

PWLL-Y-WRACH

Ref number PGW (Gm) 44 (GLA)

OS Map 170

Grid ref SS 953 754

Former county South Glamorgan

Unitary authority The Vale of Glamorgan

Community council Colwinston

Designations None

Site evaluation Grade II

Primary reasons for grading A well preserved garden layout dating to the late eighteenth century, with a pair of attractive contemporary garden pavilions.

Type of site Informal and walled garden

Main phases of construction *c.* 1770

Site description

Pwll-y-wrach (Witch's Pool) is a medium-sized Georgian country mansion situated in gently rolling countryside *c.* 1 km to the east of Colwinston village. It is a two-storey, symmetrical, nine-bay, double-pile house with sash windows and slate roofs. Built of stone, the exterior is rough cast. The house is orientated east-west, with the main entrance front on the south. The central three bays are wider set, with a pediment over them in which is set a panel of the Prichard coat of arms. The stone entrance porch, in the centre, is single-storey, with a curving roof on top of which is a small balcony with low railings. The sides and front, around the entrance, have glazed panels. To the west of the porch a Banksian rose grows on the house, to the east a large wisteria. A large conservatory has been added to the west end of the house in the 1990s.

Pwll-y-wrach was rebuilt in its present form by David Thomas in *c.* 1770. He was descended from Morgan Williams who had a substantial landholding in Colwinston, including Pwll-y-wrach, in the late seventeenth century. The appearance of the earlier house is known from a wash drawing, 'Pwll-y-wrach before 1770', which shows a large, symmetrical seventeenth-century house topped by a lantern. The main alteration since 1770 to the house has been the building of a front porch. The first porch was added in the nineteenth century, before *c.* 1870. A photograph of this date shows a different porch to the present one and a watercolour dating to later in the nineteenth century shows a different one again. The present porch is thus the third and dates to the end of the nineteenth century. The Thomas family continued to own Pwll-y-wrach until the late nineteenth century, when the Prichard family acquired it through marriage. It has been in the Prichard family ever since.

The outbuildings lie to the north-east of the house, reached by a service drive running northwards from the main drive. The main building is former stable block, now converted to garages. It is a single-storey rubble stone building with a pitched slate roof and central pediment with a small oval window set in it. There are five double garage doors with shallow brick arches. At either end the side wall projects above the roof and the corner is topped with a ball finial. In front some cobbling survives but part of the area is concreted over. At the west end is a stone cross wall with a doorway in it. This leads through to a stone cottage set at right-angles to the stable block. This is two-storey, with a pitched slate roof. It has stone paving in front and is covered with Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*). The stable block is probably contemporary with the house; the cottage may be earlier in origin. To the east is a large stone barn and a squash court dating to 1964.

The garden lies mainly to the south and west of the house on ground sloping gently down to the south. It falls into two main areas: the informal garden to the south of the house and the walled garden to the west.

The tarmac drive runs eastwards along the south side of the garden from an entrance where the lane from Colwinston, to the west, turns sharply to the south. The entrance is flanked by two heavy, square, stone gate piers with overhanging triangular tops of dressed sandstone. There are no gates, although a hinge for one survives, only a cattle grid. Flanking the entrance on the north side are two very large beech trees; to the south is a belt of mixed trees and shrubs. An area of large deciduous trees extends along the north side of the drive, next to the south wall of the walled garden and for a short distance beyond, where the drive is flanked by a hedge of *Ruscus aculeatus*. To the east of the walled garden the drive runs parallel with the ha-ha, to its north, curves northwards at the east end of the garden and then divides, the main drive, now gravelled, running north-westwards through the garden to the gravel forecourt in front of the house, the service drive running northwards and a farm track, formerly a drive, running north-eastwards. This leads to the farm buildings and then continues north-eastwards as a stony track to the A48 road opposite Pentre Meyrick. There is no formal entrance to the drive but a little landscaping remains to indicate its former status: the western half is flanked by trees.

The forecourt is really a terrace, extending the same length as the house. It is bounded by a low stone wall with a flagstone parapet. A border of mixed shrubs runs along the foot of the wall and at the east end is a box-edged flowerbed. The terrace was once bordered by a yew hedge topped with topiary, but this was removed by the present owner. A central flight of stone steps leads down to a sloping lawn. To the west of the house is the modern conservatory and a contemporary large stone paved area, with two flights of stone steps down to a contemporary swimming pool, below the west end of the terrace.

The lawn below the terrace slopes smoothly down to a curving ha-ha. This gives an uninterrupted view from the house and garden to the field beyond, framed by mature deciduous trees planted on either side of the lawn and in particular by two large copper beech trees. The ha-ha has a dry-stone rubble wall with a gently sloping, grassed ditch outside it. A modern wooden bridge crosses the ditch in the centre. At the west end the ha-ha ends in an area of large beech, sycamore and horse chestnut trees. The lawn is flanked on the east by large horse chestnut trees and laurel. The ha-ha ends on this side in an outwards kink next to a large sycamore tree and a block of *Ruscus aculeatus*. Further horse chestnuts and sycamores fringe the east side of the garden, to the east of the drive.

To the south of the ha-ha a lawn slopes gently up to the drive, beyond which a further lawn rises gently to an oak paling fence on the garden boundary. The outer part of the lawn is left long, with wild flowers growing in it. There are two rectangular concrete plinths in the lawn, artificial cricket wickets built c. 1980. To the west the main lawn drops to a level area which may once have been a tennis court. Beyond the garden is a gently rising field planted with a few isolated oaks, the view framed by belts of trees along the east and west sides. That on the east includes horse chestnut and yew.

A particularly attractive feature of the garden is the pair of small pavilions which flank the house. They are in line with the south front, face south, and are more or less identical. They are built of stone, with rough-cast exteriors, and are single-storey, with slate roofs topped with cone and ball finials. The east pavilion's roof is pyramidal, the west's hipped, as this one has been extended northwards in recent years. On the south front of each pavilion is a small Venetian window with dressed stone surrounds. The west pavilion has doors in the east and west sides and a round arched window on the west. It has been converted into changing rooms for the swimming pool below. To its east is a small stone paved terrace with low rubble stone walls on its south and east sides. To the north is a hard tennis court surrounded by a beech hedge.

The east pavilion, with a door in its west side, stands in the south-east corner of a small lawned enclosure. The south and east sides are enclosed by rubble stone walls, the west side by the house and the north by a yew hedge. In the north-west corner is an Irish yew, against the house, and on the east side is a large cherry tree. There are shrub borders along all but the north side. To the south of the pavilion is a lawn with two large, gently sloping mounds in it. Some mature trees grow on the lawn, including a huge horse chestnut, a large sycamore, a smaller horse chestnut, sweet chestnut and sycamore. On a small lawn to the east is a large beech tree.

To the east of the pavilion enclosure is a larger walled enclosure with the stable block at its north end. The south side is bounded by a stone wall in the centre of which is an entrance for the service drive. This is flanked by tall, square, stone gate piers with tapering tops and ball finials. On either side are stiles of stone steps and upright stone slabs. The drive to the stables (now garages) is flanked by lawns planted with ornamental trees and shrubs. A stone wall bounds the east side, beyond which is mixed woodland dominated by sycamore and horse chestnut. At the north end is a gate leading to the squash court and barn.

At the west end of the lawn a gravel path leads westwards, past the front of the pavilion and past a mulberry tree to an arched modern wrought iron gate in a yew hedge. This is the entrance to the walled garden, formerly a kitchen garden but now mostly ornamental. The garden is a large rectangular area bounded on all but the east side by rubble stone walls. Along the outside of the north wall is a shelter belt of sycamore and horse chestnut and a yew hedge. On the east the garden is bounded by a yew hedge planted on the footings of the original wall except at the north end where there is a stretch of wall. From the gate in the yew hedge three stone steps lead down to a central east-west stone-edged path. There is also a narrow east-west grass path flanked by borders of peonies. A stony path leads northwards along the east side. At its north end there are rough, shallow steps up to a long stony path flanking a herbaceous border at the foot of the north wall, which is c. 2.5-3 m high. The border, with Victorian tile edging, is a classic herbaceous border. Half way along is a passageway between stone walls to a gap in the north wall with a gate into the field

beyond. Next to this, to the west, are the incomplete stone walls of an old glasshouse, with a doorway on the east side and a tile-edged bed in front. The raised back and west side of the interior is planted up as a flowerbed, featuring day lilies. In the southern half is a sunken paved area which may have been a pool. In the middle is brick flooring. The south side is bounded by a low stone wall with flat coping.

The north-west quadrant of the garden is used as a kitchen garden. A modern aluminium glasshouse on a concrete base stands against the north wall. The east-west path continues right to the west end of the garden and then runs north-south along the west wall, also flanked by a border. This wall is *c.* 2.2 m high, rising to *c.* 4.5 m where it forms the front wall of a bothy building and decreasing to *c.* 1.7 m at the south end, where it is concrete capped. The bothy is reached by a door in the wall at its south end. To the south is a wide modern entrance gate leading to a wooded area of seedling trees with some stone walling in it. A stone-edged path runs eastwards from the entrance, with a border of ornamental trees to its south.

The south-west quadrant of the garden is laid out to lawn, with a fruit cage and a few fruit trees. The south wall is *c.* 1.5 - 2 m high; parts have been rebuilt and parts are without coping. A wide grass path runs all the way along the south side. In the centre of the south-east quadrant, set in a lawn, is a roughly circular, stone-lined pool, with steps down to the water on the north side. The edge is level with the ground and the sides are now partly cemented. In the south-east corner is a small modern building housing the swimming pool boiler. The position of this pool in the walled garden is an unusual one and suggests either that it utilises a spring or that it may be older than the existing enclosure and relate to a different layout. The name of the house, Pwll-y-wrach, or Witch's Pool, might in some way derive from this pool.

Along the foot of the yew hedge, near its south end, is a row of dogs' graves, with inscribed headstones. A further three lie at the foot of the south wall. These date from 1900 onwards, the earliest being that of 'Ching G.I.C.P. 1900'.

The field to the north of the walled garden contains some ornamental tree planting in the form of a double row of horse chestnuts. These run north-south and are aligned on the house. Further isolated horse chestnuts grow in this field and in that to the north-east. The remnants of a stony track is visible running northwards from the garden just to the west of the cottage. Where this passes the north-west corner of a wood to the east there are the remains of a stone gate pier. To the south, next to the track, the wood is bounded by a ruinous and discontinuous stone wall.

The basic garden layout is probably contemporary with the rebuilding of the house in *c.* 1770 by David Thomas. Some of the mature trees, including horse chestnut, sycamore and beech, probably date to this period. The wash drawing of the house before 1770 shows that prior to that date the garden was completely different, with a formal walled enclosure to the south of the house. A photograph dating to *c.* 1870 shows the garden south of the house much as it is now, including the ha-ha. A slightly later watercolour shows peacocks and pheasants on the lawn. The 1877 Ordnance Survey map gives a detailed view of the layout, showing that very little has changed since that date. At that time the terrace/forecourt in front of the house was curved in outline and there appear to have been more trees on the south lawn. A few small buildings then in existence have gone. These include one behind the east pavilion, one in the north-east corner of the walled garden and buildings and a glasshouse on the north side of the walled garden. A small duck pond shown on the map, to the east of the east pavilion, has since been filled in and grassed over. The east

wall of the walled garden has been taken down since 1877 and replaced with a yew hedge and the internal layout of cross paths has been altered.

The present owner of Pwll-y-wrach has made some changes to the gardens, including the smoothing of the south lawn to slope gently down to the ha-ha. There was originally a second drop, below the terrace, with a flight of steps down it. This probably corresponded to the south wall of the pre-1770 walled enclosure. Other changes include the extension to the west pavilion, the conservatory and paved area to the west of the house and the tennis court and swimming pool.

Pwll-y-wrach originally had a second drive that approached from Pentre Meyrick to the east. This is shown on the 1877 map, and the fields between Mynydd Bychan and the garden are shown as parkland, planted with scattered trees. The westernmost end of the drive is tree lined. This drive is now disused and reduced to a farm track and the rudimentary park is farmland. The field to the south of the house was deliberately landscaped and given a splayed shape to give a fine view from the house, framed by belts of trees on either side. To the north of the house the 1877 map shows the eastern field, now a wood, as orchard and the western field, to the north of the house and garden, with a belt of trees around it. The avenue of horse chestnuts is not shown and must therefore be later. Most of the trees shown lining the track that runs northwards have gone.

Sources

Primary

Wash drawing: 'Pwll-y-wrach before 1770'. Private collection.

Photograph c. 1870, of south front. Private collection.

Watercolour painting of south front, c. 1880. Private collection.

Secondary

Lewis, S., *A topographical dictionary of Wales* (1833).

Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales, *Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Glamorgan*, IV (1981), pp. 282-83.

Newman, J., *The buildings of Wales. Glamorgan* (1995), p. 330.