

## VOELAS

**Ref No** PGW(Gd)59(CON)

**Former Ref No** PGW (C) 61

**OS Map** 116

**Grid Ref** SH 850 515

**Former county** Clwyd

**Unitary Authority** Conwy

**Community Council** Pentrefoelas

**Designations** Scheduled Ancient Monument: Brohomalgi stone (De96)

**Site Evaluation** Grade II\*

### **Primary reasons for grading**

House, garden and park in an extremely picturesque part of the Conwy valley, with the river forming the main focus. The picturesque potential is fully exploited by the positioning of the house, by the garden, terraced walled garden, and woodland walks. The river walk to the east of the garden is particularly picturesque.

### **Type of Site**

Terraced garden; terraced walled garden; picturesque park with river and woodland walks

### **Main Phases of Construction**

1813-19; c. 1860; 1957-61

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

Voelas is a substantial white stuccoed house in classical style situated on a level platform carved out of the steep slope on the north side of the river Conwy, to the west of the village of Pentrefoelas. It was built in 1957-61 by Sir Clough Williams-Ellis for Col John Wynne-Finch. It is a two-storey house, with sash windows and a central pediment on the south front. On the north front is a heraldic plaque with the motto 'singula in uno'.

The first house on the site, called Lima, was a Regency Gothic villa built in 1813-19 by the Hon. Charles Finch, who had married the Wynne heiress. The earlier house of the Wynnes in the area was Hen Voelas, to the north-west of Pentrefoelas, which was demolished at this time (1819). In 1856-58 Finch's grandson Charles Wynne-Finch, built a much larger brick house on the site, enclosing the old house within it, and

changed the name to Voelas. A photograph album of 1861 shows the Regency house still in place.

There are various outbuildings to the east of the house, arranged around a stable yard to the north of the walled garden. Most are of stone, and are contemporary with the walled garden, which dates from the Victorian period. The building facing west is rendered and gabled. To its south is a stone two-storey building with a curving west end, around which the gravel path to the walled garden bends.

Voelas has a small park, mainly to the south of the house, on either side of the river Conwy, bounded on the south side by the A5 road. The park is focused on the river, and stretches from the Pont Rhyd-y-dyfrgi, called Pont Lima in the nineteenth century, at the west end, to Pont Hendre Isaf at the east end. The river is extremely attractive and picturesque here, with a winding course and rocky bed. It gives the park and garden a very picturesque character, and full use has been made of it in laying them out. The main feature of the landscaping of the park, which merges imperceptibly with the garden, are simple walks laid out along the river, chiefly on the north side. A footbridge that allowed access to the south side of the river from the garden is now gone.

The house is reached by two drives. The first runs from a Victorian lodge (1862) dramatically sited next to the Pont Rhyd-y-dyfrgi, which dates from the 1860s, at the west end of the park. The lodge was inspired by a visit to Austria, and is supposed to be in 'Austrian Tyrol' style. The second drive runs from a simple entrance off the A5 to the south of the house, over the river on a substantial stone bridge, built in 1788, and then joins the first drive. The bridge originally carried a public road along the west boundary of the park, but this was diverted westwards to the Pont Rhyd-y-dyfrgi when the park was enlarged in the 1860s.

Much of the park is in Gwynedd, the river and a tributary to the west of the house forming the county boundary. The ground, which slopes down to the river on both sides, with very little flood plain, is largely wooded with semi-natural deciduous woodland and some coniferous planting. To the south of the garden, and to its immediate west the woodland is largely beech. There is some ornamental tree planting, mainly of conifers. Banks of rhododendrons are a feature of the park, particularly near the house, along the main drive, fringing the woodland south of the river, and in the wooded area to the east of the walled garden. A picturesque river walk runs from the garden eastwards through woodland along the river. It crosses several small tumbling streams, and at its east end rises by shallow stone-edged steps to a small gate on the park boundary. A small building which houses the generator (disused) is situated near the path.

The park was probably largely made by Charles Wynne-Finch in the 1860s. The 1846 tithe map shows only the house, outbuildings, and a straight drive from a by-road to the west. By the time of the 1870s Ordnance Survey map the present drives and footpaths had been made. The only area not developed at this stage is the woodland to the north of the river, east of the walled garden, and its accompanying river walk. This had been added by 1913, when it is shown on the 25" Ordnance Survey map. Some of

the planting, in particular the rhododendrons, is probably late nineteenth or early twentieth century in date.

The garden lies to the south and west of the house, on ground sloping southwards to the river. To the west the garden merges with the wooded park, while to the east it is bounded by the stable yard and walled garden. Most of the structure of the garden probably dates to the mid nineteenth century, when the house was rebuilt by Charles Wynne-Finch. The 1846 tithe map gives no details of the garden, and only shows the drive entering from the west. A photograph album of 1861, showing the house and garden just before the massive alterations took place, shows fir trees on the slope below the house, and a dovecote, now gone, to its south-east. Captions to photographs indicate much tree felling in the garden, and the clearance of the dingle in 1861. The 1870s Ordnance Survey map shows a terrace in front of the house, and the present walks up the tributary stream (the dingle), and into the woodland to the west. Some of the ornamental planting, particularly the rhododendrons and azaleas, is probably later. There is evidence that the terraces may originally have been revetted with stone walls. The present revetment wall of the west terrace probably dates from the rebuilding in 1957-61 by Clough Williams-Ellis.

The present layout consists essentially of a terrace and forecourt around the house, a terraced and sloping lawn down to the river, and a woodland walk up either side of the tributary stream to the west. The drive enters the garden to the west of the house, crossing the tributary over a stone bridge, and leads to a rock-cut forecourt to the north of the house. It then continues into the stable yard. The forecourt is screened from the garden to the east of the house by a high rendered wall decorated with acorn finials. Against this, on the garden side, is a single-storey rendered pavilion, with arched windows. This is contemporary with the house, and contains Elizabethan panelling from Hen Voelas.

A terrace with a wide gravel path runs along the south and west sides of the house. On the south it is bounded by a steep grass scarp, with wide stone steps down to the next level. On the west it is bounded by a dry-stone revetment wall with a semi-circular projection near its north end, opposite the side door. Below this the ground drops down to the stream. Below the main terrace, on the south side, is a further, narrower terrace, below which is a small scarp and then the natural slope down to the river. This is of grass, with spring flowers. The only planting is one old oak on the slope, and another by the river (fallen 1994). The lawn continues, narrowing, to the west, between the beech wood and the river. The wood is ornamented with some rhododendrons and conifers. A grass path runs along the river bank, crossing the stream over a small stone bridge. It continues west to the bridge and east along the outside of the walled garden to the woodland beyond. Below the path the river is revetted with a stepped wall.

At the east end of the garden a gravel path curves around the outbuildings, with a screening box and yew hedge on its north side. At its end is a yew hedge and an iron gate into the walled garden. Next to this is a large sycamore.

To the north-west of the house is a separate part of the garden. This is an informal woodland area of coniferous and deciduous trees, with underplanting of

rhododendrons and azaleas. A winding gravel path leads up the west side of the dingle, through the woodland, to a simple stone slab footbridge over the stream, and then winds back down the west side of the valley.

The walled garden lies to the east of the pleasure garden, south of the stable yard and outbuildings. It was made in the 1860s, as part of Charles Wynne-Finch's improvements. It is a truncated rectangle in shape, with straight north, west, and east sides, and with the curving south side following the bank of the river. The garden is bounded by stone walls on the north, west and east sides, and by iron railings along the river on the south side. It is orientated north-south, with the upper part on the steep slope down to river level, and the lower part on level ground on the flood plain. The upper part is divided into three terraces separated by stone revetment walls and linked by steps. The terraces are edged by low flat-topped parapet walls.

The top terrace is backed by a high stone wall with a door through into the yard, and is largely surfaced with gravel. At the west end are stone sheds and a lean-to glass-house, next to which is the brick back of a former glass-house. At the east end is a narrow lean-to glass-house with a curving roof on a brick base. This is a peach house, and was built in the 1890s. Steps lead down to the middle terrace at each end.

The middle terrace is narrower. At its east end are wide stone steps flanked by square piers leading up to a rockery slope. This is laid out informally, with narrow paths, and narrow steps leading up to an iron gate into the woodland walk to the east. The rockery slope is bounded on the north by a beech hedge on the back drive to Trebeddau. There is a raised section in the middle of the terrace, below which two flights of steps lead down to the lower terrace via a small platform with a cobbled surface, the centre of which is set in a diamond pattern. At the west end of the terrace is a large magnolia, and the gate into the pleasure garden.

The lower terrace has steps down at either end, with a millstone set in the paving in front of the east steps.

The lower part of the garden is level, and laid out to lawn, with gravel cross paths flanked by beech hedges. An apple tree stands in the middle. A path runs along the foot of the terraces, leading to a gate into the woodland to the east and to the steps at the west end. The east wall is c. 3 m high, topped with flat coping stones. There is a gap opposite the main cross path, and at the south end the path leads to an iron gate in the wall with an iron frame around it on the inside. The south side of the garden is bounded by iron fencing, near the west end of which is a gate, with steps leading to the riverside walk.

## **Sources**

### **Primary**

1846 tithe map: Clwyd Record Office (Ruthin).

1861 family photograph album (private collection).

1870-80 miscellaneous views (? MS G.E. Wynne): National Library of Wales, drawings vol. 310, pp. 53, 55, 57, 61; drawings vol. 311, f. 99; drawings vol. 309, p. 106, 107, 112.

**Secondary**

Pratt, D., and A.G. Veysey, A Handlist of the Topographical Prints of Clwyd (1977), no. 508.

Hubbard, E., Clwyd (1986), p. 259.