

**CADW/ICOMOS REGISTER OF PARKS AND GARDENS  
OF SPECIAL HISTORIC INTEREST IN WALES**

**SITE DOSSIER**

**SITE NAME** Shirenewton Hall

**REF. NO. PGW (Gt) 46**

**OS MAP 171 GRID REF. ST 479935**

**FORMER COUNTY** Gwent

**UNITARY AUTHORITY** Monmouth B.C.

**COMMUNITY COUNCIL** Shirenewton

**DESIGNATIONS** Listed building: Shirenewton Hall (II); lodge (II); summer house in grounds to E of Hall (II); Garden seat in grounds to E of Hall (II); gated entrance and attached building walls (II); stables, coach house and attached boundary walls (II)

TPO no. 40

**SITE EVALUATION** Grade II\*

**Primary reasons for grading**

Rare and well preserved example of a Japanese garden of type fashionable at the beginning of the 20th century

**TYPE OF SITE**

Formal terraced and compartmented garden area; informal tree and shrub garden area; Japanese garden

**MAIN PHASES OF CONSTRUCTION**

1880-1900; 1900-1945

**VISITED BY/DATE** Elisabeth Whittle/August 1991

## HOUSE

Name Shirenewton Hall

Grid ref ST 480935

Date/style Early 19th century; early 20th century/neo-Elizabethan

### Brief description

Shirenewton Hall is situated on the southern edge of the small village of Shirenewton, on a high plateau above the Gwent coastal plain. There was a pre-19th century house on the site, the seat of the Blethyn family. In the early 19th century it was bought by William Hollis who built the present house on the site of the old one. In 1880 it was bought by Edward Joseph Lowe (d. 1900), a famous horticulturalist and botanist. In 1900 Charles Oswald Liddell bought the property, and a wing was added on the north side of the house.

The house is a two-storey stone building, with a taller narrow tower in the south-east corner, which is different in style (with a corbelled out upper storey and crenellations) and may be older than the rest. The main entrance is on the west side. The garden front, on the south, has an open loggia of four rounded arches with a strapwork balustrade above.

## OUTBUILDINGS

Name Stables, coach house and other utilitarian buildings

Grid ref ST 480935

Date/style, and brief description

To the north of the house is a range of stone outbuildings on the garden boundary next to the Shirenewton-Crick road. These are 19th-century in date, and utilitarian in style, and consist mainly of stables and a coach house.

## THE PLEASURE GARDEN

Grid ref ST 479935 and ST 478934

Date/style late 19th-early 20th century/formal terraced; informal; Japanese

### GENERAL DESCRIPTION, HISTORY AND LAYOUT

The gardens are in two separate areas, around the house and in a separate enclave in the field to the south. The entrance, flanked by a lodge, is on the north side, and a curving drive leads to a triangular turning area in front of the west side of the house. In the middle of this is a cider millstone with a bronze Chinese bowl (fountain) in the middle. Around the house are terraced gardens and informal areas to the west and south-east. The garden is bounded by a high wall on the west, a wall and outbuildings on the north, fencing on the east, and a ha-ha on the south. The terraces lie to the south and east of the house. Along the south front of the house is a stone-paved terrace with a circular pool in a wider area opposite the loggia at the eastern end. A Chinese bronze bowl ornaments the centre of the pool. Below is a long grass terrace bounded by clipped yew hedges, below which is a further levelled lawn bounded by a ha-ha. There are similar levelled compartments to the east of the house. In these are set several Chinese structures. The largest stands just east of the house and is a raised platform bounded by green and yellow glazed tiling on which stands a tall pavilion housing an enormous bronze bell. The pavilion roof has very elaborate glazed tiling. To the east of this is a smaller pavilion of similar materials, with a dragon on top, used as a summer house, with a marble sundial on a stone crouching monster in front of it. Further east is a small square pavilion with four columns holding up a domed copper roof.

The informal areas lie to the west, north-east and south-east of the house. They are planted with well spaced specimen deciduous and coniferous trees and shrubs, with grass between. There are some notable mature deciduous and coniferous trees.

The Japanese garden lies to the south-west of the house, in a roughly oblong area fenced off in the middle of the field to the south of the main gardens. It is reached by a narrow path across the field, and the entrance is on the north side. The ground slopes to the south. The garden consists of an intricate arrangement of six ponds, winding paths, narrow cascades, and bridges. The whole is planted with mixed deciduous and coniferous trees, bonsaied pines and acers, and evergreen shrubs such as laurels, which flank the paths and screen one part of the garden from another. The garden is ornamented with numerous genuine Japanese structures and ornaments, including a tea pavilion near the north end, two bridges, a number of stone lanterns, a stone pagoda, a stone mushroom, a well, a crane statue, and red painted simple wooden archways (one at the entrance). One of the arched bridges is of red painted wood, the other is stone with green-glazed tiles.

The gardens are chiefly the creation of Edward Lowe and Charles Liddell, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The ha-ha which bounds the south side of the garden is probably earlier, dating from the early 19th century, when the house was built.

Edward Lowe was a famous horticulturalist and botanist, specialising in ferns. He was the author of a number of treatises, including one on grasses (1858), beautiful leaved plants (1861) and ferns (1895). He moved to Shirenewton Hall in 1880, and planted the gardens with a very wide range of trees, herbaceous plants and ferns (see *Gardeners' Chronicle* 13 June 1896. The ferns were raised in glass houses in the walled garden to the west of the house. These have all gone, and the walled garden is now a

separate property, with a modern house and garden in it. Very few ferns are left, but there is one area left which is probably Lowe's, along the western side of the garden, where a path winds through an area of trees and rockwork, and where there are a number of ferns remaining. Most of the specimen trees in the gardens were planted by Lowe.

When Lowe died in 1900 the property was bought by Charles Liddell, a shipper in the Far Eastern trade. He filled both his house and garden with Chinese and Japanese artefacts. As well as placing several impressive Chinese buildings in the gardens around the house, he made an entire Japanese garden, which has had no subsequent alteration (except the placing of electric light in the lanterns and pagoda). The subtlety of this garden suggests that it may have been designed by a Japanese specialist, as were several in Britain at the beginning of the 20th century. The gardens around the house were terraced (possibly earlier), and bounded by yew hedging. Their style is similar to that of several gardens in the vicinity designed by H. Avray Tipping, and it may be that he helped with their design. However, there is no evidence for his involvement.

## GARDENS AROUND THE HOUSE

### STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

A curving gravel drive runs from the entrance to the grounds to the west front of the house, where it expands into a triangular turning area with grass in the middle. In front of the W side of the house is a narrow raised terrace bounded by a grass slope. The terrace continues along the S front of the house, where it is wider and has a central stone flagged path. At its eastern end the terrace widens in front of the loggia, with a circular central lily pool surrounded by stone paving. The pool has dressed stone curving edging with low square plinths at intervals. To its E steps lead down to a yew-edged small compartment which leads into a level square area (? croquet lawn) with a slight scarp along its N side. Below the terrace along the S side of the house is a long level grass terrace bounded by yew hedging on the E and S, with an octagonal stone-edged pool at the E end. Below is a large lawn, most of which is a roughly levelled rectangular area, bounded on the S, W and E by a slight scarp. Below it slopes gently down to the ha-ha which forms the S boundary of the garden. This is curving, with a dry-stone wall. At its western end there are stone steps down the wall leading to the path to the Japanese garden.

There are a number of gravel paths in the garden. Two branch off from the drive, one to the east and one to the south. The former runs through a wooded informal area to the back of the house. The latter is a winding path through an informal area next to the wall along the W boundary of the garden. It is lined with rockwork and there are rough rockwork shallow steps at intervals. In the angle of the wall N of the blocked 'moon gate' (see BUILT COMPONENTS) is an area of rockwork with narrow winding paths. On the E side of the house straight paths lead to the Chinese buildings, and a curving path runs through the trees along the N side of the garden, ending at a gate into the field to the SE. There are signs in the field that the path continued across it originally.

## BUILT COMPONENTS

### Entrance lodge

The entrance lodge is a two-storey rendered building with a stone tile roof. It stands to the W of the entrance, and is of a similar style to the house.

### Garden walls and entrance

The entrance is in the N corner of the grounds, and consists of a pair of wrought iron gates between two square rusticated stone piers topped with ball finials. These are flanked by two smaller pedestrian gates of similar wrought iron, and by two further piers without finials. On either side are low curving stone walls topped by iron railings, with further stone piers at intervals. The N side of the gardens are bounded, along the Shirenewton-Crick road, by a high stone wall, and by outbuildings. On the W side of the gardens is the former kitchen garden wall, a brick wall c. 5 m. high. In the middle is a large blocked 'moon gate' edged with dressed stone. To the N of this the wall takes a right-angle bend to the W and continues N in stone. In the angle is an area of rockwork with narrow curving paths. The woodland area of the garden, at the SE end, is surrounded by iron railing.

On the W side of the house there are three flights of stone steps up to the raised terrace, the central one leading to the front door of the house. They are all similar, with low parapet walls and square plinths topped by ball finials (on the central and S ones, at the lower end). The S steps lead up to the terrace along the S front, which is surrounded by a low parapet wall. Steps at its E end lead down to a small garden compartment. In the centre of the S front, opposite the central bay of the house, two flights of stone steps lead from the upper to the middle and middle to the lower terrace.

To the E of the house are three Chinese buildings that were incorporated into the garden layout by Charles Liddell at the beginning of the 20th century. The first, nearest the house, is a square stone pavilion which stands in a paved area. From its ceiling hangs an enormous bronze bell. The pavilion stands on a raised stone platform whose sides are covered with green and yellow glazed and decorated tiles. There are stone steps up to the platform on the S side, and on the N side steps down to the basement below. Tiles are falling off the W side of the platform. The pitched roof of the pavilion is tiled, with fantastical animals along the ridges.

A gravel path to the E leads to a small Chinese summerhouse, open to the S. This is built of similar materials, with green and yellow glazed tiles on the front, and on top of the roof a carved dragon.

The gravel path continues eastwards and leads to a small pavilion set just to the NE of the path. This is a square stone structure of four stone columns holding up a domed copper roof. It is open on the W side, and has a low wall between the columns on the other sides.

## ARCHITECTURAL ORNAMENTS

There are a number of Chinese artefacts in the garden, put there by Charles Liddell in the early 20th century.

To the W of the house, in the middle of the turning area in front of the house is a large cider millstone in the middle of which is a Chinese bronze bowl on a stone plinth. It has

been converted into a fountain. In flowerbeds on the raised terrace on the W side are a Chinese bronze bowl and cauldron, both on feet, being used for bedding plants. In the middle of the lily pool on the S terrace is a lotus-flower bronze bowl, converted to a fountain, standing on a raised stone octagonal plinth.

To the E of the house, in front of the summer house stands a Chinese marble sundial on a short column, standing on a stone crouching monster.

At the N end of the woodland area at the SE end of the garden is a small paved area on which stands a small rectangular marble plinth. This appears to be classical rather than Chinese, and was originally part of a fountain. Pipework for the fountain is still attached to the side.

#### PLANTED COMPONENTS

The garden is laid out mainly with lawns, yew hedging, and informal areas of specimen trees and shrubs. Many of the trees were planted in the 19th century, some by Edward Lowe.

The western half of the garden, to the W of the house, is an informal area of deciduous and coniferous trees and shrubs. Trees (see TPO 40, area A1) include sycamore, copper beech, evergreen oak, Corsican pine, larch, Spanish chestnut, lime (flanking the path along the W boundary), wellingtonia, beech, ash, horse chestnut, thuya and red oak. Near the NW corner of the house is a large mature fern-leafed beech tree (TPO 40, T1). In the angle of the W boundary wall there is a large beech tree beneath which is an area of rockwork in which ferns and some bamboos are growing. This area is referred to in the Gardeners' Chronicle article (see refs), and was planted by Lowe. The curving drive is surrounded by shrubs, mainly rhododendrons, and mature trees, including large pines.

The turning area on the W side of the house has a flowerbed in the centre, around the Chinese bowl fountain, and the raised terrace has a narrow border beside the house.

The upper terrace on the S side of the house is edged by narrow borders, and against the house there is a large *Magnolia grandiflora* and a large *Magnolia acuminata*. To the E of the terrace is a small square lawn surrounded by clipped yew hedging, to the E of which is a larger square lawn with yew hedging along its S and W sides. Below the upper terrace is a long rectangular lawn edged on the E and S sides by clipped yew hedging, with central openings. At the E end is a large mature cedar tree. The large lawn on the S front is flanked by two large Monkey Puzzle trees (*Araucaria imbricata*) (E one - TPO 40, T8).

Along the N boundary, and in the area of informal woodland at the SE end of the garden are mature trees, including pines, limes, and cypresses, and evergreen shrubs. In the field to the south of the house are several isolated mature deciduous trees, and a mixed clump (TPO 40, G2: 1 golden elm, 2 Corsican pine, and 1 oak). Along the south-east boundary of the field is a narrow belt of larches and pines.

Reconstructions of original planted features

None

Special collections of garden plants

Remnants of Edward Lowe's plantings of ferns, and some of his specimen trees.

Documented living plants

None

Other (including elements of nature conservation interest)

None

#### ESSENTIAL SETTING AND VIEWS BEYOND THE SITE

Essential setting: pasture fields to the S, SE and SW of the garden

Views: S across fields to Bristol channel and beyond

S across field to Japanese garden

#### ANY SPECIAL FEATURES

Separate Japanese garden (see below)

#### SURVIVAL OF INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS

Structural components: all

Built components: most (glasshouses in walled garden to W gone)

Architectural ornaments: most

Planted components: some