

## GLASFRYN

**Ref No** PGW (Gd) 24 (GWY)

**OS Map** 123

**Grid Ref** SH 402 426

**Former County** Gwynedd

**Unitary Authority** Gwynedd

**Community Council** Llanystumdwy

**Designations** Listed buildings: House and coach house, Grade II;  
SSSI: Llyn Glasfryn; Ancient monuments, standing stone & Ffynnon Grasi;  
Gwynedd Sites and Monuments Record Primary Reference Number 1374.

**Site Evaluation** **Grade II**

**Primary reasons for grading** Late eighteenth-century walled park with contemporary formal plantings of beeches, some of which survive; nineteenth-century kitchen garden; semi-formal garden area with topiary and interesting modern plantings.

**Type of Site** Park and garden enclosed within stone wall; lawn with ha-ha and ancient beeches; drives and walks with avenues of trees; kitchen garden; incorporates former tree nursery.

**Main Phases of Construction** Eighteenth century, late nineteenth/early twentieth century.

### SITE DESCRIPTION

Glasfryn is set more or less centrally within the original park, and faces south-east towards Llyn Glasfryn, which, however, is not visible from the house. The house is three-storey, built of grey stone, without rendering (except on north-east wing), in Tudor/Elizabethan style with mullioned windows and a projecting central block over the sandstone porch.

The property belonged to the Cadwaladr and Vaughan families in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and was sold to the Lloyds in 1728. It came into the family of the present owner in about 1745, when Archdeacon John Ellis received Glasfryn Uchaf and about 50 acres from his brother-in-law in lieu of his wife's dowry and some other money owed. Ellis then built what was described as 'a handsome mansion house with park-like grounds stretching down to the lake'. A painting of the house in about 1750, which hangs in the present house, must be of this mansion.

The Archdeacon's son from his first marriage inherited his mother's property, and

Glasfryn came to the son of a second marriage, the Revd Thomas Ellis. He built the park wall (in about 1790) and planted beeches around it and in front of the house, several of which still survive. Marriages in this and subsequent generations allied the Ellises with the Williams, Clough and Greaves families; the house was rebuilt and the top storey added in 1890-91 by the Revd John Clough Williams-Ellis, whose wife Mabel was the sister of Richard Greaves of Wern, Porthmadog, which was rebuilt at around the same time. Most of what is now visible externally is of this date. Rambling domestic offices at the rear were demolished in 1937.

The coach house is nineteenth-century in date, being shown on an estate map of 1842 but not on a map drawn in the second decade of the century. It is of stone with a slate roof, and was rebuilt from lintel height in the 1970s, work which received an award. It is single-storey with a loft and has a wide carriage doorway in the centre of the side facing the house. Part of the building is now a holiday cottage, with its own small garden which was laid out in 1970. The game larder is a small stone building on the east side of the courtyard behind the house, now used as a woodshed.

Glasfryn Uchaf is shown, with a dovecote on the end (now gone), in a painting of the house in about 1750. It was the original house and the name 'Glasfryn Uchaf' was transferred to the pre-1750 house. During the nineteenth century the main house became plain Glasfryn and the old house reclaimed its name. As there is a bell turret (still containing a bell), it was probably at one time accommodation for estate workers. Since 1970 it has been a holiday cottage with its own small garden, laid out with paths, borders and box hedging.

The remains of a barn lie to the north of the house. All that survives is the west end, a stone wall with a curved top and a blocked doorway above ground level. The shape of the top of the wall may have been modified to fit the corrugated iron roof which it now carries. Other extant walls are also corrugated iron, but the east end is open and presumably originally had a stone wall like that on the west. The barn is not shown on the 1842 estate map but had been built by 1900.

The stone stable building is at right-angles to the barn, to which it appears to have been joined at one time. A short distance to the east are the remaining two walls of another large outbuilding, now ruined but shown on Ordnance Survey maps of 1900 and 1918; neither this nor the stable building is shown on the 1842 estate map. The yard near these buildings is part concrete, part gravel.

A garage lies to the north-east of the house, just outside the courtyard, and is a fairly recent building, not shown on old maps. It was originally single, but has been made double. The approach to it is flanked by yew hedges and borders.

There is a small, late eighteenth-century park laid out and walled in about 1790 by the Revd Thomas Ellis, who also planted beeches around the circumference. The park wall in front of the house takes the form of a ha-ha, but this may not be original as trees were planted along this boundary as along the others. Parts of the original park have now been incorporated into the garden and others used as a tree nursery, and some of the land outside the wall has become parkland. The expansion of the

park probably dates from the middle of the nineteenth century.

The house originally lay close to the centre of the park, but although it is still surrounded by the park on all sides, the bulk of the surviving parkland lies to the south, overlooked from the front of the house. The original extent and layout of the park appears very clear from the early nineteenth-century 2-in. manuscript map drawn for the 1st edition 1-in. Ordnance Survey map, and it was evidently later altered, but it is interesting that the boundary running south-east from the house is not shown on this map. This is an old ha-ha type wall, but above ground (embanked on the garden side), similar in style and construction to the 1790 park wall, planted with beeches of very great age, and it looks as though it should be contemporary with the park wall; it was certainly in place by 1842. It is also interesting that the ha-ha, or the wall on the line of it, cut across the area in front of the house apparently previously considered part of the grounds, which were described earlier in the eighteenth century as going down to the lake.

The alterations to the park probably took place around the middle of the nineteenth century. An estate map of 1842 shows few changes since the 2-in. map was drawn, but by 1900 the present kitchen garden had been made in an area to the east which was not part of the demesne in 1842. The expansion of the park is likely to have been contemporary with this.

Apart from the plantings of beeches along the boundary wall, and a small area of woodland beside the drive (shown on the 2-in. map), the only original plantation to survive appears to have been a small one north of Llyn Glasfryn. The small group of beeches immediately east of the house may be survivors from an L-shaped plantation in this area which has otherwise disappeared. A square area surrounding the house may have been the original garden, and the rest of the park was apparently open ground.

Llyn Glasfryn, a natural lake, lies outside the park wall, but the area between it and the wall has much of the character of parkland and perhaps already had before the wall was built. The drive skirts the lake closely and it clearly had a recreational aspect, both for sport (shooting) and pleasure boating. The legend that it was created by Grasi forgetting, after fetching water, to put the lid on the well nearby (Ffynnon Grasi), thus causing it to overflow, persists, and is told at the house to this day. The standing stone near the well is said to be the figure of Grasi, turned to stone for her forgetfulness. Unfortunately this stone cannot be seen from the house, and a second one has been erected in a nearer, and visible, field. As this is not shown on the 1918 25-in. Ordnance Survey map (which, however, shows the original stone), it was presumably put up after that date.

There is a single lodge, built after 1842, at the main drive entrance, about 1 km south of the house. It is a small, simple, single-storey design with an attic, built of grey stone. The entrance gates and posts were erected in 1901. The metal posts have stone balls on top (one fallen). The gates are white-painted iron, and the main gate has been moved to close off the lodge garden; the pedestrian gate and a matching piece of fencing on the other side remain *in situ*.

The long drive, from the south-west, passes through farmland before reaching the lake. A wall meets the drive, about half way along the western edge of the lake, which may mark the limit of a later, extended park. The three large enclosures between this point and the house and garden are now pasture fields, with scattered trees, but the three smaller enclosures to north and east, which were part of the original eighteenth-century park, were used as a tree nursery from 1948 to 1973. They are now full of trees planted in rows, including many exotic conifer species, some nearing maturity. A further area to the east, south of the kitchen garden, is similarly planted.

A long straight wall crosses the park from north-east to south-west, cutting off the furthest two fields; this is on the line of the eighteenth-century park boundary, and is a dry-stone wall 1-1.5 m high. Where it forms the south-east boundary of the lawn, this wall forms a fairly short, straight ha-ha, which is achieved by the level of the lawn being somewhat higher than that of surrounding areas, possibly built up to create the ha-ha rather than the wall being sunk. There is a ditch on the field side. The ha-ha is collapsing slightly, and there are the stumps of quite large trees which have been removed.

Just east of the point where the wall and bank on the north-east edge of the lawn meet the ha-ha, which here becomes an ordinary wall, there is a disused entrance through it.

On the west edge of the garden area the higher level within is retained by a wall along the side of the drive which also has a ha-ha effect. It is about 1.5 m high and was built in the 1930s, of large stone blocks. On the other side of the drive there is a similar wall with a bank against its west side, to preserve the sunken effect - the field level is a good deal lower than that of the garden. The drive was deliberately lowered when these walls were built, but was probably previously already lower than the garden.

The beech trees on the north-east edge of the lawn are planted on a bank rising slightly from the lawn, which is retained by a dry-stone wall on the park side. Again, this is very much like a ha-ha, although the effect is now lost as the park enclosure beyond is full of outgrown tree nursery stock.

The area of the garden as at present laid out is probably larger than when the park was made late in the eighteenth century, as the early nineteenth-century map shows a square area surrounding the house which was probably the garden at that time. The house has now expanded to fill more of that space, and the garden has correspondingly expanded into the original park. The details of the layout have been more or less constantly changing since late in the nineteenth century at least. There has probably always been, however, a plantation to the south, and some more formal areas near the house; the area south of the house bounded on the north-east by the old wall with beeches may have been lawn since the square garden disappeared, which was perhaps at the same time as the wall was constructed.

The trapezoidal area which is now the garden was obviously at least partly defined by the Revd Thomas Ellis, assuming that he built the ha-ha type wall with beeches

planted along it on the north-east of the lawn. The ha-ha defining the south-eastern edge of the lawn is part of the original park wall. The drive runs along the western edge of the garden, and has probably been in much the same position since the house was first built.

The drive leads to a large, gravelled courtyard on the north-west side of the house, surrounded on all sides but the north-east by walls or buildings. The western part of this space was occupied by old kitchens and domestic offices, and there was a butchery to the east of the house, all of which were demolished in the 1930s, at which time the archway over the approach from the drive, on the west, was built. A similar archway was built over the main path into the garden, on the east, in 1960.

The coach house, on the north-west side of the courtyard, is linked to the gable end of Glasfryn Uchaf by some 1930s walling, masked by shrubs, and the archway over the approach from the drive links these to the garden wall adjoining the house. In front of the coach house is a cobbled area laid by the present owners, with small borders against the walls of the building. East of the coach house is a way out, flanked by a pair of Irish yews, leading to the track to the kitchen garden, and the north-east end of the courtyard is closed by a yew hedge. Just within this, on a small area of grass, is the former game larder. The south-east end of the hedge abuts the walling of the 1960 archway, which links the house to the garage, the latter being beyond the courtyard. Old photographs show a pump in the courtyard, also marked on old maps, and there are stone troughs full of plants against the house wall.

The approach to the garden is through the house or via one of the entrances either side of it, all of which lead first into the formal areas nearest the house. There is a wide gravel walk and neatly mown lawn directly in front of the house, with areas planted with shrubs, ornamental trees and other plants to the east and, particularly, the west. A hedge separates the formal part of the lawn from the rest, which is now managed as wild flower meadow in summer, following a carpet of daffodils and narcissi in the spring. This hedge is kept clipped low so as not to obstruct the pleasant view across the meadow/lawn and ha-ha into the park.

There is a small triangular plantation south of the house, along the west side of the main lawn. In photographs dating from the 1920s and 30s, large old beeches and other trees can be seen in this area, together with much younger trees. All the old trees have now gone, and the oldest of what remain may have been planted around the time the drive approaching the front of the house was made. Others were planted in the 1940s (including a group of beeches outside the plantation area, to the east, which presumably replace an older group shown in the old photographs). Scots pines above what was then the service drive, along one side of the parallel walk, were planted in about 1935. The trees along the other side of the walk are mixed deciduous varieties, including lime and beech, of about the same age.

Photographs and maps from late in the last century and early in the current one show a branch leading off from the drive at the southern corner of the garden, and directly approaching the house, while what is now the main drive became, beyond this point, a service drive. The construction of this drive took place after 1842 and before 1900, and may be associated with the rebuilding of the house in 1890-91.

This drive was removed in the 1930s and trees planted over it, so that its route is now very difficult to identify on the ground.

Photographs also show an iron fence running alongside this drive and along the edge of the lawn in front of the house. There were fewer trees to the south and west of the lawn than there are now.

Apart from an ilex planted in 1910 near the hedge line and some older trees in the plantation and on the lawn, most of the plantings in the garden were made within the present owner's memory. The row of late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century beeches on the north-east has survived remarkably intact.

Five Irish yews near the south-west corner of the house were planted in the 1930s and trimmed to resemble the narrow cypresses typical of Italian gardens. They are now becoming rather large and losing their early shape. Two untrimmed specimens by the gate are older.

The present owner estimates that there is about a mile (over 1.5 km) of hand-clipped hedges in the garden as a whole. The hedges are mostly of box and yew, and apart from those in the kitchen garden they are in the areas around the house. There is a rounded box hedge growing up against the buildings alongside the approach to the back of the house from the drive (in cross-section this is a quarter-circle shape), and a pair of half-cylinders with miniature hedges at their feet flanking the front porch of the house. Miniature box hedges define the rose beds in front of the house and the borders along the high wall north of the west lawn. A larger one encloses the paved area with stone bench seating on the south corner of the house. A short length of hedge with a box ball at the end edges the path from the west lawn to the top of the steps down to the drive. There is an unusual topiary figure of a bird in flight close to the drive, just south-west of the house. This is in yew, and dates from about 1925-30.

The kitchen garden is believed to have been made in the 1840s, but is not shown on an estate map of 1842. It is roughly square, walled on two sides and divided into quadrants by paths.

The garden has a mortared stone wall about 2.8 m high on the north-west, and a lower, dry-stone wall (about 1.5 m) on the north-east. The other two boundaries are clipped box hedges. There is an entrance (with a wooden half door, not original) in the western half of the north-west wall, and a box arch through the hedge on the south-west side. On the north-east, the garden does not extend right to the wall; there is a strip within the wall planted with mature beeches along the wall and younger conifers (planted about 1948) on the garden side. Separating this from the garden is a curious beech hedge which has been created by planting a row of young trees close together, as if for a hedge, but not keeping them clipped from the start, so that they have formed clean boles at the base. An arch through this balances the box arch at the other end of the north-east - south-west cross path.

The paths have packed earth or gravel surfaces, and the two cross paths plus those along the north-east, north-west and south-west sides remain (the southern part of the

latter is grassed over); that along the south-east edge is no longer maintained. Most of the paths are edged with young box hedges, but exceptions are the lost south-east path, which has no hedge, and the northern part of the cross path running north-west to south-east, which has a mature box hedge on the south-western side. There is some geometric box topiary here and there, at corners and other significant points.

In the centre is a dipping pool, surrounded by a circular box hedge 3 m high, with a 'step' at a lower level on the inside. Four arches through the hedge give access to the paths in each direction, and honeysuckle and *Tropaeolum speciosum* decorate the hedge. The small dipping pool, about 1.5 m across, consists of a metal basin supported on a circular dry-stone wall. The bowl is engraved GARRON near the rim. This used to be filled by bringing water up from the lake in a cart. It is not shown on the 1900 map (although of course it may have been there) and is marked as a fountain on the 1918 map.

There is a small cottage in the west corner of the garden which used to be a tool shed but was enlarged in the 1930s. Another cottage against the outside of the north-west wall is not shown on early twentieth-century maps and may date from the same period. The glasshouse, recently partly demolished, was against the north-west wall, which was whitewashed where it formed the back of the glasshouse. Tobacco profits in the 1920s paid for this building, which replaced an earlier one on approximately the same site, shown on 25-in. Ordnance Survey maps of 1900 and 1918. There was no boiler house in 1900; a small structure shown in 1918 may have been one, but has now been demolished to make way for the cottage. The two early maps also show a small area of glass, probably a frame, just to the south-west of the glasshouse. There is now no trace of this.

The west quadrant is mainly lawn, with some areas of vegetables, and the north quadrant is similar, with perhaps a greater area under cultivation. The southern and eastern quadrants are less well maintained, being a nursery for young trees and shrubs, some of which have now grown very large, especially in the southern quadrant. There are ornamental borders surrounding the central circular feature and both cottages, and a border along the south-eastern edge which is full of young Christmas trees.

Beyond the garden to the south-east is a small area, formerly an orchard, which has again been used for a tree nursery, the trees having now grown past the nursery stage. Just outside the archway through the hedge on the south-west side is a large Monterey cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*), which has had its lower branches trimmed to reduce shade in the garden.

## Sources

### Primary

Information from Mr & Mrs R. Williams-Ellis.

Family photograph albums held at Glasfryn, containing a complete record of

alterations to the house and outbuildings from before 1890.

Two paintings of the house of about 1750 and 1895, hanging in the house.

2-in. manuscript map for 1st edition 1-in. Ordnance Survey map, between 1816 and 1820: University College of North Wales archives, Bangor

Glasfryn estate map, 1842: County Archives, Caernarfon, XM/MAPS/2868

### **Secondary**

Hyde Hall, E, *A Description of Caernarvonshire (1809-1811)*, ed. Gwynne Jones, E, 1952

Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales, *Inventory*, Caernarvonshire Vol. II, 1960

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