

GWAYNYNOG

Ref No PGW (C) 58
OS Map 116
Grid Ref SJ 035 655
Former County Glyndwr
Unitary Authority Denbighshire
Community Council Denbigh
Designations Listed building: Gwaynynog Grade II
Site Evaluation Grade II

Primary reasons for grading

Garden and small park in superb position with distant views to the Clwydian Range. Gwaynynog has historic associations with Samuel Johnson and with Beatrix Potter, who used the kitchen garden as the setting in some of her children's books, in particular The Flopsy Bunnies.

Type of Site

Small landscape park; informal garden with formal elements; part walled kitchen garden

Main Phases of Construction

late eighteenth century; 1870s

SITE DESCRIPTION

Gwaynynog is a picturesque, rambling house, situated on a rolling plateau on the north side of the Ystrad valley. From the house there are magnificent views southwards across the valley to the Clwydian Range in the distance. The house belonged to the Myddleton family until 1870, when the Revd Robert Myddleton sold it to Oliver Burton. On Oliver's death the estate was inherited by his nephew Fred. Beatrix Potter, the famous author of children's books, was his wife's niece, and she visited Gwaynynog frequently between 1895 and 1912.

The house is two-storey, built of stone, with a pitched slate roof, and has a long and complicated building history. It is essentially H-shaped, with the main entrance, a storeyed porch, on the east side. The oldest part of the house dates to the second half of the sixteenth century (a date inscription of 1571). In 1764 Colonel John Myddleton carried out improvements, including the alteration and extension of the south wing to give a large room with canted bay at either end. Oliver Burton made further alterations after 1870, including the refacing of the house in stone, in a 'Tudor Gothic' style, and the addition of a further east-west wing on the north side of the house.

There are various stone outbuildings loosely arranged around a yard to the north of the house, one of which has been converted into a separate dwelling. The yard is bounded on its east side by a high, battlemented stone wall with an arched entrance for the drive flanked by a pedestrian arched doorway on the south side.

The former park of Gwaynynog lies mainly to the north, south, and south-west of the house. Although most of this is now purely agricultural,

there are some remnants of landscaping to the south and south-west of the house, on the north flank of the Ystrad valley.

The main entrance lies to the north of the house, on the A543 Denbigh to Pentrefoelas road. It is flanked by simple square stone piers and a low stone wall, with a two-storey stone lodge on the west side. The tarmac drive runs more or less straight to the entrance through an arch in the battlemented wall to the yard to the north of the house. The small forecourt to the east of the house is reached by a short curving gravel drive. The main drive is flanked by a double row of oaks for its full length, with a small grove of oaks at its southern end.

To the south and west of the house the ground slopes down towards the Ystrad river and a small tributary. Most of the ground is under pasture and cultivation, with three small areas of mixed woodland projecting out from the garden. These effectively frame the near views from the house and garden. The easternmost wood runs from the south-east corner of the garden down the slope towards the river Ystrad. It is called the Nut Walk, and within it there are traces of a winding path. The wood is bounded on its west side by a stone wall which is a continuation of the ha-ha that runs around the garden. The other two areas of woodland lie to the west of the garden and kitchen garden, the latter being mainly a coniferous plantation, surrounded by a stone wall. One of the pictures in The Flopsy Bunnies by Beatrix Potter depicts the view from the field looking eastwards back towards the house between these two woods.

In the small valley to the west of the house a tributary of the Ystrad has been dammed at its southern end to form a narrow sinuous lake. In the middle is a small wooded island, and both this and the lake edge are revetted in stone. The banks of the lake are now overgrown; it was originally used as a boating lake. Below is a small pool.

The only other traces of landscaping are three clumps of deciduous trees, two in the field to the west of the lake, and one to the east. Dr Johnson's monument, erected by John Myddleton in a spot by the river frequented by him during his visit in 1774, was restored in 1975.

Most of the landscaping was done by Colonel John Myddleton in the late eighteenth century, although some of the oaks are undoubtedly older than this. A plaque with the date 1768 on it was found on the cottage in the kitchen garden. This was originally sited over the door of the cottage by the river Ystrad known as Dr Johnson's cottage, and was removed from there for safekeeping. Visitors of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries describe the venerable oaks: 'the most majestic oaks in our principality' (Pennant, 1783), the fine views and the pleasant walks. Pennant records that John Myddleton had cut walks through the 'wooded dingles' and that there were spectacular views from their ends. It is no longer possible to say where these walks were (but there is a walk along the river Ystrad). Dr Johnson's visit of 1774 was commemorated by the urn and inscribed plinth erected by John Myddleton (Johnson remarked that it 'looks like an intention to bury me alive'). A small cottage, now ruinous, in the wood on the steep slope above the river (Henfaes Covert) was named Dr Johnson's Cottage, and the wood to its south-west, on the other side of the river, Johnson's Wood. The lake appears to have been made in two phases. On the 1841 tithe map it is shown as oval, with an island and some planting around it. By the time of the 1913 Ordnance Survey map it had been enlarged to its present, more elongated shape. This was probably done by Oliver Burton in the 1870s. By this time the present configuration of the park was in place, the main difference from today being the greater number of scattered trees in the park and the planting of the Nut Walk wood, which is not shown on the 1841 tithe map.

The garden lies on level ground to the east and south of the house. It is bounded on all but the house side by a well preserved stone ha-ha, giving fine panoramic views out from the garden across the Ystrad valley to the Clwydian Range in the distance. The general form of the garden, including the ha-ha, is likely to date from the time of Colonel John Myddleton, in the late eighteenth century. The garden is shown in its present configuration on the 1841 tithe map, with the area to the east of the house wooded. Some features, such as the tennis courts, formal garden, and rockwork garden, were added in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries by the Burton family.

A short gravel drive leads from simple wooden gates flanked by iron fencing on the main drive to the north to a small forecourt on the east side of the house. To the east of it is a disused hard tennis court. Most of the garden is laid out to lawn, with an area of widely spaced old oak trees along the east side. South-east of the house a small scarp in the lawn shows where there were once lawn tennis courts. In the south-east corner is an iron gate leading to the Nut Walk wood. Where the ground rises slightly at the west end of the garden are two large old sycamores.

In the angle between the south and north wings, at the west end of the house, is a small formal courtyard garden laid out with stone-paved paths, rosebeds and low yew hedges. It is bounded by a rockwork bank on the south side and by a retaining wall topped by a yew hedge on the west side. In the centre of the north end of the area is a sundial on a square pillar. This area was laid out in the early twentieth century.

A path flanked by a cypress hedge leads along the west side of the house and outbuildings. From it iron gates lead to the fields to the west. The view from the northern field looking back towards the house appears in an illustration in Beatrix Potter's book The Flopsy Bunnies. The path leads to a small rockwork garden created by Helen Barker, aunt of the present owner, Mrs Janie Wynne Smith (great grand-daughter of Frederick Burton). Contained within a rough stone wall, it is laid out with narrow gravel paths, a central lily pool, and much rockwork, with a stone arch at its north end leading into the kitchen garden. Just to the west of this garden is a stone, barrel-vaulted chamber, thought to have been an ice-house.

The kitchen garden of Gwaynynog is perhaps its most famous feature, as being the background for some of Beatrix Potter's most famous stories (Peter Rabbit, The Flopsy Bunnies). Beatrix Potter describes the garden in her diary for Tuesday 28th May 1895: 'The garden is very large, two-thirds surrounded by a red-brick wall with many apricots, and an inner circle of old grey apple trees on wooden espaliers. It is very productive but not tidy, the prettiest kind of garden, where bright old fashioned flowers grow amongst the currant bushes'.

The garden dates from the late eighteenth century (a plaque from the cottage has a date of 1768), and was built by Colonel John Myddleton as part of his general improvements. It is situated on a gentle north-westwards facing slope to the north of the house and outbuildings. It is four-sided, surrounded on all but the west side by brick walls with wide slate tops (some missing; part of the south wall is of stone). The walls stand to their full height, ranging from 3.5 m on the north side to about 2.8 m on the east side. In the middle of the east side is a wide arched entrance with wooden doors (much sketched by Beatrix Potter), and in the south wall is an iron gate leading to the yard. In the middle of the north side is a short stretch of cross wall. A fence divides the west side from the woodland beyond (in the Peter Rabbit illustration a hedge with a wooden gate is shown here).

In the south corner of the garden, set at an angle at the west end of the south wall, is a stone potting shed with a pitched slate roof, abutting on to a stone outbuilding against the garden wall. The gable end facing the garden has a rectangular ground-floor window, and an arched Gothic window above. This appears in Beatrix Potter's story The Flopsy Bunnies.

The internal layout of the garden was restored in 1990 by Frances Smith (now Williams). A straight grass walk runs along the west side of the garden, bounded by old espalier fruit trees on the east side and by rhododendrons on the west side. Two grass paths run north-south from the gates in the south side, and a cross path runs parallel with the north wall. At its west end are two stone piers, one circular, one octagonal, flanked by holly. At one time there was a toll gate between Denbigh and Gwaynynog which hung from these piers. Just to the south of the path is a circular, stone-lined former pool (now disused, without water). A lean-to glasshouse stands against the east end of the north wall.

Sources

Primary

1841 tithe map: Clwyd Record Office (Ruthin).

Secondary

Pennant, T., A Tour in Wales (1783), pp. 49-51.

Potter, Beatrix, Peter Rabbit (1901).

Potter, Beatrix, The Tale of the Flopsy Bunnies (1909).

The Journal of Beatrix Potter from 1881 to 1897, transcribed by Leslie Linder (1966).

Pratt, D., and A.G. Veysey, A Handlist of the Topographical Prints of Clwyd (1977), no. 153.

Hubbard, E., Clwyd (1986), pp. 154-55.

'Beatrix Potter's secret garden', North Wales Life, autumn 1991.

'Gwaynynog': privately printed leaflet (1994).

HORSLEY HALL

Ref No PGW (C) 59
OS Map 117
Grid Ref SJ 365 551
County Clwyd
District Wrexham Maelor BC
Community Council Gresford
Designations Listed building: dovecote and gazebo, Horsley Hall
Grade II
Site Evaluation Grade II

Primary reasons for grading

Survival of the structure of an extensive Edwardian garden, with some massive rockwork and a few fine ornamental trees.

Type of Site

Edwardian formal garden, with rockwork area

Main Phases of Construction

c. 1907-12

SITE DESCRIPTION

Horsley Hall was a huge, red brick house situated on an eastward-facing slope on the western edge of the Dee valley, to the north-east of Wrexham. There has been a house on the site since about 1540, when Thomas Powell built a timbered and moated house here. A new house was built in about 1875 by F. Potts, agent to the Duke of Westminster, and in 1907-12 this was greatly enlarged, and remodelled in Jacobethan style, by G.H. Kitchin for Mr Philip Ashworth. In 1917 it was bought by Lord Wavertree, who made further improvements. It was sold for demolition in 1934 and was largely demolished in 1963. The house was built of brick with stone dressings. It had long west and east fronts, with the entrance, a large single-storey porch, on the west side. There were two main storeys and a gabled attic storey, projecting bays at the north and south ends, and a tower in the middle of the east side.

The house remains lie towards the northern end of the garden, and are aligned north-west/south-east. They consist of a long, two-storey gabled range, with ruinous walls, very little roof, and a number of tall chimney stacks in Tudor style.

To the north of the house is a derelict stable court of the same style and period.

The garden lies on an eastward-facing slope between the north-south Marford to Llan-y-pwll road and the level ground of the Dee valley. The whole site is very neglected and derelict, with large areas covered in invasive vegetation, and with some parts, particularly along the west side, affected by Second World War military installations. However, much of the garden's structure and some of its planting remain.

The garden dates from the Edwardian period, and was laid out by the architect G.H. Kitchin at the same time as the house was remodelled, in 1907-12. Its layout is largely formal, with a series of garden compartments and terraces linked by straight paths flanked in places by yew hedging (now very much overgrown, but originally clipped). Within this structure are some informal elements, such as a rockwork garden of narrow winding paths and massive stones, and a small informal pool garden. Old photographs show a grand, elaborate garden, with steps, balustrading, urns, formal and informal pools to the east of the house. Features in the gardens that are no longer there include a semi-circular classical portico designed by Kitchin, with a doorway flanked by seats at the end of the walks from the house to the water garden; a baroque gateway from Great Buckingham Street, London, where Peter the Great once stayed, which Philip Ashworth bought for the garden, and which remained in situ until 1978; and a rusticated stone gateway with elaborate wrought iron gate, designed by Kitchin.

The main entrance was originally at the south end of Marford village, where there is a lodge, but this drive is now overgrown and disused. A side entrance off the Marford to Llan-y-pwll road, to the west of the house, runs south-east down the slope to the stable court and house, and this remains, in derelict condition. Old photographs show that Lord Wavertree made the garden in front of the west side of the house more formal after 1917.

The main garden remains lie to the north-east, east, and south of the house. The higher ground along the west side of the site is occupied by mixed woodland, some planted, some invasive. To the north-east of the house are two walled compartments (see Kitchen Garden). At the south-east corner of the westernmost one is a small octagonal dovecote built of brick with stone quoins and doorcases. The dovecote was originally attached to the south end of the dividing brick wall, attached to the gardens' south walls, but these walls have been demolished and it is now free-standing. A ruinous half-timbered gazebo is attached to the south end of the east wall of the easternmost compartment.

The main axis of the garden runs north-eastwards from the house. First is a rectangular level area, beyond which the main cross path runs north-west/south-east the full length of the garden. Beyond this is a rectangular compartment bounded by yew hedging on a stone-revetted bank, then a narrow central path runs between stone walls of massive blocks to a large mound. From here there is a view out across the fields, and the axis is continued, after a field's gap, by a lime avenue. This only extends for one field's length: originally it ran as far as the Crabmill Farm road.

The rockwork is composed of massive blocks of stone. Narrow paths wind through it to the south of the path, and lead to a small pool with a central plinth. Bamboos cover the area, which suggests that there might have been a Japanese theme to it. To the south of this is a rectangular area with rockwork on the north and west sides, some large pine trees, and an overgrown yew hedge on a bank along the south side. Steps on the west side lead up to the main cross path. Next, to the south, is a compartment surrounded by yew hedging, occupied by a large rectangular pond (former swimming pool), now dry, lined with concrete. On its west side is a ruinous stone wall with a central alcove whose fan-shaped top has fallen into the pool. To the west is an informal area with an irregularly-shaped ornamental pool, with an alcove-shaped yew hedge to its south, behind which (west) is an area of rhododendrons. The southern end of the garden is largely seedling trees, but interspersed among them are some fine ornamental specimens such as pines, cedars, hollies, horse chestnuts.

The slope to the south of the house is terraced, with some enclosing yew hedging and rhododendrons.

There are two partly walled gardens to the east of the stable court, north-east of the house. They are large rectangular compartments on ground sloping to the east. High brick walls, standing to their full height, survive on all but the south side, where they have been pulled down. In the middle of the dividing wall is a pointed-arched doorway. Against the north wall of the eastern compartment is a fallen glasshouse. All traces of the interior layout have gone, and they are now just rough grass with some seeding trees.

Sources

Primary

Sketchbook by G.H. Kitchin: RIBA Library, London.
1920s photographs (private collection).

Secondary

Hubbard, E., Clwyd (1986), p. 388.
Lloyd, T., The Lost Houses of Wales (1986), p. 25.

LLANTYSILIO HALL

Ref No PGW (C) 60

OS Map 125

Grid Ref SJ 192 436

County Clwyd

District Glyndwr DC

Community Council Llantysilio

Designations None

Site Evaluation Grade II

Primary reasons for grading

Fine axial arrangement of house, walled garden and avenue, of eighteenth and nineteenth century date, in picturesque location in the Dee valley

Type of Site

Park; informal garden; walled garden; avenue

Main Phases of Construction

Eighteenth century; 1870s

SITE DESCRIPTION

Llantysilio Hall is a large, rather gaunt stone house situated on level ground on the east side of the Dee valley about four kilometres west of Llangollen. To the south and west the ground drops quite steeply to the flood plain and river. The situation is a beautiful one, with fine views across the valley. It was built so that its south front is aligned on the walled garden and avenue to the south.

The first house on the site dated to 1723. It was built for the Jones family, whose tomb lies in the nearby churchyard. The house was of brick, and was situated at the foot of the slope to the south of the house. In the mid 1860s the German engineer C.F. Beyer, a partner in the locomotive-building firm Beyer, Peacock & Co, bought the house, demolished it, and in 1872-74 had a new one built in neo-Elizabethan style by S. Pountney Smith. The house is three-storey, aligned north-south, with the servants' quarters, billiard room and a walled yard at the north end, and with the main entrance on the east side, consisting of a porch with the initials 'C F B' over it. Over the back door is a sandstone carving of three stallions' heads, the crest of the Jones family. Beyer bequeathed the house to his godson Sir Henry Beyer Robertson, in whose family it remained until 1994.

The stables and coach house lie on the lane to the north-east of the house. They were built at the same time as the present house by the same architects. The stables and tack room have been converted into a house. Brynteg Cottages, on the same lane, were built by S. Pountney Smith at the same time as temporary accommodation for the hall's builders.

A small area around the house and garden has been landscaped with tree planting. The earliest part is the lime avenue which runs southwards from the centre of the walled garden down the slope below to the river. This is probably early eighteenth-century in date (with some replacement

trees), contemporary with the original house. The 1872 OS map shows a further row of trees parallel to the avenue, to its west, and parallel rows at an angle to it, which may also have been of this date. These have now gone. The back drive, which leads from the road to the walled garden, and which may have been the drive of the original house, is flanked at its western end by limes.

The present entrance is to the north-east of the house. It is flanked by low, curving stone walls and plain gate piers, and there is a two-storey stone lodge of the same date and style as the present house on the north side. To the north are a group of horse chestnuts, while to the south is an area of woodland, including yews and copper beech, on ground dropping down to a small stream. The drive curves across a level grass area, ornamented with a few isolated trees, to the forecourt and garden on the east side of the house.

In the two fields to the east and south-east of the walled garden there are a few isolated specimen conifers, probably planted by Beyer in the late nineteenth century.

The garden lies to the east, west and south of the present house. To the east and west the ground is level, to the south it drops steeply down to the walled garden. This part of the garden is contemporary with the house, c. 1872-74, although some of the trees may be older. In front of the house, to its east, is a rectangular gravel forecourt in a rectangular area bounded on the north and east by a shrub border with a few ornamental trees. A gravel path leads round the house to the garden west of the house, which has a rectangular lawn bounded by a bank of rhododendrons on the north and by an unkempt shrub and woodland area to the west.

To the south of the house is a steeply sloping lawn, on either side of which are informal groups of large trees, including lime, beech and oak, with some laurel and holly underplanting. At the foot of the slope the ground levels out on the site of the former house. The south boundary of the garden is formed by a substantial stone revetment wall, with central steps down to the secondary drive. At the west end of the wall a small ashlar stone pavilion is built into the wall.

The 1872 map shows the garden layout much as it is now, with more paths, along the south side of the house, around the west lawn, down the east side of the slope, and along the foot of the slope. It also shows an L-shaped conservatory at the west end of the foot of the slope. This has gone, although an overgrown paved area and small pool may be all that is left of it, and the pavilion in the wall may have been part of its basement. From the style of the pavilion this feature appears to date from the Victorian phase.

The walled garden lies to the south of the house, below the grass slope, in the middle of the north-south axis with the house and avenue. It was built as an adjunct to the earlier, eighteenth-century house, and was incorporated into the late nineteenth-century garden. It is square, sloping to the south, with composite walls of stone outside, brick inside, on all but the south side. This is bounded by, from the outside, an iron fence, ditch, and stone revetment wall, which is topped by a box hedge. In the middle is an iron gate leading to the avenue. The walls are about 3.5 m high, topped with stone coping, and mostly stand to their full height. There is a ragged gap in the middle of the east side. The entrance is in the middle of the north side, with a wooden gate and stone steps flanked by two golden cypresses and box edging, leading down to a central gravel path, now partly grassed over. Further gravel paths run along the north, east and west sides.

The main feature of the walled garden is two enormous yew hedges, about five metres high, which run parallel with the central path half way down the garden. Most of the rest of the garden is rough or mown grass, with old espalier apple trees lining the paths. There is a large bay tree in the north-east quarter of the garden. There were originally diagonal paths across the two halves of the south end of the garden, but these have now gone. In the centre of the south-eastern quarter is a very old mulberry tree, said to be of a special variety. It has long since fallen on its side, but is still alive. Some old pear and plum trees still line the walls.

In the south-west corner of the garden is a small brick pavilion, with an arched opening on its east side, over which is a decorated stone gable top. Inside is a curving wooden bench. There is a lean-to glasshouse against the west end of the north wall, outside which are some glasshouse footings. In the north-west corner is a potting shed. There is a small rectangular pond in the middle of the north-south central axis.

Sources

Primary

Plan of Llantysilio Hall and adjoining lands, the property of C. Beyer, 1869: Clwyd Record Office (DD/LH/52).

Secondary

Bersham through the eyes of a traveller: 'Llansillio' (line engraving by J. Walker, after W. Evans, London. 23 April 1796).
Hubbard, E., Clwyd (1986), pp. 198-99.