

FFYNONE

Ref number	PGW (Dy) 18 (PEM)
OS Map	145
Grid ref	SN 242 386
Former county	Dyfed
Unitary authority	Pembrokeshire
Community council	Manordeifi
Designations	Listed buildings: Ffynone Grade I; Gazebo in walled garden Grade II TPOs on some specimen trees
Site evaluation	Grade I

Primary reason for grading Many nineteenth-century elements of the garden remain, including the fountain garden. The exceptionally fine terrace gardens are well preserved as are the long terrace and Italianate garden loggia, all designed by Inigo Thomas *c.* 1904. The surrounding parkland is well preserved.

Type of site Early twentieth-century terraced gardens designed by Inigo Thomas to complement re-modelled Nash house. Parkland and woodland walks with fine specimen trees. Earlier walled garden with gazebo.

Main phases of construction Elements of walled garden extant by 1830, woodland walks and fountain garden extant by 1889, terraced gardens *c.* 1904.

Site description

The present house at Ffynone (also sometimes spelt Ffynnonau), sits on the a south facing bluff above the steep little valley of the Afon Dulas, at *c.* 119 m. AOD. The site is approached from an un-named local road off the B4332, between Cenarth and Boncath. To the south is the valley of the Dulas; to the east is the Afon Cych. There are numerous wells in the area and the place name may reflect the local pronunciation of the orthographically correct for 'Ffynhonnau'.

Before the end of the eighteenth century, Ffynone belonged to the Morgan family of Blaenbwlan, from whom it was bought by Captain Stephen Colby sometime before 1775. The Colby family is of some antiquity, and the Pembrokeshire branch would appear to have prospered owning three estates, namely Rhosygilwen, Pantyderi and Ffynone by the turn of the century. Early in the 1790s, John Nash, who had family ties in Cardigan, was commissioned by John Colby to design the new house for Ffynone. In 1792, work began on clearing the site and eight miners were employed 'to blast and carry away rubbish' for the foundations. In June 1794 Messrs Jones, Dunn and Drewett of Bristol were required to make up and complete a geometric

staircase with moulded nosings and bracketed soffits (*sic*) of Painswick stone; the floor of the vestibule was also to be paved in the same material. In 1795, the flags, steps and window cills were quarried from the local deposits at Maenordeifi. In the same year the malt house, sheds and offices in the kitchen court were plastered and tiled. In 1798, under the direction of Thomas Hazelby, a circular wall at the north front was built as well as gate pillars. Walls were also built around the stable-yard and garden, with hundreds of tons of fresh soil being carted in to improve the growing potential. Local sources suggest that this soil came in from Ireland as ballast, but so far there is no proof of this.

In February and March 1796, sixty thousand trees were sent from John Mackie, a Norwich nursery man, these included 'Larch Fir, Beech, English Elms and Scotch Fir', the total cost being £21 12s 6d. In 1779 the house was still not complete and the foul weather was causing a variety of problems but by the turn of the century the material for curtains, bed ticking and so on was being ordered from Swansea.

At Ffynone, Nash had emulated the classical Georgian plan and it is felt to be the most successful of his early designs. The house was quite plain but with a great sense of style. However, in the 1820s, it was necessary to carry out a major rebuilding programme. The roof was completely stripped, windows replaced, as was the conservatory dome and windows. The entrance front was also extended with a portico in the Doric Greek style, which the present owner suggests may have also been designed by Nash.

Between 1902 and 1907, the house was again altered, but this time much more extensively. Mrs J V Colby commissioned Inigo Thomas, architect and garden designer, to improve the house in accordance with her wishes; her husband was, at the time, spending a few months shooting bears in Siberia. The entire garden front and approaches were redesigned and two new wings were added to form a dining room and drawing room. The basement was extended to form the loggia, balustraded balcony and formal terrace. Heavy keystones and rusticated quoins were added to the original structure and at least one of the windows was completely re-modelled. The attached stable block was also re-modelled with clock tower, cupola and weather-cock.

Since the turn of the century, the house has remained substantially unaltered, although it was necessary to undertake extensive restoration work over the last decade or so. This work was undertaken by the present owner.

Attached to and situated to the north-east of the house is the utility courtyard and stable block. There is an arched entrance to the courtyard on the north-east side. The buildings that make up the courtyard stand to two storeys and are slate roofed. The overall effect of the unadorned rendering is a plain simplicity, with the exception of the clock-tower. This is at the eastern end of the northern range and is of red brick. A projecting stone string course separates the lower section, in which the clock faces sit, from the upper, bell, section and cupola. Set on a ball on top of the cupola is the weather vane. The whole has been recently restored.

Set on a bank to the north of the utility courtyard and reached by a flight of six slate steps, is the octagonal game larder, which dates to the early twentieth century. The foundation courses are of slate, with appropriate drainage holes, above which the brick walls stand to 0.75 m. At each corner are the timber posts that support the roof. Between the posts the main glazing bars remain, although it is more likely that perforated zinc sheeting was used, rather than glass. At the apex of the roof is a decorative wooden ball.

Nash re-sited the house at Ffynone and its associated gardens to a more prominent position above the edge of the steep valleys made by the Afon Dulas and a small tributary. The c. 1830 schedule of tithe apportionments records that there were some 237 acres associated with

the house in the parish of Manerdify (*sic*); there were further lands in 'Cappel Colman' and 'Clidy' parishes. In this instance, the schedule of apportionments is of limited use in that, unusually, it gives neither the field names nor the land use. It is therefore difficult to estimate how much, if any, of the surrounding land was actually parkland. The fields to the north-west and east of the house do, however, have a parkish feel and these two fields total some 30 acres.

As far as can be judged, there have always been three drives associated with Ffynone. To the north of the property is the drive which served the utility courtyard. To the south of this is the house and some distance away to the south-east is the course of the former drive that Fenton may have taken. This last drive is the only one to have been re-routed.

The main drive begins at an entrance set back from the road and immediately to the south of the lodge. Built between about 1830 and 1889, the lodge is a two-storey building, now rendered. Originally it probably had three gables. The barge boards are decorated and there is a finial above. The entrance is flanked by four imposing gate piers. The outside pair stand to just over 2 m. and are topped with stone balls. The central two, between which the drive passes, stand to just under 3 m. and are again topped with stone balls. All the gate piers have been constructed with three projecting bands edged with moulded stone. Between these bands, which are at regular intervals, are tightly fitting dressed stone blocks. Between the outer and inner piers are two small decorative iron screens. Between the inner piers is hung the decorative pair of opening gates.

From this impressive entrance the drive, which has a pressed gravel and tarmacked surface, follows the contour across the slope to the house. The forecourt is entered through another set of even taller gate piers; these stand to about 4 m. and on the opposite side of the forecourt is a further, identical set. To the north of this semi-circular forecourt are the retaining walls, steps and balustrades that separate this area from the lawn and service drive.

The service drive starts immediately to the north of the lodge and is entered past square stone gate piers that stand to about 2 m. These gate piers were probably contemporary with those to the main drive, that is about 1902-1907. Both these piers were formerly topped with stone balls; one is now ivy clad and the other is lying some distance away up the track. The drive is now a farm road, with a wall to the north and the ha-ha between drive and garden to the south.

The lower drive is shown on the tithe map as winding up-slope through the plantations heading east to then swing west across the field to the east that still retains its parkish feel and from there to either the south of the house or to the utility courtyard. By 1889, the drive no longer dissected the field but has been re-routed to the north to follow the eastern and northern field boundary. Of the original drive there is now little trace, but the present owner has seen parch marks in the field on the appropriate line. Today, this drive, which is not part of the Ffynone property, is used by the forestry consortium for extracting timber. However, the stone retaining walls to the north are still evident and stand to an average of 1.5 m. From Fenton's description it seems likely that he approached the house using this drive, which would have given him the 'romantic winding ascent'; access via the northern drive is almost level. This route would also have taken him through the plantations that are shown on the tithe map and that remain today, although now mostly coniferous plantings.

From the surviving accounts and mapped evidence it would seem that some aspect of the garden was developed to accompany each phase of the house so that little of the eighteenth-century garden now remains. Unfortunately Fenton (1811) describes little of the garden, but he does refer to the recent plantings: 'I ride under a rich hanging wood of oaks, thickly interspersed with birch of a large size and many of the weeping kind; then take a turn to the left,

and by a romantic winding ascent through most thriving young plantations up to the house of Ffynonau, a handsome modern building, the residence of John Colby Esq., but generally thought to be injudiciously placed on the summit of a very exposed hill, where the slope below it presented so many more eligible situations, and capable of the same command of prospect. The place was purchased of William Morgan, Esq., by Captain Colby, of the navy, uncle of the present possessor, to whom great praise is due for his forbearance of the axe, and his spirit for planting on a great scale'.

From the documentary evidence it is known that in May, 1795, Nathaniel Aubrey was paid for building garden walls in brickwork, unless these were the walls to the front (north-west) of the house, which were later removed in the nineteenth century remodelling, the walls referred to are probably those of the diamond shaped section of the walled garden, that are still partially extant.

The tithe map of about 1830 probably shows the gardens and drives as they were laid out when the house was built. To the south-west of the front (north) of the house is a substantial carriage turning circle; this was later removed. There appears to be a small garden building to the south of the house, where the Inigo Thomas terrace now is. There are a total of three drives, two of which still exist in their entirety and one, to the east, that was re-routed between c 1830 and 1889. The area of woodland indicated on the tithe map is less extensive than the areas shown on subsequent surveys; the walled garden has also yet to be developed into its three distinctive areas.

The Allen photographs of Ffynone (1871), show that the plantings around the house have thrived and matured well; there are sizeable oaks and beeches to the front; whilst to the rear (south-east) of the house, is a large graceful conifer.

The First Edition Ordnance Survey map (1889), shows that the garden had been developed considerably over the previous few decades. The lodge to the west of the house is now shown, the walled garden is recorded with the 'apple store', its vinery and other areas of glass and the area has been extended to partially surround the original diamond-shaped plot, so that the total area is now some three acres. The woodland between the house and walled garden is now more extensive and the fountain, immediately to the north of the walled garden is shown. Some features were also lost during this time. The carriage turning circle has been removed, the small garden building had disappeared.

The Second Edition (1906) seems to have recorded the property in the middle of the 1902-07 revamp by Inigo Thomas. The large conservatory to the back (north) of the house has gone, but the terrace is not yet built. Some of the paths to the north have also gone and there would appear to have been some landscaping work to level the garden more in the area immediately to the south. The area of Thomas's side (south-west) terrace shows a small square garden adjacent to the house, but the course of the retaining wall, with characteristic central bulge, is shown as a dotted line. If this is the case, it is interesting in that this area was developed prior to the main terrace. Efforts have been made to establish Thomas's *modus operandi* but in his lecture to the Royal Institute of British Architects (1926), he gives no clue as to the sequence of events at Ffynone.

The re-modelling by Thomas changed the approaches to the house considerably. The elegant forecourt to the north of the house was by Thomas. The design of the forecourt echoes the lines of the west garden. To the south of the forecourt is the house, the west and east boundaries are made up of walling and a clipped yew hedge. Both these boundaries are entered by the main drive, to either side of which are pairs of impressive gate piers that are similar in design and stature to the central entrance gateway. To the north of the forecourt is the outward

curving stone wall that retains the rising ground above. The wall is topped by slate balustrading, like the south terrace, but this time there are 16 balusters between each interval pier. On the top of each interval pier are small stone basins on pedestals. The upper lawn can be reached from the forecourt by delightfully detailed set of curved steps. To the south-west is the side terrace and sundial; whilst to the south-east is the Italianate terrace. To the north-east of the house is the grassed terrace that was formerly occupied by two tennis courts and a croquet lawn. The garden can, therefore, be divided into three areas of use, the woodland areas, the lawns to the front and rear of the house and the formal terrace gardens adjacent to the house.

The woodlands flanking the main drive occupy just under nineteen acres. To either side of the drive (north and south), is a mowed strip with rhododendron and other shrubs adjacent to and under the trees. A small area contains well established yews; these are believed to be associated with the original house of Ffynone, of which there is now no trace. The land slopes fairly gently down towards the drive from the north and falls away more steeply to the south. The girth and height of some of the specimen trees suggests that they may be part of the original planting scheme. To the north of the drive is a small canal and circular pond, next to which is a classical (reproduction) urn. Evidence from the early surveys suggests that the canal and attached pond were constructed between 1889 and 1906. Both appear to be stone lined, although somewhat overgrown. On the margins of the pond are plantings of bamboo and an impressive clump of gunnera. Again to the north of the drive and a little to the east of the canal is the well. The water from this well is piped via the lion tank (see below) to eventually supply the Garden Cottage associated with the walled garden. The well itself is partly sunken (to the north and west) and partly surrounded by brick and stone walls (to the south and east). At present there is a wooden door to the well chamber and it is protected by a half roof of slate slabs. To the south of the main drive, and approached by flights of steps from both the drive and a path beneath, is the lion tank. This is a small oval pool, with sides and rim of recently restored stonework. In the south-facing side is a lion's head spout. The tank is recorded as a well on the Second Edition Ordnance Survey map, 1906.

The paths within the woodland area are very much as they appear on the First Edition Ordnance Survey, although they had become somewhat overgrown with *Rhododendron ponticum* prior to the last decade. Many of these paths have been, or are about to be, re-established. Areas have been cleared and named species and hybrid rhododendrons are being planted to replace the more invasive ponticum. Within glades or at junctions of paths are some 'eye-catchers' and water features. In the southern area of the woodland is the 'Lion tank' and at a junction of one of the paths within the main drive is an attractive rose arch and gate; this possibly dates from the mid-nineteenth century. At a junction of the several paths downslope of the rose arch is a small (reproduction) statue that stands to just over 1.5 m.; however, the stone base on which she stands is somewhat older. In shape and in style it is very similar to the stone base on which the sundial has been erected, if a little smaller. A short distance from the statue is a flight of slate steps that can be used instead of reaching the point where the paths meet.

Further down the slope (heading south) the configuration of the paths has changed since 1889, now the path winds downslope directly to the fountain garden, rather than to the side of the walled garden as it did before the turn of the century. The fountain garden is a flat lawn area at the base of the slope, divided by a central gravel path. Planted symmetrically to either side of the path are young fastigiate yews; in the middle is the fountain. This feature probably dates from c. 1850.

The narrow paved path that heads east from the fountain garden is post 1889 and is so similar in style to the paving on the terrace that it may relate to the 1902-07 re-modelling. The

surface consists of square slate slabs, with triangular infills to the sides that are similar, if not identical to the slabs of the terrace. To the south of this path are some mature conifers that may have been sent from Veitch's nursery in about 1870-90; to the south of the conifers at this point is part of the wall of the walled garden. Further east the boundary between the plantations to the south and the garden is made by a ha-ha that stands to 1.5-2 m. This path, referred to by the present owners as the 'paved path', eventually leads back up the slope towards the house. This ascent is marked by a set of eight steps at the top of which are small gate piers that stand to just over 1 m.

To the south of the house is an area of sloping lawn that is separated from the fields to the east and south by a ha-ha that stands to a maximum of 1.5 m. A small decorative iron gate gives access to the fields from the lawns. To the north-east of the lawn is a further, extensive level lawned area that was previously the site of the tennis courts and croquet lawn. To the south, this is edged with a mature but neatly kept laurel hedge; whilst to the north is a retaining wall between this and a further lawned area to the north. The ha-ha is of dry stone; set into it towards either end are 'viewing steps'. These charmingly idiosyncratic features consist of two sets of four steps set an oblique angle to the tennis courts. Set back behind the steps, in a dry-stone recesses, are moulded stone benches that are about 1.25 m. long. The fact that these slabs are sandstone, and not slate as is the case with the rest of the stonework, and are moulded may indicate re-use from features dismantled at the turn of the century. In the centre of the wall is a small flight of steps that leads to the flat area adjacent to the utility courtyard. To either side of these steps are magnificent golden yews.

In addition to the lawn areas above, there is a small lawn area to the north of the house beyond the forecourt. This is separated from the service drive by another retaining wall, which again stands to an average of 1.5 m. Incorporated into this wall is Colby's mounting block, which has recently been revealed by clearance work.

The terrace and belvedere were created as part of the Edwardian re-modelling of the house, under the direction of F Inigo Thomas. Thomas placed a five-bay belvedere raised on arched windows in front of the old house, with steps descending outwards to the astonishing formal terrace. The effect of this terrace depends not only on its great length and breadth, its local stone flagging and decorations, and its terminating exedras (one of them a pool crossed by stepping stones), but also on his (Thomas's) additions to lengthen the façade which forms its backdrop as well. Two single-storey wings were added, just offset from the central block and kept a few feet lower than its main floor, to create a palace-like, Italianate façade of 13 bays. Thomas's plans, which still exist, show he was not proposing to stop until he had made a hanging garden beyond (Haslam, 1992). The hanging garden was never created, but he may not have been completely disappointed for in his paper to the Royal Institute of British Architects (1926), he mentions that plans were always left with the families in case future generations might wish to complete the work.

The terrace is extensive, being about 75 x 10 m. In the centre is a projecting square bay that is about 8 x 2.5 m. The parapet fronting the belvedere, the flight of steps to either side and the south border of the terrace are all balustraded. Each baluster, and there are nearly 100 on the terrace alone, is turned in slate, with slate capping and interval pillars; the flags are also of slate. On the terrace these balusters stand to nearly 1 m. At the western end of the terrace, the lawn is reached by a flight of steps; at the eastern end, where the ground level is higher, access is directly from the path. To either end of the terrace are semi-circular bays formed by walls that stand to just over 2 m. Where the walls abut the terrace are pillars similar to those that mark the entrance to the property, except that these are about 4 m. high and are topped with ebulliently

decorated urns. At the north-eastern end, the need to retain the symmetry required that one of these urns was partially buried within the fabric of the house wall.

Although the symmetry of design is retained at either end, the detail and use is different. At the north-eastern end is a semi-circular lily pond, beyond which is an arched entrance to the pathway that skirts the southern front of the utility courtyard. To reach this arch, the pond is crossed by four stepping stones that link with a flight of seven steps (the lowest two are semi-circular) that go beneath the arch. At the western end of the terrace, the semi-circular bay is occupied by a rather fine bronze of Lloyd George, executed by Kathleen Scott (wife of the explorer) in about 1930. The bust is set on a white marble pillar that stands to about 1.5 m.

To the right-hand side (north) of Lloyd George is a doorway that leads to the side or west garden; the internal level of the west garden is retained on the south and west sides by substantial walls that stand, at a maximum, to over 4 m. The configuration of this garden is classical and symmetrical with a central, western, bow projection; this bow is again decorated by balustrading that is identical to that on the south terrace. The plantings echo the simple symmetry; within the lawn are four yew topiaries in the form of Scotch thistles (the countess is related to the Campbells of Stackpole and Gelli Aur), which are surrounded by dwarf box hedges. Towards the western end of the lawn is the sundial which is dated 1723 and bears the legend 'post tenebra lux'. The present owner suggests that this indicates a connection with the South Sea Bubble. The sundial stands on a large octagonal base that consists of several vast slabs of stone.

The fountain garden lay within an unidentified enclosure of some 2.30 acres in about 1830 - 40. By 1889, this area was definitely included within the curtilage of the woodland garden, and the fountain is shown. Standing to about 2 m. above the path, the fountain consists of two bowls, the smallest to the top. In the centre of this bowl are two cherubs (or small boys) that support the fig leaved patterned central stone spout. The water drops from the lower dish into a finely carved circular basin, which is about 4 m. wide. Overall the fountain has a delicate and well-executed feel.

The kitchen garden is probably in part late eighteenth-century in date. In May 1795, Nathaniel Aubrey was paid for building garden walls in brickwork; the diamond shaped, brick walled enclosure that now forms part of the walled garden is shown on the tithe map, as is the small barn to the north. The walls of this area may of the kitchen garden may well be those that Aubrey built, but there is no positive proof.

By 1889, the original diamond shape has been added to and extended. The additional area includes the land to the south, between the original walls and the road, and some additional land to the north-east; so that the whole totals just under 3 acres. An extra dividing wall running due north - south was also built; at the southern end of this stone wall is an apple store.

Today, the entrance to the walled garden is via the Gardener's Cottage, the other four entrances that linked the walled garden to the house gardens still exist but are not used. The early survey show a considerable range of glasshouses immediately to the north of the Gardener's Cottage; these had been added to by 1906, with a further range being built against the south facing north wall of the original diamond-shaped garden. Most of this glass has now gone, but a smaller modern glasshouse occupies some of the site. There are no gravelled walks or paths within the garden, but the borders appear to have changed little since the survey of 1889.

The wide border to the east is a mix of shrubs and herbaceous material, including some very tender material; the wall behind the border in this instance is stone, and it was part of the extended area. In the upper, northern, corner of this section is an entrance to the woodland

garden of the house. This was probably a vehicular entrance, the arch over is depressed, and is a little under 3 m. high, well done with shaped impost. The double white doors may be original. To the left, west, the stone wall abuts the brickwork. Further west again are the remains of the vinery that was built against part of the southern section of the original brick wall. Sometime after 1906 a portion of this brick wall to the west was dismantled, so that, in this part of the garden the pre 1830 garden and the pre 1889 garden are amalgamated.

To the north is the northern brick wall that still stands to a maximum of 4.5 m. in front of which is a wide herbaceous border with, possibly, the original stone edgings. To the west, further along this wall, is another, pedestrian entrance, but of very different construction from the stone arch. The area to right and left of the arch projects some inches and the arch itself is pointed. Again, there is a white painted wooden door and the arch stands to 2.5 m. Running almost due south from this entrance is a double line of concrete posts linked at the top by chains. These were clearly intended for growing climbing and scrambling plants and they still serve that function today. To the west of this avenue is a further section of the southern brick wall. This impressive wall stands to a maximum height of some 5 m., but is threatening to fall away at the north-eastern end.

One wall that did not survive the winter of 1995/96 is the north-south stone dividing wall, the central section of which has slumped. To the south of this wall is the two-storeyed, octagonal apple store. To the west is an external stair to the upper floor and to the north is an arched extension which abuts the stone wall (above). The windows and doors echo the shape of the pointed arch in the brick wall and there is now a rectangular extension to the west as part of the conversion into a domestic building.

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