

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

SITE DOSSIER

**SITE NAME** Machen House

**REF. NO.** PGW (Gt) 32

OS MAP 171 GRID REF. ST 227880

FORMER COUNTY Gwent UNITARY AUTHORITY Newport B.C. COMMUNITY  
COUNCIL Lower Machen

DESIGNATIONS Listed building: Grade  
National Park AONB SSSI NNR ESA GAM SAM CA

SITE EVALUATION Grade II

Primary reasons for grading

Regency garden with well preserved mock Gothic structure

TYPE OF SITE

Gardenesque, mock Gothic, 'Chinese'

MAIN PHASES OF CONSTRUCTION

1831-35

VISITED BY/DATE Elisabeth Whittle/May 1991

## HOUSE

Name Machen House

Grid ref ST 227880

Date/style Mainly 1830s/Regency

### Brief description

Machen House is a Regency two-storey rendered stone house. It is situated to the W of Lower Machen church in the centre of the small hamlet of Lower Machen. It was first a farmhouse, then a small rectory. The living was presented by Sir Charles Morgan of Tredegar to his third son Augustus (1800-1875) in 1831. Between 1831 and 1835 the house was hugely enlarged, submerging the former house, the only remnants of which can be seen on the N side. Side windows, a porch (on the E, entrance side), and front door were added, all in gothic style. The gothic garden walls and outbuildings to the N were added at the same time.

## OUTBUILDINGS

Name Bothies and stables

Grid ref ST 227880

Date/style, and brief description

To the N of the house is a range of single-storey bothies along the garden boundary, between the churchyard and the garden. It is a simple linear building, rendered, with a slate roof and gothic windows, and is now converted into a house.

The former stable block, in similar style, lies to the SE of the house, and is now a private house.

## THE PLEASURE GARDEN

Grid ref ST 227880

Date/style 1831-35/Regency 'gardenesque'

### GENERAL DESCRIPTION, HISTORY AND LAYOUT

The garden of Machen House lies to the N, E and W of the house, adjoining the churchyard to the E. The ground slopes NW-SE, with the steeper part to the N and NW of the house. The entrance is on the S side, off the former main road between Bassaleg and Machen, with a curving drive up to a turning circle on the E side of the house. The garden is about 2 acres in size, and is surrounded by a stone castellated wall, with several mock turrets (described by one author as 'pretentious pseudo-antiquity'). The layout of the garden is largely informal, with winding gravel paths, two artificial naturalistic ponds, specimen trees and shrubs and lawns. Some of the trees and possibly rhododendrons date from the 1830s, and a few of the trees, including the large beeches at the S end of the garden, are considerably older. The easternmost pond was deliberately planned as a 'willow-pattern' garden, with a 'Chinese' stone bridge at its lower end, a weeping willow next to it (replaced in the 1950s), and rhododendrons along the NW side. In the middle of the pond is an original iron fountain. The other pond has a central rockwork fountain and a rockwork cascade, also original. Some of the stone plant containers and vases, and ironwork plant containers and sundial are original, although not in their original positions. To the W of the house is a small summerhouse, also part of the original layout, with iron painted columns on its open, S side.

The N quadrant of the garden has been grassed over. Freestanding near the NE boundary of the garden is a curious stone structure which probably pre-dates the gardens; it is a short wall containing three arched niches, each with two stone shelves. This may have been for bee skeps, and its date is uncertain.

The garden was made at the same time as the house, in 1831-35, by Augustus Morgan. It was originally more extensive than it is now, with a 'maze garden' to the S of the stables (now the private garden of the stables house), and a kitchen garden to the SW (now a separate private garden). A wood to the N of the garden was also laid out as a wild garden, with a pond, walks, and some evergreen planting. This is now completely reverted to the wild, with the pond gone, and only a few rhododendrons and laurels to indicate that it was once part of the ornamental layout.

Most of the original structural and built features within the garden remain. There is now a hard tennis court where the original rose garden was, and to its W a modern swimming pool.

### STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

The entrance to the garden is on the S side, and a curving tarmac drive leads to a turning circle in front of the E side of the house (with grass in the centre). A curving gravel path leads westwards off the drive to the 'Chinese' bridge at the S end of the easternmost pond. A further gravel path runs along the S front of the house to the summerhouse and pond, with a branch off north-westwards to the head of the further pond. Further gravel paths wind through the garden to the W of the house, including along both sides of the north-western pond, and there is a gravel path along the inside of the boundary wall, now grassed over in the northern section of the garden, but clearly visible.

The lawn on the S side of the house is mostly gently sloping. The levelled part was an Edwardian lawn tennis court. The levelled area which is now a hard tennis court was formerly a formal rose garden.

There are two artificial ponds in the garden, lying roughly parallel to each other. That nearest the house forms the NW boundary of the lawn, and is the central feature of the 'willow-pattern' garden. It is roughly rectilinear, with a curving edge on the lawn side, and is dammed at its lower, SW end, with the dam cleverly concealed beneath the bridge. Below it overflow water runs in a small stream through the garden to a drain under the garden wall. The second pond, to the NW of the first, is longer (at present drained - drained every winter), with curving dry-stone edges and a stone dam at the SW end. At its NE end is a rustic naturalistic stonework cascade, and in the middle is a rustic stonework fountain.

Against the N wall of the forecourt in front of the E side of the house is a small rectangular pool with an ironwork fountain.

#### BUILT COMPONENTS

The garden is enclosed by a wall. This varies in height, and is of stone rubble construction for most of its length, with the northern side of brick. On the S the wall is c. 1.5 m. high, and has a roughly castellated top. The entrance is flanked by four square stone piers capped with iron tops with small iron acorns on top. Along the E boundary of the garden is a castellated stone wall c. 2.5 m. high, with a blocked arched doorway (to the former 'maze garden'). The northern end of this wall appears older. At its N end, on the N side of the forecourt, the wall is rendered and c. 3 m. high, still castellated, with two arched doorways into the churchyard. On the W side of the garden the wall is c. 2 m. high, with a roughly castellated top. In the SW corner is a false turret - two walls at right-angles in the corner, with battlements on top and two arched windows (designed to look like a turret from the road - see photo). There is a similar turret further W, half-way along the S wall of the kitchen garden. Half way along the W side the wall rises to a battlemented 'tower' facade over an arched doorway into the former kitchen garden, with two blocked arched windows. The wall to the N of this is c. 3 m. high, stone for a short distance, and then brick, topped with stone slabs. This wall continues to the bothies, which form the garden boundary between the N edge of the garden and the house.

#### 'Chinese bridge'

This stands at the southern end of the pond nearest the house (the SE pond). It is a 3-arched curving stone bridge with a low parapet. Iron uprights are embedded between the arches. The pond dam is underneath it, except for the central arch which is open to allow the overflow water into the stream below.

A simple small stone bridge crosses the stream below the further pond.

#### The summerhouse

This stands to the W of the house, with a small paved court in front of it (to the S). It is a small rectangular building, with an open S front supported on four painted iron pillars standing on a stone plinth. The hipped roof is of stone tiles. There are two shallow stone steps between the two pillars flanking the central entrance. The interior is plain.

#### The bee wall

Near the N wall stands a short stretch of rubble stone wall. On its SE side are three alcoves with pointed arches, the central one higher and wider than the other two. The arches are faced with quartz and lined with cement with quartz embedded into it. In the alcoves are two layers of stone shelving. This is thought to be a 'bee wall', and appears older than the 1830s garden.

Above the tennis court is a white painted wooden revolving summerhouse that was brought to this position recently from its original one

beneath a large deciduous tree to the W of the ponds. Its date is uncertain, but it may be Edwardian.

#### ARCHITECTURAL ORNAMENTS

A number of garden ornaments date from the 1830s:

- a large stone bowl standing on a stone plinth at the NE corner of the lawn,
- an octagonal stone raised bed surround with a small iron bowl on a narrow pillar (brought here from the former rose garden) in the centre of the grass circle of the forecourt
- an iron fountain (jet) flanked by two stone bowls on plinths at the N end of the forecourt
- two stone vases on stone plinths near the N wall of the forecourt
- an iron fountain (jet) in the middle of the near pond
- an iron fountain (jet) in the middle of the far pond (rustic stone fountain)
- an iron sundial on a square plinth in front of the summerhouse (brought here from another site in the garden)
- the base of a stone statue to the W of the far pond

#### PLANTED COMPONENTS

The drive is flanked on the W by three large beeches (a fourth was recently chopped down and was found to be c. 300 years old), and then by a row of cypresses (post 1830s). On the E is a screen of evergreen trees and shrubs.

The centre of the forecourt is a circle of grass.

To the S of the house is a large lawn, with a large mature free-standing *Magnolia grandiflora* just in front of the house. The lawn is flanked by specimen trees at its S end, near the S boundary of the garden. Amongst these trees are mature conifers, including yews, a mulberry, and laurels (a large monkey puzzle tree was cut down in 1990). Along the NW side of the near (SW) pond is a bank of large rhododendrons. The willow next to the 'Chinese bridge' is a replacement (c. 1950s) for the original one. The W side of the garden is planted with specimen trees and shrubs, including old yews, conifers, and further rhododendrons. The slope above the far pond, in the NW quadrant of the garden, has mixed trees, including large conifers, and shrubs, (mostly recent), including rhododendrons. Until recently there was a bamboo garden on the slope in the NW corner. Californian redwoods stood to the E where the swimming pool is now, to the N of which is a golden cypress (formerly two). At the head of the far pond, to the S of the cascade, is a group of three large cypresses. The northern quadrant of the garden is now all sloping lawn, with the tennis court on the site of the former formal rose garden.

The only remnant of the original planting of the 'maze garden' to the E is a large copper beech.

Reconstructions of original planted features

None

Special collections of garden plants

None

Documented living plants

None

Other (including elements of nature conservation interest)

None

ESSENTIAL SETTING AND VIEWS BEYOND THE SITE  
Essential setting: churchyard to the E

ANY SPECIAL FEATURES

None

SURVIVAL OF INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS

Structural components: most  
Built components: most  
Architectural ornaments: some  
Planted components: some

UTILITARIAN GARDENS

NAME Kitchen garden

Grid ref ST 227880

Date/style 1831-35/walled kitchen garden

DESCRIPTION (categories as for the pleasure garden)

The former walled kitchen garden is situated to the W of the garden. It is now a private garden, with a modern house built in it. Its E boundary is the W wall of the pleasure garden, in which there is an interconnecting doorway. No historic features remain in the interior, but the castellated stone walls still stand, and in the middle of the S side, next to the road, there is a mock turret similar to that at the corner of the pleasure garden.

SOURCES

Secondary

J.A.F. Pickford, *Between Mountain and Marsh* (1944).

To be appended: 1:10,000 map of site, marked with boundaries, viewpoints etc.; colour photographs of site, photocopies of relevant material, where available.

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