

KINMEL PARK

Ref No PGW(Gd)54(CON)

Former Ref No PGW(C)5

OS Map 116

Grid Ref SH 982 748

Former county Clwyd

Unitary Authority Conwy

Community Council Colwyn

Designations Listed building: Kinmel Hall Grade II*; Stables Grade II*; Old Kinmel Grade II; Plas Kinmel Grade II; Morfa Lodge Grade II; Golden Lodge (Llwyni Lodge) Grade II*

Site Evaluation Grade II*

Primary reasons for grading

House prominently set in landscape park; well preserved formal garden probably by W.E. Nesfield dating to the late nineteenth century.

Type of site

Medium sized landscape park; formal terraced garden; shrubberies; walled garden.

Main Phases of Construction

Seventeenth century, 1791-1802, 1843, 1871-1874

SITE DESCRIPTION

Kinmel was the seat of the Hughes family whose money initially came from copper mining on Parys Mountain in Anglesey. The present mansion was commissioned by Hugh Robert Hughes the grandson of the first incumbent. The present owner is a descendant through the female line. The house is sited on a north-facing slope looking out to the Irish Sea, with the main windows facing east on to the entrance court and west on to the Venetian garden.

The present Kinmel lies on top of the foundations of two previous houses, the first being designed by Samuel Wyatt c. 1791- 1802 , to be succeeded in 1841 by a house designed by Thomas Hopper. This was followed by the present Kinmel designed by William Eden Nesfield c. 1871-1874. An even earlier house, of which the ruins remain, is situated in the walled garden to the east, being a small three-storey seventeenth-century stone house, known as Old Kinmel. The present mansion is two

storeys in height, with attics and dormer windows. The central block has an offset chimney, a device used by W.E. Nesfield. The building has a pitched slate roof with a preponderance of dormers with much white painted woodwork. It is built of red brick with elaborate stonework detailing by James Forsyth. The design of the house is said to be based partly on Hampton Court (the architect and the family visited this building), and partly on Fontainebleau (the similarity to the latter can be clearly seen). The house is liberally decorated with sunflower and pie motifs indicative of its allegiance to the aesthetic movement, the pies being Japanese in origin and frequently used to decorate Japanese china. These designs are also incorporated into leadwork flashing on the west front of the house. 'It was a kind of architectural cocktail with a little genuine Queen Anne in it, a little Dutch, a little Flemish, a squeeze of Robert Adam, a generous dash of Wren, and a touch of Francis I' (Mark Girouard, Sweetness and Light).

A chapel with pitch roof and belfry is situated on the west front. The service wing continues south from the main body of the house joining up with the stable yard and having its own courtyard.

The stable yard was built in about 1855, designed by either William Burn or J. Crickmay, on a courtyard layout of ashlar with rusticated details. The north front has a dominant clock cupola with Baroque echoes. There are pedimented pavilions at each end of the north front. The roof has dormered windows. 'As a Victorian essay in Palladianism (with touches of Vanbrugh) it is a remarkable achievement.' (Mark Girouard, Country Life).

The park is a medium-sized landscape park surrounding Kinmel on all sides and lying to the south of the A55. The park rises to the south towards the mansion, the southern area of the park rising above the mansion itself. There was certainly a park here in association with the earlier buildings, the 'old' park to the east being associated with Old Kinmel. Sir Owen Wynne of Gwydir gave 'a herd of deer for Sir John's new park'. 'Sir John' is Sir John Carter who acquired Kinmel by marrying an heiress of the estate, Elizabeth Holland. He died in 1676. The exact boundaries of this park are not known but the rough area can be gauged by the lime and oak plantings to the west, east and south of Old Kinmel. The plantings around the new mansion and to the west would be concurrent with the Wyatt building in 1791 and continuing with the building of the subsequent mansions by Hopper and Nesfield. These consist largely of oak and beech. Scots pine was also planted, but very little survives. There are also plantings of *Acer pseudoplatanus* and London plane. There are small areas of mixed woodland in the southern part of the park, and a large beech wood on the south-western boundary. The boundaries of the park have been largely dictated by road construction and this too has influenced drive construction. The original Abergele mail coach road between Abergele and St Asaph ran past the southern boundary of the pleasure grounds towards Glascoed in the east. This road would have been the park boundary to the south until the 1860s when the park boundaries were extended due to the road re-routinig. The raised form of this road may still be seen in the park today.

The remains of a sweet chestnut avenue, two trees, runs alongside the old coachroad, from St George to Kinmel. The map date is 1856 but this driveway must relate to the Wyatt House. In 1863 this mail coach road was re-routed away from Kinmel to form

what is the basis of the A55 today. The park itself is sandwiched between the A55 to the north and the Roman road to Betws-yn-Rhos in the south. A private road called Coed y Drive, lying to the east of Plas Kinmel (Home Farm then), was made joining the Golden Lodge on the A55 to the Abergele Rhuddlan road to the north. The Morfa Lodge was built at the northern end of Coed y Drive in 1688. The subsequent widening of the A55 into a dual carriageway has divorced the Golden Lodge from the park leaving it stranded between the carriageways. The main entrance is now situated to the south-west of the Golden Lodge at the bottom of Primrose Hill, the lane leading into the village of St George. However part of the Golden Lodge drive remains on the Kinmel side of the A55, as a track in the Forestry Commission plantations.

The gardens lie immediately around the house, the majority being to the south and west, but also a little on the east. Because of the sloping terrain of the ground, the garden is terraced and provides an ideal viewing platform to the surrounding landscape. Not much is known of the garden prior to the present one, but there undoubtedly was a garden on the site of the formal garden west of the house. From sketches by Lady Florentia Hughes, the wife of Hugh Robert Hughes, there is evidence of balustrading from the time of the Hopper house 1843. An early watercolour by Helen Allingham, signed H. Paterson 1865 shows part of a formal garden. The present formal garden on the west is of about (exact date not known) 1875, around the time the present house was completed. The designer of this formal garden, known as the Venetian garden, is said to be W.A. Nesfield the father of W.E. Nesfield, the architect of the house. It is similar in spirit to the gardens at Witley Court designed by W.A. Nesfield, representing the simpler layouts of his later designs as compared with the highly complex and architectural Italianate gardens of his earlier years. It is certain however that father and son did work together on garden layouts.

The design of the formal garden, with its topiary, leans towards the later Victorian fashion for 'old fashioned' gardens. There was a swing away from the highly formal Italianate gardens of Charles Barry (1795-1860) and indeed W.A. Nesfield's earlier layouts, for example The Royal Horticultural Society Garden at Chiswick. The plantings in formal beds were not 'old fashioned' but Victorian. The central stone fountain is too massive in proportion to be misconstrued as 'old fashioned'. The use of clipped standard hollies is however very reminiscent of the illustrations of Kate Greenaway, and there is no doubt that the 'old fashioned' garden was the perfect accompaniment to a 'Queen Anne' house. The garden today comes even closer to the ideal for an 'old fashioned' garden.

The design of the Venetian Garden at Kinmel focuses on a large circular stone fountain with a marble centrepiece (not original). The plot is divided into four with formal beds surrounded by clipped yew at the eastern end and the western end with two 'Roman' pillars at one time part encircled by clipped yew similar in shape to the Greek letter omega. This area is sunk and there is a circuit gravel path. The garden front which was terraced now has a large area of sloping tarmac instead of gravel. Because of the sloping nature of the site this part of the garden forms a terrace. The whole area is surrounded by a brick wall, with a garden house and steps to the southern level in the south-western corner.

To the south, west and east of the house and stable complex, and to the north of the stables, is an area of shrubbery on a higher level, running the width of the Venetian Garden and the house, forming the southern part of the pleasure garden. It has a wide (3 m) gravel path, now grassed over running its length with gates at each end leading on to the park. The area is made up of informal tree and shrub plantings divided by naturalistic paths.

The walled garden lies to the east of the house and has been built up around the house of Old Kinmel. It appears on an early OS map of 1856, at the time of the Hopper house. At that time there were still a number of other buildings in the vicinity of Old Kinmel, and the walled garden had not been enclosed on this western corner, which was probably incorporated into the walled garden with the re-routing of the drive from the north of the walled garden to the south.

The walls are c. 5 m high, built of brick and stone and not of one build. Some of the stone walling could relate to the early seventeenth century and be associated with the house of Old Kinmel, whilst the brick is probably of eighteenth and nineteenth century origin. The main entrance from the house was on the west side by a stone crow stepped arch. The gateway is still there but the arch has gone. The garden is divided into four, three quarters being for production whilst the house of old Kinmel takes up the other quarter. The north-western area is completely walled off from the rest of the garden. East of that area the garden forms an L shape containing the remains of the greenhouses on the south facing wall. To the south of the greenhouses are the pond and nuttery. The pond once had a weeping willow grown from the tree by Napoleon's grave on Elba. To the south of the pond are a well and the remains of the potting sheds. On the northern wall are the remains of the glasshouses and the boiler room.

In the nineteenth century this garden was very much an extension of the pleasure garden. The north eastern, and part of the southern area of the walled garden were divided into four sections by herbaceous borders, backed by fruit bushes, the borders were edged with box hedging which still survives. The southern end had a raised terrace running east-west bordered by Irish yews. This is in fact a walk to the Garden House which is situated in the extreme south-eastern corner of the walled garden. At the west end of the terrace are two stone gatepillars at one time with ball finials. At the east end of the terrace is an entrance on to the park with an iron gate and stone gate pillars.

The south-western quarter of the walled garden is entirely taken up with an area of cold frames and a slate water butt. To the east of this area and directly behind Old Kinmel is a dilapidated old vinery running north-south.

Sources

Primary

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Secondary

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