

BODELWYDDAN CASTLE

Ref No	PGW (C) 2
OS Map	116
Grid Ref	SH 999 745
County	Denbighshire
District	Denbighshire
Community Council	Bodelwyddan
Designations	Listed building: Bodelwyddan Castle Grade II*
Site Evaluation	Grade II

Primary reasons for grading

Well preserved eighteenth- and nineteenth-century landscape park with nineteenth-century picturesque accretions. Arts & Crafts garden by Thomas Mawson.

Type of site

Medium-sized landscape park; pleasure grounds; formal former kitchen garden.

Main phases of construction

Eighteenth century, nineteenth century, with twentieth-century additions.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The present house, Bodelwyddan Castle, lies to the south of the Marble church at Bodelwyddan and is divided from it and the accompanying Almshouses, village fountain and rectory by the A55. The castle lies at the top of a gentle slope in a well wooded parkland setting, with views over the Rhuddlan Marsh and Irish Sea to the north.

The castle is a sprawling, three-storey castellated mansion, liberally decorated with machicolations and turrets. It is built of a local white limestone, and stands in a prominent position on a low hill overlooking the coastal plain. From it there are extensive views, and it is visible from some distance to the north and east. It has a long asymmetrical north front dominated on the eastern side by a huge arch framed by two square turreted towers. These in fact incorporate two large chimney stacks from the seventeenth-century house. Moving west there is a gatehouse and entrance into an inner courtyard with two turreted towers. Other decorations on the house include an effigy of a knight in an alcove on the north front, and another by a gateway on the southern side. An Elizabethan or early seventeenth-century house on the site was remodelled between 1800 and 1808 for Sir John Williams. The present form of the castle was built between c. 1830-42 for Sir John Hay Williams (1794-1859), and was designed by J.A. Hansom and E. Welch. Parts of the earlier remodelling remain visible, such as the north end of the east front.

The stable block stands within the walls of the inner courtyard at the south-western end and is barely recognisable as such. It has an extension on the north side and is

now a cafe and restaurant. There is a series of ventilation turrets along the ridge and larger doorways on the south side have been reduced in size. They are built of the same local white limestone as the castle.

Immediately to the south of the castle and stable block is a recently built hotel arranged around all but the south side of a central open court.

The park is of medium size lying to the south of the A55 and surrounding the mansion on the north, south and eastern sides. It lies slightly to the north of the Elwy valley. The park lies on ground which rises to the south, running down towards Rhuddlan Marsh in the north with views to the Irish sea in the north. The park is largely undulating grassland dotted with large mature deciduous trees (mainly oaks). To the east of the castle a children's play area is in the course of construction in a slight dip in the ground. The former drive from Bodelwyddan village to the north is being reconstructed as access to the area. The house and pleasure grounds lie to the western side of the park whilst to the east and south-east are the fish pond, mill and related ponds. In the south-western corner of the park lie two stone-lined ponds which continue as a stream into the pleasure grounds. Immediately west of the pleasure grounds just within the park walls is the lime kiln.

The park originated in the eighteenth century, but took on its present form in the nineteenth, with the building of the massive boundary walls and lodges in the 1820s and 30s by Sir John Hay Williams. In his journal for 1836 he commented: 'I was so occupied with great walls and towers I was not a little rejoiced to find them drawing to a conclusion. The back gate was now finished and the tower to the north of it completed - also the road to the steam engine altered and new gate-posts set up'. The boundary walls are of the same stone as the castle, and stand c. 3 m high and higher in some places, with large irregularly shaped coping stones.

The main pleasure garden lies to the south of the castle. To the south of the new hotel are two small modern areas: a cypress maze commemorating Thomas Mawson and a small enclosed garden laid out with small formal flowerbeds, gravel paths, a brick well, and a small brick pavilion. To the south is the large walled garden with ornamental elements laid out by Sir John Hay Williams in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. It occupies an elongated inverted D-shaped area, with a high brick wall around all but the south-east side, which is open to the park. In about 1910 Mrs Aitken, a tenant of the castle, employed the landscape architect Sir Thomas Mawson to lay out an Arts & Crafts style garden in the southern half of the walled garden. Mawson commented: 'I replanned the upper part of the garden behind the castle and carried out some necessary improvements on a very difficult site. The soil was sparse, resting upon limestone, demanding great care and knowledge in the choice of shrubs and plants; but here again a fair measure of success rewarded our efforts'. This part of the gardens takes the form of four compartments surrounded by clipped yew hedges, divided by brick paths with mill stones at the entrances to each compartment. On the lower side the cross path is terminated by a stone bench surrounded by a semi-circular yew hedge. The north-eastern compartment is divided into four formal flowerbeds with stone edging. The other compartments are now informally laid out with flower borders and stone chip paths. Along the eastern side of this part of the walled garden is an informal area planted with ornamental trees and shrubs with a small stream running through it. This descends through a series of small pools and cascades into an informal pond. This area is separated from these yew compartments by a blue metal pop-art pergola. On the western side of the yew compartments a path separates this garden from a perimeter border which lies under the wall.

The northern end of the walled garden was recently laid out by the firm of Colvin and Moggeridge for Clwyd County Council, replacing the old glass houses. The main feature is an aviary on the western side. Steps lead down to a large area of grass with serpentine paths and boxed edged flowerbeds. Again the perimeter flowerbed continues down to this end of the walled garden. A low brick wall on the eastern side overlooks the park. On the park side of the wall a holly hedge has been planted. Between this hedge and the park is a strip of grass c. 5 m wide, and the boundary with the park is a beech hedge. The main entrance to the garden on the east side is through a small classical stone portico with four columns. This was taken from the north front of the castle and is pre-1820s in date. Just outside it is a stone obelisk which was removed to its present site in recent years from its original position on the south-eastern edge of the woodland to the south. The monument was originally erected in 1837 by Sir John Hay Williams in memory of his parents.

The wood to the south of the walled garden was laid out with an informal walk around the perimeter of the wood. There is a doorway in the western wall which leads to the limekiln. Further along the western perimeter wall there is a stone alcove built proud of the wall with a stream running under it. At intervals along the wall are 'gun loops'. Sir John Hay Williams wrote in his journal for February 1836: 'I decorated and beautified the long south wall to the Keepers Tower and put up a gate and made a back entrance to the garden from the farm'. The obelisk was situated on the eastern side with a summerhouse behind it which is no longer in existence. The main south drive winds gently through this wood and although overgrown there is still a hard core base. Where the drive emerges through the perimeter wall the site is marked by a folly tower and archway known as the Keepers Tower. Either side of the drive and near to the Keeper's Tower are two small quarries. Another small quarry was also situated on the eastern side of the wood to the north of the obelisk site. An eastern drive branches off the main drive and emerges from the wood just to the north of the old obelisk site. In the northern end of the wood are subsidiary pathways so access across the width of the wood was possible. Today the pleasure ground wood forms part of a woodland trail but part of the wood is sealed off to the public.

The ponds and woodland in the north-east corner of the park by the mill and mill ponds were also laid out as pleasure grounds with diverting and management of water for streams. A nursery was also situated in this area. Little remains today except for the ponds and the remains of an ice-house.

Sources

Primary

Journals of Sir John Hay Williams 1818-1859 (Claydon Archives).

National Library of Wales:

Pencil and wash drawing by Richard Colt Hoare c. 1813 (original drawings vol. 9 f. 86);

1847 pencil drawing copied from a sketch by Lady Sarah Williams, and another of the house from above (drawings vol. 94 ff. 24, 26);

Pencil and wash sketch by M.F. Lewis, c. 1858 (drawings vol. 64, p. 73).

Secondary

Mawson, T.H., The Life and Work of an English Landscape Architect (n.d., c. 1927), p. 185.

Howell, P., 'A Castle Home for Victorian Portraits', Country Life, 23 October 1986.
Hubbard, E, Clwyd (1986), pp. 324-27.
Pratt, D., and Veysey, A.G., A Handlist of the Topographical Prints of Clwyd (1977),
nos 628-30.
Pettitt, E. L., 'Bodelwyddan Castle', Annual Report of County Archivist.

