

GYRN CASTLE

Ref No PGW (C) 33

OS Map 116

Grid Ref SJ 114 816

County Flintshire

District Flintshire

Community Council Llanasa

Designations Listed building: Gyrn Castle Grade II

Site Evaluation Grade II

Primary reasons for grading

Nineteenth-century picturesque layout centred on a series of lakes with a circuit walk

Type of Site

Lakes and woodland with circuit walk incorporating rock garden; terraced garden

Main Phases of Construction

1817-24; 1860s; 1890s

SITE DESCRIPTION

Gyrn Castle is situated to the east of the village of Llanasa. To its north-east the ground drops to the coastal plain, giving fine views from the house out over the Dee and Mersey estuaries. To the south the ground drops steeply to the valley of the Afony-Garth.

In the early eighteenth century Gyrn formed part of the estates of the Mostyns of Cilcain. It then passed to the Revd Samuel Edwards of Pentre Hall, Montgomeryshire, on his marriage to Charlotte Mostyn, eldest daughter of Roger Mostyn, in about 1749. However it was sold in the following year to Thomas Hughes of Halkyn. His son Robert died in 1806 leaving it to a James Ewer of Holywell. The estate was sold to John Douglas (a partner in Douglas, Smalley and Co, the Holywell Cotton Manufacturers). Douglas had the house rebuilt in the castellated style in 1817-24, incorporating parts of the earlier house. The eastern end has a top lit picture gallery, with a tall tower standing in the front of it. The south side of the gallery block has castellated turret towers.

A coach house and stables with other farm buildings lie directly behind the house, to its west. They are enclosed by a castellated curtain wall, with entrances to the yard under two castellated archways, one on the west, the other on the north.

There really is no park at Gyrn but an attempt was made to 'parkify' the field lying immediately south of the main drive in the nineteenth century by the removal of hedges and some clump planting. The two main clumps are of oak, and stand in the centre of the field and near its southern boundary.

The present main drive runs straight from Llanasa eastwards to the house. It is flanked by oaks, with some ash and sycamore. The entrance is flanked by plain sandstone gateposts with shallow pyramidal tops and curving sandstone walls. A simple one-storey lodge stands to the left of the gate. The east drive, now disused, branches off past the lakes, and leads to the village of Glan-yr-Afon. A single-storey lodge similar to that at the west entrance marks this gate. A short drive with an informal avenue of mixed deciduous trees, including beech and oak, runs from the Llanasa to Glan-yr-afon road to the house. The lodge and lodge gates were designed by Culshaw and partners for Sir Edward Bates, the present owner's great grandfather, in 1866-68. These consist of a castellated arch gateway with a circular turret and a steep roofed octagonal lodge.

The main focus of the pleasure garden is the series of five lakes which lie in the valley to the south-east of the house. These were probably made at the same time as the major re-modelling of the house for John Douglas in 1817-24. They are shown in a print of Gyrn drawn by J.P. Neale in about 1818-23. The lakes were formed by widening the small Afon-y-garth stream. The central lake is the largest, with two small islands. The rest are much smaller. Wooded banks surround the lakes, creating a certain picturesqueness, and an earthen path makes a circuit walk around the woods and lakes. The largest lake has an artificial otter holt built into its eastern side. The woods are planted mainly with beech and horse chestnut, with an underplanting of rhododendrons around the lakes.

A rock garden, probably created in the 1920s, is sited at the end of the bank to the north of the ponds. Rustic stone steps wind up through the middle of it, and artificial waterfalls run into a small moat around the base. It is no longer maintained as a rockery. On a precipitous slope just below the house is a series of nine terraces thought to have been made by the present owner's grandmother in the 1890s. They are reached by stone steps down either side. Four are broad, five are narrow, and they are revetted with dry-stone walling. The terraces are bounded by a stone wall and holly hedge to the north, and planting in the area includes monkey puzzles and Scots pines. A summerhouse once stood on the south-western corner of the lakes wood.

A large area of lawn in front of the house, to its north-east, was once laid out with a tennis court and some formal beds, but today all is mown grass. From here it is possible to see the Hillbre Islands and the Wirral. A sale notice in The Times, 1853, described the views: 'It commands indescribably extensive and beautiful views, including the Isle of Man, Hillbre Island, the port and town of Liverpool, the estuaries of the Mersey and Dee'. A stone paved area on the north front of the house acts as another sitting area.

A tarmac tennis court is sited to the north of the house, to the south of which is a recently erected stone wall and gateway, with a fine pair of Italian wrought iron gates depicting the family crest of the Visconti family, a serpent swallowing a baby. In front of the gates are some formal rose beds.

A well preserved stone ice-house is situated next to the largest lake. It has a small window opening about the entrance doorway. To its west are the remains of a timber boathouse. On the south side of the lake there is also an artificial otter holt.

The small walled kitchen garden is built into the boundary wall of the farmyard, to the west of the house. The garden is entered by a wooden door with some Gothic detailing next to the western entrance of the farmyard. The walls are castellated, with

a turret complete with arrow slits. There are some old fruit trees on the walls with lead labels. An album of paintings (c. 1890) by Lady Constance Bates shows this garden named as the Melon Yard.

Sources

Primary

Album of watercolours of gardens and surrounding country by Lady Constance Bates. Private collection.

Secondary

Pratt, D., and A.G. Veysey, A Handlist of the Topographical Prints of Clwyd (1977), nos 724-25.

Hubbard, E., Clwyd (1986), p. 383.