

## TALACRE

**Ref No** PGW (C) 38  
**OS Map** 116  
**Grid Ref** SJ 105 835  
**County** Flintshire  
**District** Flintshire  
**Community Council** LLanasa

**Designations** Listed buildings:  
Talacre Abbey Grade II\*  
Banqueting House (Gardener's Cottage) Grade II\*  
Grotto Grade II\*  
Riding School Grade II  
Walled garden, potting sheds Grade II  
Folly Tower Grade II  
Home Farm (Stableyard) Grade II  
Home Farm (Agricultural buildings to rear of stable block) Grade II  
Kennels and Saw Mill Grade II

**Site Evaluation** Grade II\*

### **Primary reasons for grading**

Remains of extensive early nineteenth-century pleasure grounds and plantation, including an unusual and quite well preserved artificial rockwork grotto and a folly tower; fine eighteenth-century Palladian banqueting house set in kitchen garden wall, possibly by Capability Brown.

### **Type of Site**

Small landscape park; informal pleasure grounds.

### **Main Phases of Construction**

Eighteenth century; c. 1820s-30s

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

Talacre was the seat of the Roman Catholic Mostyns and is situated only a few miles to the west of Mostyn Hall. The family was crippled by death duties in 1920 due to two deaths in quick succession, and were forced to sell the estate. Talacre was sold to a closed order of Benedictine nuns and remained in their hands until recently.

The house is sited on a platform made in a hillside overlooking the Irish Sea, with rising ground to the south. The present house replaces a Jacobean one of which only the cellars remain. The new house was built in front of the site of the old house by Sir Edward Mostyn 7th Bt., in 1824-1829. The architect was Thomas Jones, who designed a Tudor gothic house of ashlar with slim corner turrets and battlemented parapets and gables.

The house originally had matching gables at each end of the north-east front, but the one to the south has been obscured by the building of a church in the 1930s. The entrance to the house consisted of a porch with three four-centred arches and an oriel window which were obscured for many years by a fire escape and lobby extension, both now removed.

There is a covered walk on the north and west fronts with four-centred arches, similar to those in the porch on the north-east front. Above the covered walk is a raised walkway with a gothic conservatory at its western end. To the west, beyond the main block of the house is a large service wing with a sunk courtyard, with a narrow raised walkway around two sides.

Immediately to the south-west of the house is an unusual octagonal building, the Riding School. It is similar in style to the house, with a central castellated octagon, originally a dovecote. It may have been built in two stages, with the central, higher core being the oldest part.

The stable yard, also thought to have been designed by Thomas Jones, lies some way along the main drive, to the south-west of the house. It consists of a three-sided yard with a low stone wall to the front. A central gabled bay has a clock tower with cupola. The land drops steeply at the rear where there is another range of buildings. These were probably cow sheds, in a five sided open yard.

The kennels lie on the north-west side of the drive, to the south-east of the stable yard. A three storey stone cottage is surrounded by the kennel yard and kennels. The latter, like the farm buildings is a six-sided building.

The grounds at Talacre have been considerably cut up due to the recent straightening of the A548. To the north of the A548 are a Big Pool Wood and a Little Pool Wood, part of a nineteenth-century drainage system, planted all around with trees. Further to the east is Brick Pool Wood. The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map shows thick planting around the ponds which has thinned over the years. The boundary of the estate to the north was determined by the old road, which lies to the south of the Pool woods.

A Park Issa is listed in a survey of Talacre of 1634, but whether that refers to the present park, which lies to the south of the house, is not certain. The present park is on a hill behind the house, which flattens out into a large field of about 150 acres. There is little planting, the main feature being the Hovel Plantation on the highest point. This is probably of late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century date. It is referred to on the 1839 tithe map schedule, and is shown on the tithe map as circular and divided into four quarters, with a multi-sided building in its centre. Nothing remains of the building except a raised area in the centre of the plantation. A raised public footpath skirts the plantation to the south-west. The plantation now consists mainly of oak and sycamore. Whatever shape the hovel took

there is no doubt that the siting of the plantation and building was for the views over the sea and the estate. From the Hovel Plantation it is also possible to see the eighteenth-century banqueting house in the walled garden to the north-west.

Of the several original drives only that from the village of Gronant to the west is still in use. This is a winding track, the outer part of which is now built around. At the entrance is a lodge and rusticated stone gate piers. Outlying parts of the estate, and therefore drives and lodges, have become divorced from the remainder, with parts of some drives becoming public footpaths. There was formerly a drive from the north, one from the east, and one from the south. The south drive skirted the park to the north-west of The Dingle valley, joining the west drive near St Benedict's Lodge. The drive formerly continued around the edge of the park, past quarries at the northern end, to the village of Gwesbyr. This part is now a public footpath. The lodges, all of nineteenth-century date, survive, but many have been altered, and that at the south end of the park is ruinous.

Except for an eighteenth-century banqueting house built into the north-west wall of the kitchen garden, which a local author claimed, along with alterations to the house, as the work of Capability Brown, the gardens at Talacre are entirely nineteenth-century in character and planting.

The gardens lie all around the house, sloping downhill to the north and rising more steeply to the south. The garden appears from the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map to have been heavily wooded and planted with shrubs, interspersed with pockets of open ground. There was an area of lawns immediately around the house with a shrubberied bank under the north front and two sets of steps leading down to the grass.

At the west end of the house a small area has been recessed and the banks embellished with brick and stone rockwork covered with cement mortar, and a seat of similar material. Small pockets have been left for filling with plants. In front of this is a formal stone fountain in an octagonal stone edged pond. Two benches in similar style and in the same materials stand nearby.

Two lithographs by Paul Gauci of c. 1821 show lawns below the house to the north-west and north-east, which remain, although they are now overgrown. Pathways to the west lead to the Riding School. To the west is a chain of three ponds, the result of some stream widening. The lowest is the largest. To its west is a ruinous and inaccessible ice-house. The stream comes from the south and there is another pond to the south of the Gronant drive with walks along The Dingle which borders the Park.

Walks descend from the Riding School to the three ponds, with a path around the edge of the lowest. Continuing in a northerly direction from the lowest pond there was a choice of direction. To the north was a path skirting an open paddock. Due to the building of the dual carriageway this is no longer possible and this area of garden is now cut off. Bearing east a terrace or marine walk is reached which has views towards the sea. This is planted with evenly spaced Irish yews, and links up with the main driveways from the north and east. A footpath through the old quarry used to lead to the village of Gwespyr but part of the area above the quarry is now a caravan park.

Below the terrace was a large wedge-shaped field. How this area was treated is not known. There are two further open areas of ground to the north bordering the old road. This entire area is now cut off from the rest of the garden by the building of a stretch of dual carriageway in 1974-75.

The other main area of the garden lies on higher ground behind the house. Again terraces have been made to accommodate the various features. The first terrace, a broad oval in shape, is shown in a turn of the century photograph laid out with a series of formal flower beds, circular in the middle and scalloped at the edges. The beds are set in gravel, edged with rough bits of stone and planted with bedding out geraniums. When the nuns came in the 1920s this area was converted into a cemetery.

The next terrace contains the folly tower and grotto, both thought to be contemporary with the house (c. 1824). These can be reached by pathways just to the north-east of St Benedict's Lodge or to the south-east of the house. The ruined folly tower is constructed of a mixture of brick and stone with a coating of mortar. In the basement floor are the remains of a shell room. A path leads around what appears to be the tumbled ruins of the tower, also of mortared stone and brick. The path continues around the pile of rubble, steps having been cut into the natural stone, and finally leads to the entrance of the grotto. This is built of the same material as the tower. It has several chambers connected by winding passageways. One of the chambers is open to the sky. Features include a (Mostyn) lion's head with a hole for the mouth. A fire lit at the back of the hole could fill the 'mouth' with flame and smoke. There is also a cyclops, a ghostly figure delineated on a passage wall, and in the innermost chamber the headless life-sized figure of a seated monk.

A footpath east of the folly tower and grotto leads to the edge of the old quarry where the remains of a stone summerhouse lie buried beneath layers of ivy. From here there are views into the quarry which has sheer sides.

The gardens are surrounded by a high wall, which was built by the nuns. In some places there was already a low wall and this was simply added to.

Much of the original planting in the garden has been replaced by seedling woodland and undergrowth. Much nineteenth-century cherry laurel and Portuguese laurel remain, however. The path in the terrace walk is flanked by rows of Irish yews, and yews are planted around the rockwork to the west of the house.

The walled gardens are situated to the west of the house, on ground above the ponds. They are on a north-south alignment. There are two adjoining enclosures, the second being roughly a quarter of the whole. The gardens are entered from the north, through a row of stone potting sheds, fruit and vegetable stores. A row of glasshouses lies directly on the other side of the wall. The walls are of brick, c. 3 m high, and have engaged columns on the inside of the gardens. The north garden has a central well on which is aligned an eighteenth-century Palladian banqueting house which was converted to a gardener's house in the nineteenth century. It is set into the north-west wall of the garden. This building is referred to in J. Poole's Gleanings of the History of Holywell (1831) as being by Capability Brown. It is the only eighteenth-century building on the estate and is built within view of the house; only the facade facing the house has a finished appearance. It is a three-storey

pedimented stone building. Each floor has a single room with a window, and at ground floor level the central block is flanked by two single-storey rooms. The centre of the ground floor is rusticated, with a blocked central rounded doorway.

The second and smaller garden appears to have been a fruit garden, and many fruit trees survive. Adjacent to the walled garden and to its west is another orchard. Between the orchard and the walled garden wall is a path and a bank, the latter being planted with hazel coppice. Part of this bank is built up with stone and to the rear of the banqueting house a small rockery has been made which could be late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century. The westernmost wall of this orchard area was contained by a low wall which the nuns heightened in the 1920s to form their boundary.

A pit house and the remains of frames are situated outside the walled gardens at the north end. Other glasshouses were also sited outside the southern end, though nothing is left of these. The outer eastern wall of the walled gardens was planted with trained wall fruit some of which remains. In front of the wall was a wide border with a stone kerb edging.

## **Sources**

### **Primary**

Survey of Talacre Estate, 1634: Clwyd Record Office (Hawarden), D/MT/553.

Tithe map and schedule, 1839: Clwyd Record Office (Hawarden), NT/M/49.

Two lithographs of Talacre c. 1829 by P. Gauci: Clwyd Record Office (Hawarden), 1018, 1019.

Photograph c. 1914 of formal garden below folly: Clwyd Record Office (Hawarden), D/MT/1093, D/MT/1095.

Sale Particulars 1921: Clwyd Record Office (Hawarden), D/MT/1064.

Sale Particulars 1990.

### **Secondary**

Poole, J., Gleanings of the History of Holywell, Flint, St Asaph and Rhuddlan. Their antiquities and surrounding scenery with a statistical and geographical account of North Wales in general (James Danes, 1831).

Pratt, D., and A.G. Veysey, A Handlist of the Topographical Prints of Clwyd (1977), nos 1018-19.

Hubbard, E., Clwyd (1986), p. 444.