

## **LEESWOOD HALL**

**Ref No** PGW (C) 47

**OS Map** 117

**Grid Ref** SJ 253 614

**Former County** Clwyd

**Unitary Authority** Flintshire

**Community Council** Leeswood

**Designations** Listed building: Leeswood Hall (grade II\*); White Gates (grade I); icehouse (grade II); former stables and attached walls (grade II); dovehouse (grade II); bridge over river Terrig (grade II); walled garden, cottage, vine house (grade II)  
Conservation Area: Leeswood

**Site Evaluation** Grade I

### **Primary reasons for grading**

Remains of early eighteenth-century transitional landscape, designed by Stephen Switzer. The rarity of the survival of this kind of layout, and the fact that it was designed by Switzer, make this landscape garden of national importance. Main vista from the house closed by magnificent early eighteenth-century wrought-iron gatescreen by Robert Bakewell.

### **Type of Site**

Transitional formal/informal landscape garden

### **Main Phases of Construction**

c. 1728-32; early nineteenth century

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

Leeswood Hall is situated on the north-west-facing slope of the small valley of the river Terrig, to the south-east of Mold. It is a large L-shaped two-storey Palladian mansion, with an eight-bay front facing north-west. The central four bays are recessed. It is built of rendered brick, and the main front is topped by balustrading.

The house was built for a local squire, George Wynne, in about 1724-26, and has been attributed to Francis Smith of Warwick. Wynne had recently come into a fortune through the discovery in 1715 of a rich seam of lead on his family's land on Halkyn Mountain (by the 1740s this was exhausted and he became destitute, dying in poverty in London in 1756). The house as built was much more grandiose than the present one, which is only the central core of the original. It was flanked by two long service wings, and had a third storey above the cornice. Between the wings, on the south-east side of the house, was an open court with a grass oval in the centre. Wynne was said to have spent £40,000 on it. On his death Leeswood passed to his daughter, and on her death in 1798 it was bought by the Revd Hope Eyton, vicar of Mold, descendant of the original owners of Leeswood. He pulled down all but the central core of the house, removed the top storey, and remodelled the interior in Regency style at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Since then no further major alterations have taken place.

Flanking the entrance drive, to the south of the house, lie a large brick barn and classical brick stable block, along the north-east and south-west sides of what was originally a closed courtyard. The south-east side has been demolished (post 1880s), and recently the stable block has been converted into residential units. The yard is cobbled. Both buildings would appear contemporary with the house. To the south-east of the drive is a further small range of stone and brick outbuildings.

The Leeswood pleasure grounds lie mainly to the north-west, north, and north-east of the house. (Note: although the grounds could be divided into 'park' and 'garden' this would be relatively meaningless here as it is evident that the landscape was designed as a whole. The ha-has and woodland boundaries distinguish between the areas that could, or could not be grazed. The landscape has therefore been taken as a whole, in which the areas beyond Switzer's layout will be indicated.)

The grounds were initially laid out for George Wynne, to compliment his grand new house, in the late 1720s and early 1730s. There are indications that the layout was by Stephen Switzer, a noted garden theorist and designer of his time: Wynne had connections with those in the forefront of garden design at the time; in March 1732/3 he paid £53 5s. into Switzer's bank account with Hoares, and there is a reference in a letter from Switzer to Wynne in 1739 of an outstanding bill; also, Wynne's gardener, John Price, took three copies of The Practical Husbandman and Planter (1733-34), most of which had been written by Switzer. The first attribution of the garden to Switzer is by the Hon. Daines Barrington in 1786, in an article in Archaeologia. Switzer's style was what he called 'rural and extensive gardening': large-scale layouts of open ground and woodland, held together by strong formal axes of avenues and vistas, but within which informality was allowed. Ha-has enabled vistas to end with views out into the countryside beyond. This kind of transitional landscape was laid out at Leeswood, largely in the irregular-shaped area of woodland to the north and east of the house. The shape of the area would suggest that the layout respects earlier field and woodland boundaries, and indeed the configuration of woodland and open ground remains more or less unchanged to this day. The ornamental layout is first shown on a 'rough draft' of the estate dating to the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

The principal elements shown are first 'lawns' to the north-west and south-east of the house, with the 'White Gates' terminating the axis at the north-west end and an avenue leading to a small angled pavilion at the south-east end, above the house. The magnificent White Gates are thought to have been erected here in about 1726 by George Wynne to close the vista in front of the house. A wide smooth grass slope was created between the house and gates. This entailed a great deal of earth-moving (mainly building up), as can be seen by the uneven ground on either side. It appears that the gates were never used as an entrance. The authorship of the gates has been in some doubt: at first they were ascribed to the famous smith Robert Davies of Bersham. He worked at the nearby Croes Foel forge, and is known to have produced ironwork for Chirk Castle and Wrexham Church at about this time. However, there is evidence that the gates are the work of Robert Bakewell of Derbyshire, also active at this time. The public road bounding the south-west side of this area is shown widened into a rectangular area abutting the stables to the south-west of the house, with the 'Black Gates' at the north end of the wider part. The road still widens on its north side at this point. The Black Gates closed the main cross axis of the grounds, which runs south-west/north-east across the front of the house and through the woodland to the main north-south axis.

Secondly, to the north-east of the 'lawns' the draft shows a woodland area laid out with several vistas cut through it, including the north-

south axis mentioned, which runs near the east boundary of the grounds, and which is terminated at its south end by the angled pavilion (which thus serves two axes). A long south-east/north-west vista runs from the southern end of the woodland across open fields, through the walled garden, across open ground to a circular mount, then on down the grass slope to an amphitheatre of grass ramps and a roughly circular part of the lake. A parallel vista runs from a garden building near the north-south axis through a round-ended rectangular clearing (? bowling green) to the edge of the wood and the basin-shaped end of the lake. An angled vista to the south-west runs from a small pavilion at its southern end to the northern edge of the woodland. Two cross-axes run north-east/south-west, the main one across the front of the house (see above) and the secondary one through the centre of the walled garden. In the north-east corner of the woodland a series of ponds are shown running parallel with the north-south vista.

The third main area shown in the draft is the lake in the valley bottom, dammed at its north-east end, which lies along the north-west boundary of the grounds. This is shown as a long, narrow lake with two bulges, one in the centre, at the end of the main south-east/north-west vista, and one at the north-east end, at the end of two further vistas. It is not clear whether or not this is the original shape of the lake. There is a possibility that there were originally two, or possibly three round basins corresponding to the bulges in the lake, and that these were amalgamated into a more informal lake later in the eighteenth century.

Other features shown on the draft include a rectangular pond or reservoir in the field to the south-east of the outbuildings, an ice-house between house and lake with a rectangular enclosure above it, a bridge over the river Terrig on the north side of the lake, a dovecote to the west of the road, and a belt of planting along the western boundary of the estate, to the west of the road. Two watercolour paintings give further evidence of the original appearance of the grounds. One, possibly by Moses Griffith, shows the bridge with ornamental piers and gates, the amphitheatre, and obelisks on the lawn in front of the house. It also shows a small utilitarian outbuilding to the west of the amphitheatre with what may be a walled enclosure attached. This is probably the rectangular feature on the draft. A second watercolour featuring the White Gates shows both the obelisks and a statue on the lawn in front of the house. It also shows that the road was turned into something in the nature of a private drive by the erection of a wall and gate piers across it at the west end of the gates (enhanced by the widened stretch next to the house), with a small toll house just inside.

The Revd Hope Eyton made some minor changes to this layout in the early years of the nineteenth century. An estate map of 1809 shows some of them: all but the north-eastern third of the walled kitchen garden has been demolished, and the remaining third divided by a cross wall, with a new garden house in the middle of the north-east side, thus blocking this axis. The widening of the road has been removed, and the Black Gates moved from here to the woodland end of the main cross axis. A curving drive, sweeping up the slope from the west end of the White Gates, is shown crossing the public road, but it was presumably never built. The outline of the pond remains the same, as does the woodland, and the garden pavilions are still shown. A ha-ha was built in front of the house.

By 1840 a curving drive had been made running from the Mold-Wrexham road to the north to the front of the house via the existing path running along the western edge of the woodland. The Black Gates were re-erected at the entrance, and the small twin pavilions flanking the White Gates were moved to flank the Black Gates. A small stone bridge was built to take the drive over the river Terrig.

Thereafter only minor change occurred, with Victorian and Edwardian planting of conifers and rhododendrons (the latter particularly in the 'bowling green', which became known as the American garden), and the making of a lawn tennis court to the north-east of the house. The early eighteenth-century garden buildings became ruinous, and most disappeared (only one shown on the 1871 Ordnance Survey map), and a rockwork area was made where the summerhouse had stood at the south-east end of the 'bowling green'. In the 1980s the Black Gates were moved to the entrance to Tower, and the sundial from the Bowling Green was re-erected in the garden there.

Simple stone piers flank the entrance to Leeswood, which is to the south of the stable block, off the Leeswood lane. A rough track leads past the outbuildings around the back of the house to a gravel oval on the north-west front. The entrance off the Mold-Wrexham road, to the north, is now disused. It is flanked by dressed stone walls and twin single-storey classical stone pavilions facing each other (formerly flanking the White Gates). Central doors are flanked by pairs of attached Doric columns, with sculpted pediments over depicting 'Music' and 'War'. Topping the pediments are stone urns flanked by ball finials. The gateway is closed by simple iron gates (formerly by the Black Gates). The disused curving drive, now turfed over, can be traced across the fields, and crosses the river over a small single-arched stone bridge. Where the drive enters the grounds, on the edge of the wood, there is a simple iron gate flanked by stone piers. The drive continues as a grass track along the west edge of the woodland, flanked by oak and horse chestnut trees, and ends at the north corner of the house.

To the north-west of the house a gravel forecourt and narrow lawn are bounded by a curving ha-ha. A curving drive, probably of nineteenth-century date, originally led from the forecourt to the north-west side of the stable court, but this is now disused, although traceable. It runs through an area of oak and beech trees underplanted with laurel and holly. A wide grass slope of even gradient runs north-west from the ha-ha down to the White Gates next to the public road and the river. These are a masterpiece of wrought ironwork, and remain in excellent condition. They stand in their original position, and consist of a screen and central gates of five bays, about 30 m. long, flanked by square stone piers and low curving brick walls. The screen is topped by highly ornamental broken pediments; four open-work three-dimensional piers are topped by solid cupolas on top of which are urns and delicate flowers. The top of the gates is curved, with a highly ornamental overthrow topped by an arched dolphin, the Wynne emblem. Along the perimeter of the grounds, between the slope and the Leeswood road is a belt of mixed deciduous and coniferous trees, including beech, horse chestnut, sycamore, and a row of pines.

Between the slope and the lake, near the lower end, is a well preserved ice-house, consisting of an egg-shaped brick-lined chamber half sunk into the ground, with a passageway entrance flanked by stone walls on the north side. The domed top is partly mounded up with earth and has the remains of a stone covering. Large mature beech trees stand around the ice-house, and a yew is growing next to it. Above it, to the south-east, is a roughly levelled rectangular area backed by a scarp, which is probably the site of the enclosure. To the north, overlooking the lake, is a small semi-circular turf amphitheatre. This consists of a level platform cut into the slope below which is a curving narrow terrace and then a steep curving turf scarp down to a grass circle. The terraces are flanked by grass ramps leading down to the circle. The semi-circular slope below the circle is also flanked by ramps, and at its foot is a further narrow terrace. The purpose of this amphitheatre is obscure: it stood on one of the main axes of the Switzer layout, and thus served an

ornamental purpose, but additionally it may have been used in some activity which involved a spectacle taking place. The 1871 map shows a boat house on the shore of the lake to its west, but this has disappeared.

To the west of the woodland area is an uneven grass slope with scattered deciduous trees below which is a small lake of irregular outline, dammed at its north-east end and along its northern side by an earthen bank. It is now choked with seedling trees and undergrowth, but there is still water in parts of it. Next to the dam at its north end is a ruined mill. Beyond the lake is the small river Terrig. A track leading to the mill crosses the river over a double-arched stone bridge with stone finials at its western end. The lake is surrounded by light deciduous woodland.

Immediately to the south-east of the house is a lawn with a disused circular stone and concrete fountain base in the centre. Beyond the drive a grass field slopes upwards. In it are a few old limes, possibly remnants of a lime avenue that originally led to an eye-catcher on the brow of the hill. This has completely disappeared. Next to the outbuildings is a roughly rectangular pond, dammed on its north-west side, which is a former reservoir.

To the north and east of the house is an area of mostly semi-natural deciduous woodland. Near the house there is some ornamental Victorian or Edwardian tree planting, particularly of conifers, with rhododendron underplanting and large yew trees which may originally have been clipped. To the west of the walled garden is a large mature tulip tree. A path leads from the house north-eastwards to an open grass area within the woodland, part of which is a lawn tennis court. At the north-east end of this area are the remains of one of the eighteenth-century garden buildings. All that is left is some brick walling, a stretch of stone wall, much fallen brick and stonework, and, on the south side, a raised stone platform and steps. The south side may have been a later conservatory. From here a winding, part rockwork-edged narrow path leads past a small bamboo-fringed pool to the 'bowling green', or American garden. This is a roughly rectangular platform, with curving ends, built up above the slope by considerable earth-moving at its north-west end. Around its perimeter are massive closely set yew trees, originally a clipped yew hedge. The interior is now completely overgrown with rhododendrons, and is impenetrable. A small path leads to the octagonal plinth of an early eighteenth-century sundial in the centre. A 1940s photograph shows the sundial to have had a fluted column topped by a cube with gnomons on the vertical faces, on top of which was a ball finial (it is now at Tower). At the south-east end is a sunken area bounded by steep banks faced in places with rockwork. Rockwork-edged paths lead to a recess cut into the slope at the south-east end, in which there is much fallen brick and rockwork, which might suggest a collapsed structure, possibly a grotto of some kind (there is also a small adit for a mine in one side). The area is overgrown with large yew trees.

The woodland contains a large number of seedling deciduous trees interspersed with large mature limes. The original paths and vistas have become completely overgrown. A winding path, of nineteenth- or early twentieth-century date, partly flanked by rhododendrons, and passable in places, leads from the eastern end of the 'bowling green' northwards to a series of three ponds stepped down the slope. The highest is a narrow rectangular pond aligned lengthwise on the slope. Below it is a larger rectangular one, with a great bank along its north side between it and the lowest pond. This is the largest, rectangular in shape, bounded by earthen banks with flat tops (probably for walks) on its north and east sides. The main north-south axis of Switzer's layout runs immediately to the west of this string of ponds. It is completely obscured by seedling trees, but at its northern end it terminates in a symmetrical arrangement

of 'ditches'. Either side of the end are two rectangular ditches with steep sides. There is evidence (see Site Dossier) that these may have originally held water. Just beyond them the axis itself is terminated, on the very edge of the woodland, by a much shallower 'ditch', really a scarp, slight ditch, and low outer bank.

To the north-east of the walled garden is a level semi-circular platform edged by a low dry-stone revetment wall. This is part of the original early eighteenth-century layout, forming part of one of the cross-axes, the rest of which has gone.

Near the western edge of the woodland is a large circular mound c. 6-7 m high, called The Mount. This may be a medieval motte in origin, although there is no documentary evidence to support this allegation. In general form it has the appearance of a motte, with steep sides, a slight ditch around it, and a flat top. It is tree covered, in particular with tall yews, with a narrow spiral earthen path winding up its sides, flanked by overgrown yew hedging on its outer side. On the top are two classical stone seats with sides and arched backs, and a square stone plinth - all that is left of a stone table. Originally there were four seats, and all date to George Wynne's period. The draft plan shows the mount densely planted except on the line of the vista, which is clear, and with a central feature on top.

To the south-west of the lane to Leeswood village is an area of former park beyond the Switzer layout. This is now a pasture field with a belt of planting along its western side. In it, to the south of the house, is a ruinous classical dovecote. It is square, built of brick with stone quoins, with a ruined pyramidal slate roof. It appears contemporary with the house, dating to the late 1720s.

The walled kitchen garden lies to the north-east of the house, on the southern edge of the woodland area. It is rectangular, orientated north-west/south-east, and has a central south-west/north-east dividing wall with a gap at the north-east end.

The garden is only the northern third of a much larger kitchen garden built at the same time as the house. The original garden reached right up to the house, and had one of the main axes of the grounds running north-west/south-east through the middle of it. By the time of the 1809 map of the Leeswood Hall demesne the southern two-thirds had been demolished, and a garden building and cross wall built. The 1871 Ordnance Survey map shows a layout of perimeter and single cross paths, with the garden building in the middle of the north-east side, a central glass house in the middle of the north-west section, and several glass houses outside the west corner of the garden. Of the built structures only the garden building and one glass house survive. The northern half is laid out to lawn, with perimeter borders and a few fruit trees. A path along the north-east side is bordered by box edging. The southern half is rough grass with rows of old fruit trees.

The brick walls of the garden mostly stand to their full height of c. 4 m, the north-east side being slightly higher at 5 m. They have stone coping on top, and varying brickwork indicates that parts have been heightened and repaired. A section of the northern end of the north-east wall has fallen almost to ground level. There are lean-to sheds against the outside of the north-west wall, and a round-arched doorway with stone surround and an iron gate into the garden near the south end. The dividing wall, which has also been heightened to c. 4 m has a large square stone pier at the north-east end with a projecting cornice topped by the broken foot of a stone urn, part of which stands on the ground below. There is a doorway similar to that in the north-west wall near the

south-west end of the cross wall, and another rectangular doorway near the north end of the south-west wall.

In the middle of the north-east side is a small two-storey classical brick building with a central gable end in the form of a pediment. It is flanked by brick walls with blocked arches and stone piers topped by stone urns. These are similar to that on the end of the cross wall. Originally there was an open vista between the piers through to the semi-circular platform and along the south-west/north-east axis of the Switzer layout beyond. The date of the building (recently restored) is thought to be around 1800: it is not shown on the 'Rough Draft' (c. 1790), but does appear on the 1809 map.

Outside the west corner of the garden is a ruined glass house facing south-east, built against a brick wall. Its narrow glazing panels indicate a date in the early nineteenth century. Against the other side of the wall are lean-to brick sheds. To its south is a short stretch of isolated brick wall, possibly part of a small building shown in this position on the 1871 map. Only the footings of other glass houses shown on the map to the east remain.

## **Sources**

### **Primary**

Letter from Stephen Switzer to Sir George Wynne, 1739: Clwyd Record Office (Hawarden) D/HE/295.  
'Rough draft of the estate at Leeswood' (c. 1790): private collection.  
Watercolour of Leeswood from the bridge (n.d., eighteenth century): private collection.  
Watercolour of Leeswood and the White Gates (n.d., eighteenth century): private collection.  
'A Map of Leeswood Hall Demesne in the parish of Mold, the property of Richard Garnons, Esquire, surveyed in 1809 by E. Jones': private collection.

### **Secondary**

Pennant, T., A Tour in Wales II (1783): engraving, p. 42.  
Hussey, C., 'Leeswood, Flintshire', Country Life 30 July and 6 August 1943, pp. 200-03, and 244-47.  
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