

BRYN-Y-NEUADD

Ref No PGW (Gd) 3 (CON)

OS Map 115

Grid Ref SH 677 747

Former County Gwynedd

Unitary Authority Conwy

Community Council Llanfairfechan

Designations Listed Buildings: Stable block, Grade II; fountain, Grade II; Bronrardd (gardener's cottage), Grade II; Bryn-y-Neuadd farm, Grade II*, and buildings, Grade II.

Site Evaluation **Grade II**

Primary reasons for grading Park and garden laid out by the eminent Victorian garden designer Edward Milner; Italianate garden with 1850s French cast-iron fountain by Barbezat & Cie; stream near former Grand Lodge laid out with artificial pools, waterfalls and rockwork by Pulham & Son; walled kitchen garden with remains of glasshouses.

Type of Site Mid nineteenth-century landscape park with formal Italianate garden and extensive kitchen garden.

Main Phases of Construction 1850s and 1860s

SITE DESCRIPTION

Bryn-y-Neuadd, now a hospital, is situated on ground sloping gently down to the sea, on the western edge of the village of Llanfairfechan. The house, which stood in the centre of the park, was built in the 1850s and was described in the *Journal of Horticulture and Cottage Gardener* in 1864 as 'Gothic-Italian' in style. It was demolished in the 1960s, being replaced by a plain hospital block.

The stable block is contemporary with the house, built by John Platt in 1858. It has a central archway leading through the front range into a yard, and incorporates two cottages. Like all the surviving estate buildings, it is constructed of dark grey granite with lighter stone dressings. It underwent alterations after the house became a hospital in the 1890s, and is still used as part of the modern hospital.

In the eighteenth century Bryn-y-Neuadd belonged to Humphrey Roberts, and later passed into the hands of his grandson, whose father had been a Denbighshire Wynne. It was purchased in the 1850s by John Platt, a wealthy textile engineer, who built a new house, model farm, several other estate buildings, railway station, church, and

much of the village of Llanfairfechan. The first edition 1-in. to the mile Ordnance Survey map of 1840-41 shows a house and small enclosure with trees, and a building on the site of the farm (and the railway), but there appears to have been nothing else on the site before Platt's time. Platt employed Edward Milner, who was by this time a well known garden designer, having served an apprenticeship with Joseph Paxton and worked with him on the gardens of the Crystal Palace, to lay out the park.

Bryn-y-Neuadd is an excellent and very typical example of Milner's formal garden style, linked to parkland with flowing curves, specimen trees and shrubberies. Much of the layout is preserved, and can be appreciated, but there is also a detailed contemporary account by John Gould in the *Journal of Horticulture and Cottage Gardener* (1864), which mentions much that is gone.

The slope below the house was terraced, and a formal garden was laid out to the south-west. Beyond this the park was planted with groups and belts of trees, underplanted with shrubbery (mostly rhododendron and laurel, beloved of Milner), and carriage drives led away to the south-west, south-east and north-east, that to the south-east being planted with a sycamore avenue. Further land belonging to the estate lay on the far side of the railway, close to the sea, and a plantation was made flanking a way down to the beach. There were bathing-huts on the beach, which burned down fairly recently, but these are not shown on 1889 or 1914 maps.

Although the modern hospital consists of many recent buildings scattered about over the eastern part of the park, these have been sited in such a way that almost all the copses, woods and groups of trees designed by Milner have survived. These are mostly mixed plantings of coniferous and deciduous trees, with underplanting of rhododendron and laurel. There are some individual trees, mostly oak and sycamore, in the open areas. The spaces between the plantations which are not maintained as lawn have reverted to waste ground; but the original layout of the park remains. Some groups of young trees have also been planted, mostly near the new A55 Expressway, which has removed most of the original belt of trees alongside the railway and cut off the western corner of the park.

The south-western corner of the park once supplied a separate focus of interest. A 'Grand Lodge', demolished in the 1960s, stood astride the long, western carriage drive shortly after it entered the park. This was an imposing gothic building with turrets, a side tower and a central archway. The stream which flows across the corner was dammed into pools, embellished with rockwork, and decorated with artificial islands and waterfalls by the firm Pulham & Sons. Artificial, 'Pulhamite' stone may have been employed for some of this work as it was used extensively at Gorrddinog, another Platt family house on the opposite side of the old A55. The bridge across the stream was immediately in front of the Grand Lodge, and the whole area was lavishly planted with mixed coniferous and deciduous trees and underplanted with shrubs, mostly rhododendron and laurel. It would have formed an impressive entry, followed by the long drive across the park with a sinuous belt of trees on one side and views across to the sea on the other. This area has suffered very much during the recent construction of the new A55, everything to the north-west of the Grand Lodge having been swept away except for a remnant of the plantation. A waterfall

and artificial island can still be seen in the stream to the south-east of the drive, although the shrubbery is now very overgrown.

The park is only described in general terms by John Gould, but he names the style as Picturesque, and remarks that the grounds have been 'recently formed and planted' and that the trees are yet small. It is clear from this, therefore, that the laying out of the park was contemporary with the construction of the estate buildings, in the late 1850s and early 1860s.

The part of the estate north of the railway line, between it and the sea, must have become somewhat irrelevant after the construction of the railway, and it was not included in Milner's design, except for the plantation flanking the route to the beach. Parts of it had already been sold off by 1914, and it is all now in separate ownership, although a right of way to the beach has been retained by the hospital, through a modern underpass for the road just south of the original railway underpass.

The drives have suffered more than the planted components through the modern use of the park, and it is difficult to trace parts of them. The 1889 Ordnance Survey 25-in. map shows: a drive from the Grand Lodge in the south-west corner to the south side of the house; a drive, with avenue, more or less continuing this out to the south-east lodge; three routes from the back of the stable block, one to the north-east lodge, one meeting this by the farm but sweeping round near the kitchen garden beforehand, and one leading off to the station to the north; a route from the north side of the house down to the beach; and a second route to the beach branching off before the Grand Lodge at the south-west corner.

Of these, the drive from the south-west corner remains; it crosses most of the park as an unsurfaced farm track, but is surfaced with tarmac from the point where the first hospital building is reached. The drive from the south-east lodge is now used as the main entrance. The lodge, dated 1861, is in similar style to the other estate buildings. A second carriageway was built parallel with the original drive, in the 1960s, to allow traffic to travel in both directions simultaneously. The original drive, indicated by the sycamore avenue, is the southern carriageway. Both are tarmac-surfaced. A tarmac route which meets the inner end of this drive just south of the stables now runs towards the north-east lodge roughly parallel with the route of the old drive from the back of the stables, which it joins at the south-western corner of the enclosure now containing the house Cerrig-llwyd; the tarmac road here curves away to the north and the drive continues to the lodge as an unsurfaced footpath. The lodge is similar in style to the south-east lodge and gate piers, but no gates, remain. The drive can also be traced back towards the stables in the grass. Similarly the place of the middle route from the stables is taken by a tarmac road, probably on the same line to start with; after passing between some modern buildings this heads away to the north and the old route, unsurfaced but used by vehicles, branches off it to the east, rejoining the first route by the farm. The northern route to the station has become completely lost among the modern developments.

The complex of routes around the house, all surfaced now, partly follows original routes and is partly new. The old route to the beach is lost and cannot even be traced easily where it bisects a copse, although the route of the path from the pleasure

gardens which joined it can be seen in grass north of the formal garden. The other route to the beach, at the south-west corner, survives for a short distance but is then truncated by the new road.

There is a curving ha-ha to the south-east of the site of the house, along the edge of the inner ends of the east and south-west drives and the area in front of the house site where they met. This was created during the construction of the modern hospital. Previously there had been a gentle slope down to the cricket ground which lay in the irregularly-shaped area of parkland which is fenced off from the rest, the fence originally having been continuous with the one surrounding the garden.

The formal garden was laid out at the same time as the rest of the grounds, and was described by Gould in 1864. There were terraces to the south-west and north-east of the house. That on the south-west is retained by a low wall and a central shallow flight of steps leads down into the formal garden. The terrace on the north-east partly overlooks the grassy bank on the north-west side of the formal garden, and a long flight of steps, again roughly central to the terrace, descends across this bank. It originally opened on to a sharp curve in a carriage drive, where the route to the beach became another route joining the drive from behind the stables to the station, but now meets the new concrete slab path, which covers a service duct, across the bottom of the grass bank below the formal garden.

From the south-west terrace a flight of steps leads down into the gravelled, rectangular Italianate formal garden to the south-west, with an apsidal end accommodating a large and elaborate, circular, cast-iron fountain in Italian renaissance style, now in full working order. The area nearest the house contains two elaborate and original box parterres, and the whole is enclosed within a decorative stone wall embellished with stone balls on the piers flanking entrances and steps. The ground drops away to the north-west and the exit on this side is down a flight of steps, but to the south-east it is via a level path and to the south-west has two steps up.

The fountain consists of a large circular stone basin, out of which rises a stone pediment supporting the tall cast-iron structure. There are four cherubs riding dolphins and blowing horns, with a basin above them; then a smaller basin; and finally another cherub holding a garland on his head, out of the top of which water rises.

The fountain is stamped 'VAL D'OSNE', indicating that it was made by the French firm of Barbezat & Cie, the leading French producers of cast-iron garden furniture and ornaments at the time the garden at Bryn-y-Neuadd was being laid out. The Val d'Osne factory was acquired from the firm of Andre in 1855, and a catalogue was produced in 1858 which showed a fountain designed by Lienard and made by Andre which had been exhibited at the Great Exhibition of 1851. This was very similar, although not identical, to the Bryn-y-Neuadd fountain, which may well have been ordered from this catalogue via Barbezat's London agents.

Beyond the apsidal end is a small, level, more or less rectangular area, edged with rockery, which has recently been used as a bowling green. It has a hedge on three

sides, with a rockery bank at the base on two of them; these banks have central paved alcoves, presumably for seats. At one time there was a small summerhouse in the larger alcove on the south-west side, but this was not the same one mentioned by Gould, and recently collapsed. Gould does not mention the bowling green but does describe a long, narrow glasshouse which lay across the end of the formal garden. This is shown on the 1889 Ordnance Survey map, but had gone by 1914. Next to this area is a grotto. This was not mentioned by Gould, so is possibly a later addition. It is large, with an underground chamber (which has a brick wall at the back, possibly connected with the heating arrangements for the former glasshouse as there is an iron stove set in the wall) and a winding passage. No evidence of any decoration of ceiling or floor was seen, though some rock with quartz veins has been used.

To the south of the formal garden are groups of trees and shrubs with a path, much as shown on the 1889 map. To the north-west, the ground slopes away, and there is a flight of steps down from the formal garden, and another, to the north-east, from the terrace across the north-west of the house site. Between these two flights is a terraced grassy slope, also shown on the 1889 map, although it has now acquired a new concrete slab path, which conceals a service duct, along the bottom. This looked down on to lawn areas with groups of trees, now partly occupied by a car park.

The area to the south-west is planted with trees and shrubs and is now very overgrown. It was here that the summerhouse, praised by Gould for its view of the Menai Straits, was located. Nothing now remains of it except a levelled area within the shrubbery, nor can the paths be traced.

Gould remarks that in the summer of 1864 25,000 bedding plants were used in the garden; this goes some way to explaining why 11 gardeners were then employed to care for about five acres of garden and four of kitchen garden.

The kitchen garden lies on the north-eastern edge of the estate, next to the model farm, and had a very large area of glasshouses, as well as two concentric walls to provide the maximum space for wall fruit. The garden walls remain complete, of the usual grey stone, with pale stone coping; the outer wall up to 6 m high and the inner about 3 m. Half of the lean-to range of glasshouses is still standing, though with little glass left, and the extreme south-western house still contains vines and rods. The other half of the range has gone, but the whitewashed wall shows where it used to stand. A long, low glasshouse range in the northern part of the garden is still there, with raised borders and a sunken central path; the heating pipes under the borders were only recently removed, and there is still some glass. Sheds and pigsties remain in the yard behind, but a small greenhouse which stood here has gone. The two boiler houses, both and sheds on the outside of the main garden wall are tumbledown but remain in situ.

The outer strip, between the two concentric walls, is now used as grazing, as is the small north-western enclosure (where the line of the central path can still be seen). The main garden is neglected but contains some fruit trees and is used for growing vegetables; grass paths, in use, follow the line of the original paths. The old iron railings of the aviary area to the south-east are still in place, almost 2 m high but

very slender.

Gould, in 1864, described the garden in detail, mentioning 270 ft of lean-to hothouses 'fitted up very completely', in which he saw peaches and pineapples and a magnificent collection of decorative-leaved plants. He also describes a fern-house, which was reached through a door in the back wall at one end of the range. There were four free-standing span-roofed glasshouses 'on the Paxtonian principle', each 105 ft long, which contained peaches and nectarines and two varieties of grapes, each of which had a house to itself. The vines were planted in 1862. At the back of the lean-to range was 'a complete range of sheds', including two boiler-houses (all the glasshouses were heated by one boiler, but there was a second for back-up in case of emergency) and a bothy.

Gould also mentions 'quarters' for vegetable cultivation, 'systematically arranged', but the only available space for these would have been between the two garden walls (which are perhaps 10 m apart), as the central area was mostly taken up with the four large glasshouses. The 'quarters', therefore, are unlikely to have been the usual four divisions of a square plot.

The 1889 25-in. map shows the garden in detail. By this time two of the large free-standing glasshouses had already gone, but everything else mentioned by Gould was still in place. There was also an extension to the north-west of the garden, with more fruit trees and another range of glasshouses on the south-west-facing wall. This too was backed by a range of sheds, and a further small glasshouse stood against the south-east-facing wall of a yard or small enclosure behind. There was also an area marked 'Aviary' to the south-east of the garden. By 1914 the other two free-standing glasshouses had gone, and some pigsties had appeared in the small yard. The aviary had become part of the farmyard, with a large barn in the middle of it.

Bronrardd, the original head gardener's cottage, is just outside the walled garden, between it and the Afon Llanfairfechan. It has its own small walled garden with a rather grandiose doorway, echoing the style of the doorways into the main kitchen garden. Most of the latter still have wooden doors in place, but are not used.

Sources

Information from Mr Stephen Hardie, hospital manager; Mrs Bettina Harden, Welsh Historic Gardens Trust.

Secondary

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Gould, J., 'Bryn-y-Neuadd', *Journal of Horticulture and Cottage Gardener*, 11 October 1864, p. 294.

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