

GLAN-Y-MAWDDACH

Ref No	PGW (Gd) 62 (GWY)
OS Map	124
Grid Ref	SH 630 167
Former County	Gwynedd
Unitary Authority	Gwynedd
Community Council	Barmouth
Designations	Listed buildings: (CHECK) house Grade II; terrace Grade II; Snowdonia National Park
Site Evaluation	Grade II*

Primary reasons for grading An exceptionally interesting formal and woodland Edwardian garden in an outstanding position on the Mawddach estuary. The garden contains unusual secret compartments, each one of a different character, all linked by an intricate network of paths. It is also very richly planted with trees, evergreen shrubs and hedges, the rhododendrons and azaleas giving a spectacular display.

Type of Site Woodland and formal garden with terraces and compartments

Main Phases of Construction c. 1900-1914

SITE DESCRIPTION

Glan-y-Mawddach occupies an outstandingly beautiful and picturesque position on the steep western side of the Mawddach estuary. The views from both house and garden across the tidal estuary to Cader Idris are spectacular. The house is situated on the steep hillside, above the A496 road, with most of the garden above it. It is reached by a steep gravel drive which zig-zags up the slope, arriving at a small forecourt on the north side of the house. The house stands at the back of a rectilinear terrace, cut into the rock behind it and the forecourt. It is a two-storey stone house with sash and mullioned windows, a hipped slate roof and overhanging eaves. The main entrance is on the north side; on the east side, overlooking the estuary, there are two projecting bays. Two-storey and single-storey service quarters project to the south. At the south end of the east front is a single-storey conservatory, which projects to the edge of the terrace. It is built of stone, with round-arched doors along the north side and full length windows on the east, from which there are magnificent views. The floor is paved with random stone.

Glan-y-Mawddach was built in the early nineteenth century and appears more or less in its

present form, except for the conservatory, on the 1880s Ordnance Survey map. The conservatory was added in the 1950s-60s. The major development of the garden came during the ownership of Mrs Keithley at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1943 Glan-y-Mawddach was bought by William Clayton Russon (knighted in 1958, died 1968) and his widow continued to live here into the 1970s.

The garden occupies the steep hillside, mostly lying above and to the north of the house. Below the house, at the lowest level is a long terrace, bounded on the east by a cypress hedge, occupied by two long, disused glasshouses. At the south end are some outbuildings and a back gate. The drive snakes up the slope on a high stone revetment wall, flanked on the outer side by a hedge of Portugal laurel, laurel and holly. To the north, below the garden proper, is an area of woodland planted with Scots pines. At the south end of the second bend of the drive is an entrance into a small stable court, with a parapet wall on the east, above a revetment wall. On the south and west sides are two-storey stone buildings and on the east is a free-standing single-storey building, now a garage. The entrance is flanked by tall stone gate piers with tapering tops. This court is shown on the 1880s Ordnance Survey map and is probably contemporary with the house. Just to the north, below the south end of the terrace, is a long, narrow flight of stone steps up to the service wing. The drive then runs at the foot of the house and garden terrace, which is bounded by a high stone revetment wall. At its foot is a border of evergreen shrubs and near the north end water runs (intermittently) from a terracotta lion head into a stone basin.

The main terrace runs in front of the house and to its north, in front of the forecourt, which is backed by a steep bank of rhododendrons. It is concrete paved and on two main levels. It is bounded on its outer side by terracotta balustrading with flat concrete coping. Five large terracotta bowls stand on piers of alternating bands of brick and concrete. Two are stamped with the word 'FLOREAT' and two are missing. Along the edge, below the balustrading, is a narrow, concrete-edged bed. Immediately around the house is a narrow stone-paved terrace with a stone revetment wall. On it are three bowls of reconstituted stone with narrow necks, splayed rims and decorated with bands of vine leaves. The northern half of the terrace is reached by two steps down from the forecourt. Between the concrete paved terrace and the forecourt is a rose bed and five stone vases, decorated with swags of grapes, on rectangular plinths. Some are very worn. At the north end of the terrace is an apse, bordered by yew hedging, in which a concrete fluted vase stands on a rectangular plinth. At the south end of the northern part of the terrace are four steps, the full width of the terrace, down to the lower part in front of the house. This is the same, bounded on the south by a short stretch of yew hedge at the outer end and the conservatory, reached by three steps up to it. A flight of six steps leads up to the house terrace.

The main area of the garden is entirely different in character, being a steep woodland garden extensively planted with rhododendrons, azaleas, specimen trees and other shrubs, laid out with a network of zig-zagging paths, some more formal than others, which lead to secret garden areas each with its own special character.

The main garden entrance lies to the north of the house, on the upper bend of the drive. Tall, blue painted iron gates (the blue is repeated throughout the garden), flanked by tall stone piers topped with urns, set in a yew arch, lead to a straight concrete paved path, flanked on the hill side by a

dry-stone revetment wall and then by a box hedge with azaleas, camellias and rhododendrons above. On the lower (east) side is a yew hedge with buttresses, standing on another revetment wall. Next to it is a row of cherry trees and all around are tall pine trees. The lower hedge changes to rhododendron and a set of dog-leg steps, flanked by rhododendron hedge, leads to a sloping path, flanked by a laurel hedge, leading to concrete steps, flanked by brick walls and a blue gate, flanked by brick piers, on the drive, just to the east of which is the entrance to Panorama Walk, which runs along the east boundary of the garden here.

The straight path opens at the north end on to a small triangular lawn, called the Fountain Garden on account of the fountain near its south end. This has a circular basin with a moulded stone surround on which stand four stone vases. In the centre is a cast iron fountain with a scalloped base, four pelicans and a bowl with a boy standing on a scallop shell on top. The lawn is bounded on the south by a laurel hedge, on the east by a taller yew hedge with topiary in the middle, on the north by a laurel hedge and on the west by a low box hedge with a narrow path along it. Behind this is a raised bed planted with shrubs and a concreted revetment wall behind that. At the south end, on the west side, a flight of seven steps, flanked by stone piers topped with scalloped vases, leads to a small, blue, wooden pavilion, open on the garden side. This has a pitched roof and much carving on the woodwork. The back panels, piers and spandrels are carved with entwined leaves, fruit, flowers, birds, trees and rushes. Inside is a bench and concrete floor. The triangular window at the back is set with stained glass as are two small windows on either side. On the south one is the motto: 'I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision' and on the north one: 'Possunt quia posse videntur'. An upper path runs northwards from the pavilion, leading to a narrow stone path with quartz edging, flanked by laurel hedges, which leads to stone steps down to the lawn. Another path, flanked by a low wall on the east side, runs from the north end of the lawn, below the high revetment wall of the Pool Garden, to the north end of the garden. The end is blocked with stones, but stone steps beyond lead down to Panorama Walk.

From the upper path curving concrete steps, with a skimmia hedge on the upper side, lead to stone steps to a wider landing. Here curving steps, wider at the bottom, lead up the hill to the Japanese Garden, while narrower steps, between low stone walls, lead ahead to the Pool Garden. This is the largest of the secret gardens within the woodland. It is rectangular, its back cut into the rock and built up with a high stone wall. The garden is largely taken up with a rectangular lawn bounded by a wide concrete paved area, backed by a raised bed of hydrangeas and a parapet wall, on the east side and a concrete paths on the north and south. In the centre of the lawn is an oval pool with flat concrete edging, in the centre of which is a simple fountain consisting of a reconstituted stone octagonal bowl on a slightly wider octagonal base. On the south side is a rocky bank of evergreen shrubs, mainly azaleas and rhododendrons, on the north a rose bed. In the centre of the south side a small stream runs down the rock, over cascades, into a narrow recessed channel and then, at the foot of the slope, into a circular pool bounded by a stone wall. In the south-west corner water runs down the rock face into a 'cave' or grotto built out from the revetment wall with chunks of stone and quartz. The water runs past quartz stones into a small channel along the foot of the back wall and into a quartz-edged pool. Ferns and bamboos, including unusual varieties, luxuriate in the moist micro-climate and at the north end is a large clump of *Gunnera manicata*. On the north side the wall continues, with a laurel hedge over it, and then runs for a short distance further as a freestanding wall with four arches in it. In the

arches is low balustrading and the second from the west has a blue iron gate. The laurel hedge continues to the east for a short distance. The gate leads through to a small concrete-paved court, bounded on the east by a dry-stone wall. Steps, flanked by two Irish yews, lead down into a very clear pool, with a bridge of a single large stone over it. Water comes into the pool from a terracotta mask on the south side and leaves at the other end. The court is surrounded by evergreen trees and shrubs. Narrow stone steps at the end, with iron hand rail, lead up to a mossy walk, stone revetted, flanked by azaleas, camellias and rhododendrons on the upper side and a rhododendron hedge on the lower. The path leads across a rocky slope with tall pines and bamboos around and comes out at a blue gate at the north end of the garden, set in the garden's stone boundary wall.

From here a path leads southwards through the woodland garden, with branches taking one on to different levels. One path runs along beneath the boundary wall, beyond which is Panorama Walk. Paths are narrow, unsurfaced or stone surfaced, with steps on the steeper parts. Towards the south end, above the house, the path network is more intricate, with various surfaces, including concrete, steps and widths. A wider path, edged with large flat stones and with concrete steps, zig-zags up the slope, with conifers all around, and leads to a mossy path, flanked by camellias and azaleas to a banded concrete and brick gateway leading to the former kitchen garden, which lies at the top of the garden.

Next to the north end of the kitchen garden is another garden area with its own character. Narrow paths, flanked by azaleas, lead through the woodland to the east, but a side path leads to a circular stone gazebo just beyond the north-east corner of the kitchen garden. Straight steps on its south side lead up to a circular platform with a low bench and flat parapet wall around it. From here there is an outstanding panoramic view. A path leads around the base of the gazebo to stone steps down to a curving stone platform beneath the north wall of the kitchen garden. Below it is a series of stone revetted terraces planted with hydrangeas, below which are further paths and steps. Wider concrete steps lead to several paths, one to an apsidal pool surrounded by evergreen shrubs. Water enters from a pipe and the pool is divided in two by a brick wall. Steps lead down into both sections, suggesting use for bathing. On the lower side is an Irish yew hedge.

Below this area a level path along the hillside, flanked to the south by a low yew hedge on the east and a rhododendron hedge on the west, leads to another secret garden, the Italian Terrace. This is a concrete paved semi-circular terrace built out over the slope and cut into it at the back. In the centre is the base for a sundial, now gone. On the outer side it is bounded by low stone walls, pierced at the top, with flat concrete coping. Lower sections are flanked by stone pyramid ornaments. Two seat recesses are cut in the stone at the back, behind which is a clipped rhododendron slope. At either end of the terrace wall are entrances, once with gates, leading to steep flights of concrete steps, flanked by iron hand railings. On either side of the entrances are plinths which formerly held seated griffons holding shields carved with 'K' for Keithley. Below the Italian Terrace is another horizontal path, with Irish yews along its outer side, which opens out at one point on to a small rectangular platform, at the back of which is a staircase of clipped yew, diminishing in width as it ascends the slope.

Below, winding stone steps, flanked by piers with circular bases for ornaments that have gone,

lead to a rustic summerhouse. This is circular and appears rebuilt, perhaps copying an original version. The half walls are of banded brick and concrete, a theme repeated elsewhere in the garden, above which are rustic supports for a conical felt roof. The floor is of terracotta tiles. More paths run down and along the slope, one leading to the service end of the house and one continuing southwards beyond the garden boundary. One path above the house opens into a small yew hedged compartment with a square concrete plinth in the centre. Nearby is an area of hydrangeas and heathers. Stone steps, with a handrail, lead to another path, of stone, below, then more, again with a handrail, lead down to the Japanese Garden.

This is a levelled area, with a concrete platform, steps and wooden pergola. The pergola is L-shaped, planted with wisterias, running around an oval, quartz-edged pool in the concrete terrace. A stream runs in on the upper side and the slopes around are planted with bamboos. The stream runs out, under a large rock stone bridge, to fall down into the Pool Garden, which is also reached by narrow concrete steps in the north-west corner. The garden was originally ornamented with stone Japanese lanterns but these have been removed. At the back of the garden, on its west side, is a small, painted, bird house or dovecote. It is in the form of a miniature house, with small turrets, a weathervane, and large and small openings. To the north is a stone platform slightly higher than the concrete terrace, backed by a stone wall and curving stone steps to an upper path. Stone and brick steps to the south lead down to a network of narrow, winding, stone paths. Further south, splayed, brick and concrete steps, flanked by stone piers lead to a path with a wider area in which is a circular concrete plinth for an ornament, now gone.

The garden was developed by Mrs Keithley in the early years of the twentieth century. The 1880s Ordnance Survey map shows that the drive, terrace, forecourt and a few paths in the woodland were in existence at that date, the drive, terrace, forecourt and some of the paths probably contemporary with the house, although the terrace probably only took on its present appearance in her time. The straight path running northwards from the garden entrance is shown on the map. Thus when Mrs Keithley began laying out the gardens she would have found the basic framework already in existence. To this she added many more paths and the individual gardens and features, which show a strong Italian, Japanese (in the Japanese Garden) and some Arts and Crafts influence. She decorated the garden extensively with stone and terracotta ornaments, some of which are shown on photographs in a *Country Life* article of 1975. Some of these were taken from the garden in 1997, in particular the griffons and sundial from the Italian Garden and the stone Japanese lanterns from the Japanese garden. The garden was richly planted with conifers and other specimen trees, including spruces, firs, pines, the umbrella pine (*Sciadopytis verticillata*), cedars, wellingtonias, araucarias, cordylines and cypresses. Scots pines dominate. Beneath these were planted rhododendrons, azaleas, camellias and Japanese maples. Rhododendrons and azaleas are particularly extensive and create a spectacular display in early summer. Hedging is formal, with yew, box and rhododendron predominating. Sir William and Lady Russon left the garden as they found it, but did a great deal of additional planting.

The kitchen garden is a rectangular area at the top of the garden surrounded by high rubble stone walls. A walled area is shown here on the 1880s Ordnance Survey map but it does not appear to be a kitchen garden, more a field. The garden is now disused, containing only rough grass, some conifers and rhododendrons. There are openings on the east and west sides, that on the east

leading to a winding path. Outside the north end of the garden is an open area in which there is a ruined stone building.

Sources

Primary

Information from Lady Sandberg

Secondary

Hellyer, A.G.L., 'On the edge of an estuary', *Country Life*, 18 September 1975, pp. 704-06.