

BETTISFIELD HALL

Ref No PGW (C) 56

OS Map 126

Grid Ref SJ 463 360

Former County Clwyd

Unitary Authority Wrexham

Community Council Bettisfield

Designations Listed building: Bettisfield Hall Grade II*

Site Evaluation Grade II

Primary reasons for grading

Remains of a Tudor/Jacobean terraced garden of some importance, as belonging to the Hanmer family in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and possibly the home in his youth of the famous horticulturalist Sir Thomas Hanmer.

Type of Site

Part walled and part earthwork remains of formal terraced garden

Main Phases of Construction

Late sixteenth to early seventeenth century

SITE DESCRIPTION

Bettisfield Hall is a tall, compact brick house of two and three storeys, dating to the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It is situated on gently undulating ground to the north of Bettisfield village, on the Bettisfield-Hanmer road. The short drive from the road runs to a small forecourt on the north side of the house, now the main entrance front.

The first house on the site was built in about 1540 by Richard of Bettisfield, who married into the Hanmer family. Soon afterwards the house was occupied by Hanmers, and continued to be so until it was severely burnt in about 1640, at which point they moved to Bettisfield Park to the north. Thereafter the house was tenanted for a long time, only in this century leaving Hanmer ownership. It is not clear if Sir Thomas Hanmer ever lived here. He succeeded to the baronetcy in 1624, at the age of twelve, and between then and 1646, when he finally settled at Bettisfield Park, was much at court and abroad. However, his connection with the house, even if only indirect, is important, as he was one of the leading horticulturalists of his day.

The present house is essentially L-shaped, with a tall, three-storey wing running north-south, and a two-storey wing running eastwards from its north end. The house is gabled, with mullioned and transomed windows. At the south end of the north-south wing a storeyed porch projects out to the west. The top floor of this wing is taken up with a large barrel-vaulted room, lit by large mullioned and transomed windows, which is thought to have been a chapel (the family was Roman Catholic). Originally the house was twice its present size, extending southwards (so that the porch was in the middle) over what is now part of the garden. Part of the north wall of this section survives as a garden wall, otherwise it has completely disappeared.

A small range of outbuildings (now garage) runs northwards from the east end of the house. It is built of brick, and is of later date than the house.

The garden of Bettisfield Hall is situated to the west, south, and east of the house, on ground sloping away from the house, gently to the east and west, and more steeply to the south. The southern slope has been interrupted by a railway cutting (now disused) running east-west across it. The garden, like the house, is compact, and there are no obvious signs that it ever continued beyond the railway cutting. On the tithe map of 1839 (pre-railway) it is shown as extending only to its present south boundary.

The garden can be divided into two main sections: the terraces to the south and west of the house, and the former orchard to the east. It is entered by a modern gravel drive from the Bettisfield-Hanmer road to the west, which runs to a small forecourt to the north of the house. There are two terraces: the main one is a large rectangular terrace extending southwards from the north end of the house for about twice the length of the house, and westwards to a scarp in the field west of the present garden. The south end of the terrace is built up over the slope, and is retained by a brick revetment wall, below which is a further, narrow terrace.

Within the present garden the main terrace is bounded by a low stone wall along its north side. This continues north-south from the north-east corner to the storeyed porch, with stone steps up in the middle to the terrace level. The garden is bounded on its west side by a hedge, and on its east side, to the south of the house, by a brick wall, formerly part of the east wall of the south end of the house. The west and south walls are visible as slight bumps in the turf. A door in the wall leads through into the former orchard area. A modern swimming pool occupies the southern end of the terrace within the garden. The brick revetment wall is about 1.3 m high. The terrace is largely lawn, with an old beech hedge along the top of the revetment wall. Within living memory the garden had a 'knot garden' to the west of the house, and was known for its walnut trees, and had an ancient olive tree. The lower terrace is only about 4.5 m wide. It has no outer revetment, having been truncated by the railway cutting, and is overgrown at present.

Outside the present garden the terrace continues across the pasture field to the west. Its north and west sides are bounded by scarps, more pronounced on the west than the north side. These are all that remain of the garden's

boundary walls, shown on the 1871 Ordnance Survey map. On the south side the revetment wall and the lower terrace continue half-way across the field, stopping where there is a definite corner in the wall. This corresponds to the north-south scarp bounding the terrace, and the wall quickly peters out into this scarp. Beyond the scarp the ground slopes down to an old water channel (which continues the other side of the railway cutting), at the south end of which is a small, boggy hollow. This appears to have been a roughly circular pond, with traces of stone revetment. Between the storeyed porch and the swimming pool a wide central east-west path has been traced (although there are no visible signs of it) running from the house site to the edge of the terrace in the field. This is shown on the 1871 Ordnance Survey map, which also shows a hedge or row of trees following the line of the present north-south hedge and rows of trees (possibly the walnuts) along the east and west boundaries.

To the south-east of the house is a gently sloping pasture field with a few old fruit trees in it, bounded on the west by the former house wall and on the south by the railway cutting. This area was undoubtedly part of the original gardens, in all probability an orchard. It is shown with trees in it on the 1871 Ordnance Survey map, and on both this map and the tithe map of 1839 it has a small pond, now gone, in the south-east corner. There are traces of walling under the turf along the east and south sides.

The garden probably dates to the time of Hanmer occupation of the house in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Its formal style accords with this date, and after 1640 both house and garden remained essentially untouched. There is a possibility that the famous horticulturalist, Sir Thomas Hanmer, spent some of his boyhood and youth here.

Sources

Primary

1839 tithe map: Clwyd Record Office (Hawarden).

Secondary

Hanmer, T., The Garden Book of Sir Thomas Hanmer (1659; transcribed 1933; reprinted 1991).

Hubbard, E., Clwyd (1986), p. 322.