

THE DDERW

Ref No.	PGW (Po) 47 (POW)
OS Map	147
Grid Ref	SN 963685
Former County	Powys
Unitary Authority	Powys
District	Radnorshire
Community Council	Rhayader
Designations	None known
Site Evaluation	Grade II*
Primary reasons for grading	Interesting well preserved mid nineteenth-century house, wooded grounds and small park in a magnificent situation at the bottom of the Llansantffraed-Cwmdeuddwr valley. Garden includes Victorian grass terraces and a well preserved and maintained early twentieth-century Italianate Arts and Crafts terraced garden.
Type of Site	Enlarged farmhouse set in old farm land. Victorian garden with later additions enclosed with woodland belts.
Main Phases of Construction	c. 1840, terrace garden c. 1920s

SITE DESCRIPTION

The Dderw is situated in a magnificent location part way up a gentle hill side on a level terrace looking south towards the Elan Valley. The south garden and the park slope away from the house towards the narrow Cymystwyth mountain road which winds around the hillside, above the deep gully of the fast flowing Nant Gwynllyn. The L-shaped house dates from about 1870 and it is built of faced sandstone with a slate roof which has central brick stacks. On the south front there are four bays, the second and fourth set in gables which are ornamented with barge boards. The house has three storeys, the family rooms being on the first and second storeys. On the ground floor the third bay has a large three-sided bow window looking out on to a gravel terrace which runs the length of the west front. The entrance front, on the west of the house, is of three bays with a stone porch set in the centre. The windows on this face are latticed whereas those on the south are sashes. Set into the

north of the house, giving the overall plan a square shape, is the remaining portion of an earlier house which dates from about 1790. This is a typical two-storey, sash-windowed rendered block which appears to have been the service and staff area of the house. The old stable/garage court abuts this range on the north.

The Dderw was a house at the centre of a vast estate. The land has been owned by the ancient Welsh Prickard (ap Rickard) family for at least 300 years. In 1799 a four-square red brick house was built on the present site by J. W. Hiort for Nathan Prickard, the Coroner of Westminster. This house was partly retained in a rebuilding which took place in about 1870, possibly for the Revd. W.E. Prickard. The house has remained in the family to the present day.

A small, cobbled stable/garage court, dating to c. 1870 or possibly earlier, abuts the house on the north. Stone and rendered single-storey buildings lie on the west and east of this court. The building on the west has been converted into a double garage, possibly from an earlier alternative use. The building on the east was used as a dairy, brewhouse and old kitchen. Entrance to the court from a large west forecourt is through a gap in the south-west corner between the house and the garage. A service track leaves the court in the north-east corner and proceeds uphill towards a farm complex which lies beyond the site boundary. In the south-east corner a narrow passage leads between the 1790s and 1870s range from the yard back into the house. In the courtyard, to the west of this, there is a well.

The small, circular park at the Dderw lies to the south of the house, ending at the Cwmystwyth/Aberystwyth valley road. The park covers about 10 acres on semi-improved pasture that falls in an increasing slope to the road and to the site of a large pool in the south-west corner. There are no plantations within the park, its character being defined by two shelter belts which curve southwards on the west and east of the house and a sparse natural beech and oak woodland in the south-east. This woodland was originally more dense but many trees were lost in the 1987 and 1990 gales. Isolated plantings of Scots pine, noble fir, lime and copper beech occur in the park. A few large, and very old, aosk stand beside a hollow way near the park's eastern boundary, as do some rotting stumps. The footpath leaves the site to the west of Walk Mill, a small converted mill which stands at the east end of an elaborate water feature. A large pool, which is now overgrown, set in a rocky and wooded dell on the south of the park, was retained on the east by a high earth dam which contains a large stone step weir. Over time the Nant Gwynllyn stream has re-routed itself and it now runs nearer to the road in the south. A modern timber footbridge carries the footpath over the river besides the mill.

The early history of the park at the Dderw is unclear, other than that it is land which has probably been in the ownership of the Prickard family for at least 300 years. A definite 'park' is marked in the area on the 1905 Ordnance Survey map. The surviving plantings within the park appear to date from the late 1800s.

The gardens of the Dderw lie to the south and east of the house and cover about 3 acres. On the north, west and east the gardens are enclosed by ornamental mixed woodland belts. The drive enters the site through a formal stone gateway on the west of the park, from which it is separated by a high planted bank. The drive runs uphill, curving around to the east where it

approaches the house between two strips of lawn which give way into areas of shrubbery/woodland, on the north, and the wood belt, on the south. At the curve, a branch of the drive continues to the north, to curve east behind the shrubbery/woodland towards the farm complex. To the west of the drive there is open pasture which is edged along the north side of the valley road by a line of semi-natural beech. The drive proceeds on a straight east line to enter a large rectangular forecourt on the north-west. Just outside this forecourt, on the south of the drive, there is a small abandoned water garden. The forecourt is surfaced in hardcore and high clipped yew hedges, ornamented with yew topiary balls, surround it on the west and south. The house is sited in the south-east corner. There are no forecourt gates. A steep rocky bank lies on its northern side, the stables/garage on the north-east.

The forecourt hedges prevent any view of the southern garden but the two areas are connected by a narrow iron gate set in the south hedge. This gate leads on to the western end of a 2m wide hardcore terrace which runs the entire width of the formal garden area, beneath the house and formal Arts and Crafts style terraced garden, for about 80m. Narrow stone-edged beds run underneath the south front of the house. From the French window a south axis is created by two sets of dressed stone steps which connect two wide, open grass terrace lawns, which run the width of the garden and look out towards the park. The first set of steps connects the house terrace and the first lawn, the second, the first and second lawn. The first lawn is retained by a low dry-stone wall on its south side which is capped with wider rectangular slabs. A path runs between the wall and the second lawn along the width of the garden. The second lawn concludes in a dry-stone ha-ha which stands about 1m above the level of the park beyond.

The terraced lawns are enclosed on their west and east sides by mature areas of shrubbery, predominantly laurel and rhododendron, which blend into mixed woodland. On the west of the second lawn, an open-fronted timber summer house stands to the south of a large overgrown yew structure, which was possibly an arbour. This yew is an extension of the south-west corner of the forecourt hedge. On the south-west corner of the ha-ha is what appears to be a large topiary dog. Near the south-east corner of the ha-ha, now partly obscured by the mature shrubbery, there is a small sundial set on a moulded stone pedestal. This was formerly a pillar on the old Waterloo bridge in London. About 3m to the south of this the ha-ha ends in a right-angle, creating a path line back towards the house. A nineteenth-century foot gate marks the line of the path, out into the park, and a small length of ornamental nineteenth-century iron garden fence runs around the angle, on the top of the ha-ha. This path, and gate, mark the line of the old coaching road through the garden. To the east of the path a woodland runs to the eastern boundary of the site. This woodland is partly overgrown but at the beginning of the twentieth century had a network of paths. There is a small gate out into the field at the east corner.

The house terrace branches at the east end of the house, one branch continuing to the west, along which it connects to the upper lawn by two small sets of steps, and the other runs up the east side of the house separating it from a fine enclosed rectangular stone Arts and Crafts, terraced garden which descends the south slope of the hill. At the northern end of the house terrace a set of wide curving steps lead up on to the second level of the five tier garden. On the east, this garden is enclosed by a high dry-stone wall which also runs along the west side of the path/road line. Part, if not all, of this wall predates the 1870 house and part way along

its length it is set with a stone inscribed with the date 1810. The path leads up the east side of the garden to enter the first formal enclosure on the west, which contains a rectangular lawn surrounded by narrow borders. At this point a cross path leads to the east, between overgrown laurel and box, towards the kitchen garden. The main path continues north, towards the farm. The lawn is enclosed on the north by a raised walk, backed by a clipped yew and holly hedge, which is itself overhung with mixed woodland. Halfway along the hedge it curves back into a semi-circle, creating an alcove which contained a simple, modern curved stone seat, which was a present from the firm of Crowthers to the present owner's parents on their golden wedding in 1955. On the east low clipped yew hedges stand either side of an entrance gap. On the west there is a high stone wall, the rear wall of the accommodation block in the stable court, which is ornamented by a stone and lead Italianate water spout and drip-pool, set between a pair of mature prunus trees. A high stone wall runs along the south of the enclosure preventing any view of the gardens below from the seating alcove. However, set off-centre in this wall, there is a gateway containing a fine ornamental iron gate. This can lead through on to the second level of the garden but a second simple wooden door, to the east of the east hedge, allows easier access.

The second level of the garden is a wide stone flagged terrace which is enclosed on the south by a low stone capped wall. A narrow border runs along its northern side. The iron gates create a central axis which runs down the remaining four levels of the garden, connecting them by sets of dressed stone steps. Narrow sets of steps also connect the levels along the western side. Some of the stone slabs which form the steps and terraces came from the old Rhayader bridge and have initials carved on them. From the second level the garden is enclosed on the west by a high clipped yew hedge. At the east end of the second terrace there is a small raised paved platform which is enclosed by low stone capped walls on the west and south. To the west of the iron gates a narrow pointed arch has been blocked up. The third and fourth levels are very similar. Both have narrow strips of slab edged grass set between narrow borders on both sides of the central path. These levels are about 4m wide. The fifth level is a lawn which is set with small box edged beds which surround a central sundial set on a stone column. This level is enclosed on the south by a high clipped yew hedge which contains an iron footgate on the south as well as a narrower gate on the west. At the south-west corner the hedges join in a large clipped square of yew. Like the forecourt, the angles of the garden hedges are marked with clipped topiary balls. The planting within the terraced garden is typically 'English' including lavender, old roses, *Alchemilla mollis*, salvias, fuchsias, heathers and cotoneaster.

By the late 1800s a typical Victorian garden had been laid out around the house. The Ordnance Survey maps of 1888 and 1905 record small enclosures to the east of the house, which presumably were bordered on the east by the high dry-stone wall. Photographs dating from this period record a sloping lawn in this area with a peach house set against the stone wall which separates the first and second tiers of the terraced garden. To the south of this glasshouse there were scallop-shaped beds cut into the grass. Another photograph records a typical late Victorian/Edwardian garden on the south of the house. A sloping lawn is planted up with large clumps of laurel, or rhododendron to the south of which there is at least one star-shaped cut parterre bed. To the east of the house a gravel path curves down across the garden to the south-east, rather than proceeding in a straight line as today. Small symmetrical cut beds were laid out along this path. On the site of the large square yew, in the south-west

of the terraced garden, a group of trees or shrubs, possibly including a magnolia, were also recorded. Victorian plantings may survive in the garden in the small shrubberies to the west and east of the terrace.

The form of the present garden was established by the mother of the present owner from the 1920s. By 1905 the terraces had been cut into the south lawn and the retaining wall and ha-ha constructed. Prior to the existence of the ha-ha the garden is believed to have sloped down into the park and to have been separated from it simply by a fence. At this time footpaths were also recorded in the eastern wood. In about 1920 the garden area to the east of the house was remodelled and the elaborate Arts and Crafts terraces designed and built by the present owner's mother and local workmen. The peach house was removed from the garden to the kitchen garden, where it still stands. It is presumed that the pointed arch doorway was blocked up at this time. The designer, or builder, of this terraced garden is unknown, but it is perhaps worth considering the similarities of this feature with another at nearby Doldowlod, with whose owners, the Gibson-Watts, the Prickards have long been friends. Thomas Mawson was also working in the area, across the valley at Cefnfaes Hall between 1900-1905 for Commander Damar Priest, work the Prickards would have been familiar with. The family still have many old gardening books, including works by William Robinson and Gertrude Jekyll, which also show that they were familiar with the gardening styles at the turn of the century. No significant changes to the gardens are believed to have taken place since this time.

The kitchen garden at the Dderw lies to the north-east of the house. The lozenge shaped garden covers about 1 acre and slopes to the south. Its southern boundary stands raised above the level of the adjacent farmland by about 1m. One wall remains standing in the garden, on the north. To the north this is red brick, rising only to about 2m. To the east it is stone and it has partially collapsed. The western boundary is defined by a low timber picket fence, which is set with two wicket gates near the north and south corners. To the south the garden is enclosed by a fence and hedge and on the east by a line of Lawson cypress. The garden is partially abandoned. It appears to be roughly divided into quarters. These are defined by moss and grassed over brick and stone edged paths. The south-east quarter has been planted with Lawson cypress and Christmas trees. Vegetables and some soft fruit are now cultivated in the a narrow strip across the north of the garden. In the centre of the garden there is an overgrown circular feature, probably a pool, which has been filled in. In the south-west quarter of the garden ten mature standard apple trees stand. These are separated from the path by a relic line of espalier fruit trees trained along wires. To the south of the orchard area there is a timber garden/summer house which appears to have been abandoned. About 10m from the west end of the north wall a locked wooden door leads through into an area of waste ground to the rear of the garden. Broken clay pots and smashed Victorian lantern cloches were found among scrub woodland which gives way to conifers. To the west of this wall are the brick footings of a lost glasshouse or bothy. The footings stand about 2m out from the wall. To the west of these footings, and outside of the garden area, the north wicket gate leads westwards into a small service area where four abandoned brick cold frames lie to the south of a timber work shed. This building appears to have been built on the brick footings of an earlier building. To the east of the door there is a small lean-to glasshouse which is about 6m long. This glasshouse carries the maker's mark of 'Walker's patent'. There are disused iron heating pipes inside. A hard core path runs west/east through the garden immediately to

the south of the greenhouse. Opposite it there is a new free-standing greenhouse which is in use. Two overgrown trained fruit trees, possibly plums, grow against the wall to the east of the old greenhouse. To the east of the new greenhouse two mature standard fruit trees grow alongside the path. A further four standard fruit trees grow alongside the path on the north of the north-east quarter. This quarter is partly used for vegetables. A line of Victorian glass lantern cloches ran adjacent to the east of the central path.

The exact date of the kitchen garden is unclear. On the 1905 Ordnance Survey map the enclosure is marked, but there are no internal details. A strip of ground to the east of the garden is also marked, although there is no trace of this today. The best records of the garden are found in contemporary photographs dating from about 1890. These record an ornamental kitchen garden with a central path lined with wide cutting borders edged in stone or brick. In the centre of the garden there was a stone edged dipping pool and, at the northern end of the central walk, a circular summer house stood between the brick and stone sections of the north wall. These walls still run north at this point, illustrating the position of this building. The summer house had a sphagnum moss roof. No trace of this building survives and it is unclear when it was lost. In 1905 no greenhouses were recorded inside the garden. The lean-to greenhouse was relocated to its present position from the site of the later Arts and Crafts garden to the east of the house in the 1920s. In its original position it was used to cultivate peaches, it is unclear whether this use continued. In about 1900 the Dderw employed four gardeners and so the grounds, including the kitchen garden, would have been maintained to a high standard. It is assumed that the staff levels gradually declined after the First World War, resulting in the gradual abandonment of the labour intensive garden. Charles Stallard, son of the Revd W.E. Prickard's head gardener, returned from the First World War minus an arm and an eye and looked after the garden until the 1950s. The orchard dates from c. 1920 and the trees in the south-east corner from c. 1960.

Sources

- Primary** Papers and photographs. Private collection.
Tithe map 1840. The National Library of Wales.
- Secondary** Haslam, R., The Buildings of Powys (1979), p. 228
Williams, Rev. J., The History of Radnorshire (1859; 1905 edn), pp. 268, 399.