

NANTEOS

Ref number	PGW (Dy) 52 (CER)
OS map	135
Grid ref	SN 620 786
Former county	Dyfed
Unitary authority	Ceredigion
Community council	Llanfarian
Designations	Listed building: Nanteos (Grade II*)
Site evaluation	Grade II*

Primary reasons for grading The well preserved house, outbuildings, grounds and landscape park of Nanteos together form one of the most important survivals of a grand Georgian estate in Wales. The natural landscape is beautiful and has been well exploited by the design of the landscape park and pleasure grounds to form a very attractive setting to the house.

Type of site Landscape park; informal garden and grounds; walled kitchen garden

Main phases of construction 1739-57; 1757-80; 1830-54

Site description

Nanteos is one of the most important eighteenth-century houses in west Wales. It is situated in the Nant Paith valley, a few kilometres to the south-east of Aberystwyth. The house is built at the foot of the north side of the valley, facing south. The rock has been cut away at the back of the house to provide a level platform for it. Below, the ground slopes gently down to the river and then rises steeply to a ridge on the south side of the valley.

The house is built in classical style, of squared grey stone, with dressed sandstone front porch, rusticated quoins, window and door surrounds, cornice and string courses. The main, square, block is three-storey. The main entrance door is in the centre of the south side. It has a delicate fan light over it and is flanked by two round-headed windows. In front is a single-storey, open, classical portico of four Doric columns and corresponding attached columns supporting an entablature. Above are three round-headed windows and over them three small, blocked, round windows. Continuing the emphasis given to these central three bays, at roof level the balustrade, which is plain around the rest of the roof, is balustered here, topped with four urns. There are also urns on the four corners of the parapet. Unlike the regularity and symmetry of the south and west elevations, the rear of the main block shows a jumble

of windows and levels. The eight, irregularly placed, chimneys are also visible from here.

At the east end of the south front, set back from it, is a two-storey extension in similar style, with a further, single-storey extension, the former billiard room, on its east end. On the east front is a small service yard, reached by a short, walled drive from the east. At the entrance to this drive are tall, angled, stone piers, with slate tops and ball finials. On the north side of the yard is a well preserved, two-storey stone building with a hipped slate roof and two louvred wooden cupolas. The plan by W.R. Coultart for this building, dated 1841, shows that it was a wash house and brew house. Against its east side are the ruinous walls of a single-storey extension, which was a coal cellar and wood store. On the east side of the yard is a substantial stone wall retaining the higher ground above, reached by a flight of slate steps. These lead up to a small lawn in front of the former laundry building.

The stables and coach houses lie to the north-east of the house, arranged around the north, south and west sides of a rectangular cobbled court. They are built of the same stone as the house, with pitched slate roofs. The coach houses occupy the centres of the north and south sides. They are two-storey, each with four round-headed doors and sash windows over them. Single-storey stables and associated rooms, with small-paned mullioned and transomed windows, occupy the remainder of the court. In the centre of the west roof is a large, octagonal, cupola with a wooden, louvred lower part and an upper dome and weather vane. The court has an unusually grand, classical, entrance front on the east side, the classical elements built of a light-coloured dressed stone. In style the central entrance is very similar to the portico at the main entrance to the house. It consists of a classical, round-headed arch flanked by paired Doric columns and attached columns, with an entablature over. On either side are two low walls and then the gable ends of the north and south wings, which are adorned with classical fronts of four attached columns and pediments.

Attached to the south side of the stable court is a single-storey stone building with hipped slate roof and a surrounding, slate-paved veranda, supported on simple iron piers.

To the east of the north side of the stable court, above the house, is a circular dovecot, standing in a small, walled yard. It is built of rubble stone and is roofless, although slates on the ground indicate that it was originally slate-roofed. The upper part of the interior is lined with ten rows of brick nesting holes. The door, with brick lintel over, is on the east side, with a window over it. There is another window on the south side.

There are various outlying ancillary buildings to the east and north-east of the house, all of which are now in use as or converted to private dwellings. At the foot of the small valley to the north-east, Sawmill Dingle, is Sawmill Cottage, a nineteenth-century two-storey house built by 1886. Next to it, north of the kitchen garden, is an L-shaped range of former farm offices, built before 1819. New kennels, around three sides of a yard, were built on the south side of Building Covert, east of the kitchen garden, in 1793-1819 and rebuilt by 1867.

The present house was begun in 1739 and finished in about 1757. It was built for Thomas Powell (died 1752) and initially had no wings or portico. It is known that there was a previous house on the site but there are no records of its appearance. Thomas Powell was succeeded by his brother, the Revd Dr William Powell (died 1780), who commissioned the first estate survey, of 1764, by John Davies. At this time the public road from Aberystwyth to New Cross ran immediately in front of the

house. To the east of the house was a D-shaped stable complex and L-shaped building, both of which were subsequently removed. A survey of 1819, by William Crawford for William Edward Powell, who inherited in 1809, shows a dovecot in the yard east of the stables and a servants' wing added to the north-east corner of the house.

William Edward Powell embarked on an ambitious improvement programme for the estate between 1830, when he moved into the house, and his death in 1854. His major contribution to the buildings around the house was the construction of the present stables and coach house court. The old stables were demolished in 1827 and by 1835 the present, much grander, court and the present dovecot had been built. Edwardian photographs show stone eagles and a horse on top of the entrance arch. These remained until at least 1958. After that the horse was sold and the eagles went after 1967. The portico on the house, very similar in style to the entrance arch of the stable court, was probably added at the same time. In 1840-41 the architect William Ritson Coultart provided plans for a new servants' wing, following a fire. At the same time he suggested two wings to the house, the east one of which (the two-storey wing) was built, and designed a new service court and its entrance drive to the east. The areas to the north and south of the new drive are labelled 'Plantation' on Coultart's plan. He also produced plans for an ice-house in 1841 but this has gone and its whereabouts are unclear. It may have been built into the higher ground behind the house and a slightly sunken area here is a possible location. In 1846 the architect Edward Haycock made proposals for further alterations to the house and these were largely complete by 1847.

William Edward Powell's son, William Thomas Rowland Powell, inherited in 1854. He carried out some improvements to the estate, including the building of the single-storey billiard room on the east end of the house and the laundry to the south of the stable court. On stylistic grounds the billiard room, which dates to the 1860s, was probably designed by the architect William Burn of Edinburgh. The laundry was in place by 1886 (1st edition Ordnance Survey map). The only major change since that date was the demolition of the game larder in the service courtyard in 1971.

Nanteos is set in a medium-sized landscape park situated in the Nant Paith valley and the rising ground to its south, where the park is bounded by the B4340 Aberystwyth to New Cross road. To the south-west of the house is a small lake. Higher ground to the north of the house is occupied by a number of covert plantations and by farmland. The Nant Eos (stream of the nightingale) of the name of the house is a small stream which rises south of Moriah, to the north of the house and runs southwards through Black Covert towards the grounds. The view southwards from the house and garden across the park is a very attractive one.

The main approach to the house is via a long drive up the valley from the west. This is a continuation of a minor road off the B4340. The entrance is flanked by low stone walls and a lodge on the north side. This is a two-storey, rendered, small building, with a small tower on its east end. It has hipped slate roofs, sash windows on the ground floor and small, single, paired, and triple round-headed windows on the upper floor. Between the lodge and the drive is a low wall and a single, latticed, cast iron pier, with an urn finial, on a stone plinth. A short stretch of iron railings runs between the pier and the lodge and a single iron gate of similar design is attached to the pier. On the other side of the drive the pier has gone, only its stone plinth and a corresponding stretch of railings of the same design as the others survives.

The drive leads south-eastwards along the valley floor, with woodland on rising ground to the north of it. It runs parallel with the river as far as the lake, to its south, where it turns northwards to run east-north-eastwards to a small forecourt on the south front of the house. A back drive continues around the east side of the service court and stables.

There are a number of tracks to the north of the drive, and north and east of the house, which are relict drives and a former public road. A former drive, now an unsurfaced track, runs eastwards from the lodge, parallel to and slightly above the present drive. Half way along it turns north-eastwards to pass to the north of the house. At the western end of Black Covert a track branches off on the south side, running eastwards to the north side of the stable court. This is the earlier course of the drive, before it was diverted further north in the early nineteenth century. At the join there is a short stretch of mortared rubble stone wall. At the east end of Black Covert the former drive runs south of a small pond on the Nant Eos. This has a by-pass channel down its east side and a sluice in the south-east corner. The stream is then culverted under the track, which then joins another former drive, now a farm track, from the north. There is then a straight stretch of track running southwards down the hill to the entrance front of the stable court. It is flanked by a deep water channel for the Nant Eos and a ruinous wall on the east side and by a bank revetted by a stone wall on the west side.

The former north drive runs northwards past Black Covert, through farmland, to a simple entrance on the A4120 just south of Moriah. A branch leads to Nanteos Home Farm, to the north-east of the house, and continues southwards as far as the Nant Paith. This stretch, and that to the north of Nanteos Home Farm, was originally a public road. Towards its south end side tracks lead to Nanteos Cottage to the east, and the north side of the kitchen garden to the west.

The main area of the park lies to the south, south-east and south-west of the house. The garden is divided from the park by a ha-ha and fence, beyond which open grassland drops gently to the Nant Paith, which is canalised to the south of the house. A belt of mixed deciduous and coniferous trees runs part of the way along the watercourse in front of the house and alders follow it further east. The Nant Eos, which is culverted under the grounds just west of the kitchen garden, emerges to run eastwards in the ditch of the ha-ha, passes under a low, arched stone bridge and then runs southwards to join the Nant Paith.

Beyond the Nant Paith the ground rises to a high ridge south of the park. The open, unfenced grassland of the park is broken by informal belts of woodland and clumps. Prominent on and below the skyline in the south-east part of the park are five beech clumps and the beech woodland of Coed Tyn-y-cwm. Running up the slope in the middle of the park is Target Covert, the western part of which is deciduous woodland, the eastern part coniferous plantation. Just to the west of the north-west side of Target Covert is a ruined stone building. The remains consist of the ends of a classical facade, with rectangular blocked windows on either side of central arches. There is evidence that it was once stuccoed. The building appears only to have been a facade, with an enclosure behind it. It was a classical eyecatcher, which would once have been a prominent feature in the park and from which there would have been fine views towards the house and down the Nant Paith valley to Pendinas and the sea. To the west is open grassland, dotted with a few single oak trees and an oak clump and a large deciduous wood called The Rookery, below which is the lake. The open grassland east of The Rookery continues up the slope beyond the park to the skyline,

where it is flanked by more woodland on the west and Coed Cwmhwylog on the east. This is an important extension of the view of the park from the house, the woodlands on either side of the central open area cleverly framing it all the way up to the skyline.

The lake is an irregular, roughly oval shape, now water lily (*Nuphar lutea*) covered, fed at its east end by a channel off the Nant Paith. The river itself runs in an artificial channel around the south side of the lake and rejoins the original channel below the lake. The channel is a substantial construction, cutting into clay and bedrock. Originally there was a weir towards the west end, with a cascade below it. This has now been washed away, but a sketch of it in 1874, by W.T.R. Powell, shows that it was adorned with stonework topped with chunks of quartz. Towards the north side of the lake is an island planted with deciduous trees and rhododendrons. The lake is dammed by a large earth bank on its west side, with sluices and stone-lined overflow channels near its north and south ends. A large yew tree grows on the bank at the north-east corner. A grass and unsurfaced path runs along the top of the dam and around the south side of the lake. The area here and below the lake is much overgrown with rhododendrons. There are two ruinous boathouses along the south-west shore, both wooden and falling into the lake.

It is not known how the environs of the earlier house on the site were laid out. The first evidence for an ornamental layout is the first survey of Nanteos, dated 1764, by John Davies. This was carried out for the Revd Dr William Powell and probably shows the layout of his predecessor, Thomas Powell, who had built the house in 1739-57. The most important difference from subsequent layouts is that the public road to New Cross followed the Nant Paith valley, roughly on the line of the old drive for most of the way, passed in front of the house on the line of the garden boundary and then swung around the service buildings and eastwards along the line of the present track north of the kitchen garden. To the south and west of the house was a rectilinear area of 'Pleasure grounds'; to the east were a kitchen garden and orchard. To the south of the public road was a large field, crossed by the Nant Paith. This formed a rudimentary park. The woodland areas to the south - The Rookery and Target Covert - were in place but occupied slightly more ground, forming a continuous area. There were three clumps of trees in the field below them.

The Revd Dr William Powell (died 1780) is thought to have undertaken the next major landscaping step by having the public road in front of the house closed and a replacement, turnpike road, built along the line of the present B4340, south of the woodland. This opened up the whole of the intervening area, between the house and the road, for use as parkland. Within this extended area the Revd Powell built the classical eyecatcher as an adornment for his new park. It was used as a dog kennel. The new road and the eyecatcher are shown on a map of the new route of the turnpike road, dated 1788.

The following owner, Thomas Powell (died 1797) appears not to have made any significant changes, although some were contemplated during his lifetime. An estate map of 1793 shows that a few changes had been made to the park by that date. Following the closure of the public road, the western part of the road has been turned into a drive and a new part made to approach the north side of the house and service buildings. This is now a track. To its south is a smaller track or drive, running roughly parallel and arriving at the south front of the house. A new drive, now a farm track, has been made to the north, up the Nant Eos valley and its west side planted with a belt of trees. The present pond in this valley is shown on the map. To the south of the house there is little alteration to the parkland, except that the Nant Paith has been

canalised into a straight channel in the 'Lawn' in front of the house. The three clumps remain and the eyecatcher is labelled 'dog kennel'.

Evidence that Thomas Powell might have been considering making a more sophisticated park comes in the form of a plan of proposals for the demesne, dated 1791, by the well known landscape designer John Davenport. This shows a vast scheme for comprehensive redevelopment of a much wider area, to include a great deal of tree planting in sinuous belts and clumps, a long and complex lake in front of the house and a number of follies, including a Gothic Seat, Gothic Temple, Rotunda, Castle, Tower and Ruins. None of this was carried out.

When William Edward Powell inherited in 1809 the estate was deeply in debt. This did not prevent him carrying out improvements, especially from 1814 onwards. In this year John Edwards of Rheola (Glamorgan), a cousin of the architect John Nash, was appointed steward at Nanteos. He found it in poor shape: 'There never was an estate in such a dilapidated condition'. Edwards suggested improvements for the grounds, most of which were carried out, and introduced Major Powell to Nash. Between 1814 and 1817 plans and drawings for picturesque buildings in the park and grounds were produced by George Repton, in Nash's office. These included two lodges, a circular dairy over an ice-house and a keeper's cottage. The scheme was abandoned in 1817, when Edwards fell out with Powell, and the only building that might have been erected is a lodge, since gone, on the Aberystwyth road.

A survey of the estate in 1818 shows that by that date the park had taken on much of its present-day layout. The lower, present drive is shown and Warren Hill, to the north has been planted as woodland. To the south the lake, with no island, has appeared and the open grassland has been dotted with trees, including the major beech clumps in the south-eastern part. The public road which ran across this area has been stopped north of the Nant Paith, the remainder reduced to a track. There is a lodge at the west entrance, between the old and new drives. Screening belts of trees have been planted along the Devil's Bridge road to the north and along the east boundary.

When William Edward Powell moved in to Nanteos in 1830 he commissioned a survey by his new agent, Thomas Griffiths. This plan, with amendments on it up to 1835,

shows a few further changes. The lake has acquired its island and also the diversion channel around its south side. The east end of the old drive has been diverted further north of the house. Both old and new sections are now tracks. William Edward Powell continued to make improvements, particularly to the house and outbuildings. His son, William Thomas Rowland Powell, inherited in 1854 and continued to make improvements. The present lodge was built in 1857 and on stylistic grounds may have been designed by the architect William Burn, of Edinburgh. Between 1862 and 1867 Powell spent £10,841 on estate improvements but despite this the estate was beginning to deteriorate. There were orders for plants from James Veitch & Son and the woods were stocked with pheasants for sport.

The remaining Powells (the male line ended in 1918) made little impact on the landscape. The 1886 Ordnance Survey map shows that the overall configuration of the landscape remained the same as before and was much as it is today. The screening belt on the east boundary has gone and Black Covert wood has been planted. The naming of the woodland to the south of the house Target Covert is a hint of the use that the eyecatcher below it was put to. Family members shot at it, sometimes with a cannon, from the lawn below the house. After 1886 there was little change, although a few

specimen trees and a belt along the Nant Paith were planted in the park before 1905. The Rookery wood was extended westwards by one field.

The most recent phase of improvement came after 1967, when Nanteos was bought by Geoffrey Bliss. He emptied and repaired the lake, filling it in 1969 to a higher level than before and thus drowning the iron railings which surround the island.

The pleasure grounds lie to the south, south-east and west of the house, occupying an elongated area on rising ground above the floor of the valley. They fall into three distinct areas.

First, to the south of the house, forecourt and drive is a lawn sloping gently down to an iron fence and slight drop on the boundary with the park. The lower part has been levelled to form a croquet lawn, now disused. At the east end are two large beech trees and a small oak. The Nant Eos emerges from a culvert in the south-east corner and runs south-eastwards along the outside of the garden boundary, which to the east of the lawn is a low, broken down ha-ha of rubble stone construction. Next to the stream, taking a bite out of the lawn, is a semi-circular, stone-revetted, slightly sunken paved area, with stone steps down its revetted scarp.

Secondly, to the south-east of the house is a further lawn, informally planted with specimen trees, known as the shrubbery. This is a four-sided area, backed on the north by the kitchen garden, bounded on the east by an iron fence and on the south by the ha-ha. The lawn is an extension to that in front of the house. Near the north-west corner is an oval mound, topped by two large fallen mulberry trees, with pets' gravestones set upright around its edge. The only dated one is 'Traveller a favourite retriever 1865'. Another dog, Nelson, was probably that Nelson drawn by W.T.R. Powell in 1842. An enigmatic inscription commemorates 'Poor Jack the Coon and Jenny his wife'. The stones are not in their original positions and were once scattered throughout the shrubbery. There are some fine specimen trees in this area. At the east end is a large cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*), the largest in Ceredigion. Along the north side are three mature maidenhair trees (*Ginkgo biloba*). The middle tree is the largest in Ceredigion. Near the eastern tree is a Sawara cypress (*Chamaecyparis pisifera*). A copper beech stands near the west end of the kitchen garden wall and there is a holm oak (*Quercus ilex*) at the east end of the area, south of the cedar, along with some laurel and rhododendron. The south side is planted mainly with beech. A former path, which winds through the area, is visible in the turf.

The third area lies to the west of the house. This is a long strip of ornamental woodland which lies between the present drive and the old drive above it. Between the two is a walk, known as Lovers' Walk, which runs from the east edge of the wood, just to the west of the house, almost as far as the lodge. A branch drops down to the drive opposite the lake. The walk follows the contour and is unsurfaced. The east end is heavily overhung by laurels and rhododendrons. The main species in the wood are beech, oak and sycamore, with an understorey of laurel, Portugal laurel, rhododendron, box and a few flowering shrubs. Notable mature trees flanking the walk include two large common limes (*Tilia x vulgaris*), two large small-leaved limes (*Tilia cordata*), sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), silver fir (*Abies alba*), Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), one wellingtonia (*Sequoiadendron gigantea*) and one oriental plane (*Platanus orientalis*).

The development of the grounds around the house went hand in hand with that of the park. The earliest survey, of 1764, labels a rectilinear area to the west of the house, north of the public road, as 'Pleasure ground'. This area roughly corresponds to part of the main lawn and the eastern end of the Lovers' Walk woodland. There is no

indication of how it was laid out but it was presumably contemporary with the new house built in 1739-57 by Thomas Powell. To the east of the house the survey shows an unwallled kitchen garden, roughly on the site of the present one, and an orchard, which occupied the east end of the present kitchen garden area and the east end of the shrubbery.

The survey of 1793 gives little indication of the layout of the grounds, except that the public road has been replaced by a drive to the north of the house and the rectilinear pleasure ground to the west is not shown. Further changes to the grounds were made by William Edward Powell, particularly during the period 1814-17, when John Edwards was steward. He suggested improvements, which were implemented, including the breaking of the regular line of the shrubbery, the building of walls around the kitchen garden and the making of a curving lawn and gravel walks. By the time of the survey of 1818 for William Edward Powell, by William Crawford, these improvements had been carried out and the layout more nearly approached that of the present day. In front of the house was a curving lawn. The present drive was in place, as was a path, the present Lovers' Walk, above it. The slope above the drive is shown as woodland. To the south of the newly built kitchen garden was a wooded shrubbery with a winding gravel walk through it. Little change is shown to this layout in the survey of 1830. The croquet lawn was made between this date and 1886, when it is shown on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map.

This layout, with some of its nineteenth-century planting, has survived to the present day. The Lovers' Walk woodland has become overgrown and invaded by seedling trees and the shrubbery is probably less densely wooded than originally, but each area has retained something of its early nineteenth-century character. Early photographs indicate that there were daffodils on the lawn in front of the house and in the shrubbery.

The kitchen garden lies to the east of the house and stable court. It is a large, walled, rectilinear area, sloping down from north to south, enclosed by walls on all sides. To the north is a track leading to Nanteos Cottage, to the west the service drive, to the south the shrubbery and to the east the former flower garden, now a private garden.

The walls are of brick and rubble stone construction and mostly stand to their original height. The east wall is stone, about 4m high, with an overhanging slate top. There is a blocked door in the middle and an open doorway at the north end. The north wall is of stone on the outside, brick on the inside, and is about 4.5 m high. It is broken down in places. In the middle it slopes down to an entrance, flanked by a gatepost, which has been roughly blocked with stone. A pointed-arch doorway on the outside leads to a small store, formerly a privy, within the wall. At its west end the north wall curves around the corner and continues, entirely of brick, along the west side. There is a wide entrance opposite the stables and a smaller one, blocked with bricks, to its south. The wall slopes down to about 3 m at its south end. The south wall is entirely of stone, about 3.5 m high, with an overhanging slate top. On the outside of its west end is a small stone building - originally an outside privy - under which the culverted Nant Eos runs. To the east is a doorway, with a brick lintel, blocked with stone. Further east is a similar doorway with an iron gate in it. This is of simple upright railing design except for the base which has a pattern of scrolls and diagonals.

The interior of the garden is grassed over and there are no visible remains of any former path layout. In the centre of the garden are two derelict glasshouses, one above the other. The upper one is better preserved. It is a vinery, with a wooden

superstructure of narrow glazing bars and glass panes on a brick base, with vine arches. A flight of slate stone steps leads up to the glasshouse on the west side. The glasshouse is built against a high wall aligned east-west, the south side of which is brick, plastered on the inside of the glasshouse, the north side stone. Against the north side are some ruined, roofless, stone bothies. The lower glasshouse is more ruinous, with no superstructure remaining. It is built against a brick wall about 2.2 m high. Behind is a furnace/boiler pit.

To the west is a circular, stone-lined pool, about 2.5 m in diameter, with an iron fountain pipe in the middle. This was fed by water piped from a small reservoir above Sawmill Dingle. North-west of the pool is a row of brick frames and above it the remains of a melon house, with a central sunken passage and flanking beds surrounded by stone walling. To the west is a roofless, ruined bothy range built of rubble stone. Its back wall, aligned north-south, and sloping side walls survive, except for a central section of the back wall.

The present kitchen garden dates to about 1812. There was a kitchen garden on the site before that but it appears not to have been walled. The earliest record is the estate survey of 1764, which labels the area 'kitching garden'. There was an orchard to the east. The 1793 map shows the same layout, with a small building on the north side. In about 1812 John Edwards was making suggestions for improvements to the young William Edward Powell. Among them was the walled kitchen garden, with a greenhouse against a cross wall. This was implemented and the present garden is shown on the 1818 survey, with a small flower garden, now a private garden, to its east. The 1886 Ordnance Survey map shows the present layout of glasshouses, fountain and bothies.

Sources

Primary

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