

PARC

Ref No PGW (Gd) 35 (GWY)

OS Map 124

Grid Ref SH 627 439

Former County Gwynedd

Unitary Authority Gwynedd

Community Council Llanfrothen

Designations Snowdonia National Park; Listed Buildings: House, gatehouse, two remaining earlier houses (listed as 'two cottages NE of the Parc'), Beudy Newydd all Grade II; Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Primary Reference Numbers 4737 & 4742.

Site Evaluation **Grade II***

Primary reasons for grading The rare survival of exceptional stone-built garden terraces probably of seventeenth-century date, associated with a group of interesting buildings and historical features set within a contemporary small walled park which includes a gatehouse and viewpoint. Clough Williams-Ellis made improvements in the 1950s and 60s.

Type of Site Small park with industrial features overlaid, neglected terraced gardens of an early date, buildings of interest.

Main Phases of Construction Possibly sixteenth and probably seventeenth century, later twentieth-century additions.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Parc is an unusual and extremely interesting site hidden away in the foothills to the north-east of the Traeth Mawr plain. The whole site is small, but has great charm, with its secluded setting but wide views, great variety of terrain and vegetation, and the contrast it provides with the steep and craggy slopes around.

There are several houses, sited just above the steepest part of the valley of one of the streams, the Maesgwm, and close by are the remains of three small rectangular buildings, probably of medieval date, which represent the only known previous settlement in the area of the park.

The choice of site for the post-medieval houses may have been dictated by various practical factors such as the need for shelter and a wish to leave as much of the level ground as possible clear for agricultural purposes. The result is that the houses are not well placed to enjoy the

main view, the most recent facing north-east, away from it, and the garden was laid out on a very steep slope.

The houses, of great interest, are an example of the 'unit system' peculiar to this part of Wales, whereby instead of enlarging or extending a house as further accommodation was required, an entirely separate but immediately adjacent house was built. Parc has never been converted to a single house, and the four successive houses on the site remain distinct.

The earliest house was probably built about the middle of the sixteenth century, but is now reduced to foundations. The later houses were built to the south-west, the next two probably being roughly contemporary and dating to the late sixteenth or the beginning of the seventeenth century; one of these is now mostly ruined, with a modern lean-to occupying part of its site, but the other has been renovated and is now occupied. The staircase of the ruined house was turned round by Clough Williams-Ellis so that it now leads into the remaining upper room, instead of into the part of the house which has gone. The fourth and last house faces these two across a yard, and has a date-stone of 1671, although this may not relate to the original construction of the house, which could be half a century earlier. It too is still occupied.

All the surviving houses are built in a similar style, of slate-stone with slate roofs. The stone is not dressed except at the corners and around windows and doors, and there are some massive boulders in the lowest courses. The houses have tall stone chimney-stacks, one of which is cylindrical. They are two-storey, and the latest has an attic dormer (possibly a nineteenth-century addition); it also had two front doors, one leading into each of the original ground-floor rooms. One of these has now been blocked.

The staircase of the latest house is in an extension at the back, but as there are blocked doorways at first and second floor level on one end of the house, it is likely that there was originally an outside staircase. The windows of all the houses had stone mullions, but many of these have now been removed. Cement rendering was removed from the outside of the fourth house about ten years ago, and the house was repointed with a lime mortar carefully made up to resemble as closely as possible the mortar used when it was first built.

The houses were built by the Anwyl family, who were related to the Wynns of Gwydir and more closely to the Clennau family. The surname was first adopted by Lewis Anwyl, who died in 1605, but it is probable that it was his father, Robert ap Morris, who built the first house. Lewis or perhaps his son, William Lewis, was responsible for the next two, and probably rebuilt the first as well.

William Lewis Anwyl was a prominent, wealthy, cultured and well-educated man with a strong sense of family, who had contacts in London and elsewhere who kept him supplied with books and information. He may have tried to create a garden based on Italian ideas on his rather unpromising steep, wet site. Despite the date of 1671 on the latest house, William Lewis, who died in 1642, may have built this too, as his will refers to a recently constructed house and a *cywydd* (panegyric) on his death mentions his 'New House of immense construction' as well

as gardens, orchards, parks and 'fair towers'.

William Lewis's elder son predeceased him and Parc went to his second son, Robert, who died in 1653 leaving an infant son, Lewis. Lewis's mother was Katharine, daughter of John Owen of Clennau, and she must have been responsible for the building of the Beudy Newydd in 1666, which bears her initials. There is no evidence, however, to suggest that she or her husband undertook any building at the house site. The date stone of 1671 on the most recent house bears the initials of her son and his wife, also Katharine, but is more likely to relate to some alterations, including perhaps the rear staircase, made at that date (a few years after their marriage) than to the building of the house.

The estate was sold at various times in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries until it was eventually bought by Clough Williams-Ellis, of nearby Plas Brondanw. It was never, however, very prosperous, which probably explains why it changed hands so often and why few alterations or improvements were made after the Anwyls' time.

Built possibly about 1600, the stone gatehouse is at some distance from the house beside a track which was clearly the original main approach; the current drive bypasses it. The building is not astride the track, but to one side of it, and is very small, consisting originally of one room, with a dormer window overlooking the approach, and a cellar. The building has been converted into a dwelling, the cellar becoming the living room and the original room a bedroom; a small extension was under construction at the time of the visit. A paved yard in front of the door is enclosed by a wall, recently built, replacing a low parapet wall along the edge of the drive.

There is a large old stone barn, clearly showing two phases of building, forming the south-west side of the square of farm buildings close to the house. The older part of this probably dates to William Lewis Anwyl's time (the first half of the seventeenth century), and the newer part to before 1700. The older part has an arch at either end of a through-way, with drip-mouldings and a mullioned window above at the front, and there is a similar pair of wide doorways, front and back, but with flat lintels, in the newer part. Other windows are slits, except for a small inserted one in the back wall of the more recent half.

The barn, Beudy Newydd, bears the date 1666, with the initials KA for Katharine Anwyl (daughter-in-law of William Lewis Anwyl), is stone-built and has now been converted to a house. It is south-west of the main house site, at the far end of the park.

The other buildings surrounding the farmyard close to the house, apart from the old barn, consist of another long, probably eighteenth-century, barn, at right-angles to the first one along the north-west side, and some smaller buildings and sheds. The layout is slightly different from that shown on the Ordnance Survey 6 in. map of 1920, and most of the rest of the buildings now standing were probably erected after this date. An illustration in the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments's *Inventory* (1916) shows part of the farmyard, and there are no buildings (except a lean-to on the barn) between the south-eastern end of the old barn and the corner of the latest house, but one small building linked to the house by a wall had appeared by 1920. A ruined small building at the north-east end of the later barn is not, however, shown on

the 1920 or later maps, and may already have been in ruins by then.

The houses and farm lie roughly in the centre of the park, which occupies a more or less rectangular area between two parallel streams, the Afon Maesgwm and the Afon Croesor, with the long axis running south-west to north-east. It is likely that the original park was smaller than at present, the house site being near the north-eastern boundary and the gatehouse on the boundary. This is suggested by the presence of a massive wall of a different character from other walls within the park, which runs north-west from the gatehouse, and also by the route of the old drive, which crosses the river and curves back to the east to meet the road, thus cutting off a corner both of the road and the new drive.

If this is so, there is little evidence to suggest when the park was enlarged to include the large field in the northern corner and the wooded area north and north-east of the old drive, but it may have been during the eighteenth century. The remains of another massive stone wall run alongside the Maesgwm, reinforcing the probability that this was the original park boundary, and the strip of park between the river and the public road on the south-east is likely also to be a later addition. The importance of this road declined after the coast road (now, since the draining of the estuary, not, of course, on the coast) was built in the eighteenth century, and the changes to the drive and entrance at Parc may perhaps have followed this development.

The two streams which define the park are both in fairly steep valleys, and the ground between them rises to an elongated plateau, or flattened ridge, on which the buildings stand. This plateau undulates, with rocky outcrops, one of which has been cut away to build the first house. Another, higher up to the north, has also been quarried; the resulting smooth faces are covered in graffiti of seventeenth-century date onwards.

The current main drive enters the park on the north-east, from a sharp bend in the road. The drive bypasses the gatehouse and the houses and leads straight into the farmyard. The drive is flanked by beech and lime trees planted in the twentieth century by Clough Williams-Ellis. Up to the point where it crosses the old wall which runs north-west from the gatehouse, it has a dry-stone retaining wall on the upper, north-west, side and is revetted in places on the lower side.

The old drive left the road lower down, before the sharp bends, and although little of its course across the field from this point can be seen, close to the river it is causewayed for a short distance (and crossed by a later field wall). It crosses the Maesgwm on a small stone bridge and from this point is a hard-surfaced track, with a dry-stone wall on the south side at first, running south-west past the gatehouse and between the upper and lower terraces. Beyond this its route is not certain, but it must either have climbed to the top of the outcrop behind the site of the first house (close to the present route), or passed immediately behind or in front of the house. It then seems to have followed a route closer to the later houses than the present drive does, and passed the latest house, going towards the barn, near the north-west wall.

There is a viewpoint in the park, to the south-west. The plateau begins to fall away quite steeply about 200 m south-west of the house site, and on the extreme edge of the high ground - the tip of the ridge - is a circular mound which commands a magnificent view. On the south-

west side of it a stone and earth seat has been constructed, cutting back into the base of the mound. The seat has a look of Clough Williams-Ellis about it, but as there is also a large broken stone table bearing graffiti dated 1851 it may be older in origin.

The park itself has probably always had to be relatively intensively farmed, the estate being small and unprofitable. There is little reason to suppose that it was ever very different from its present condition, with most of the area under pasture, woodland on the steeper parts and scattered trees in the grazed areas. Along the valley south-west of the houses, to the south boundary of the park and particularly in the area of Park Quarry, trees of mixed age, especially beech and larch, are planted. Oaks in the quarry area were planted by Clough Williams-Ellis and some very large beeches clearly pre-date the quarry by many years.

An industrial stratum has been overlaid on the earlier landscape, which has changed the character of the park somewhat. The incline/tramway, for instance, serving Croesor quarry to the north-east, now divides the farmed part of the park from a rougher area within the north-west boundary, whereas originally there would probably have been either no difference between these areas, or a gradual change towards the north-west as the slope down to the stream became steeper.

In the southern and south-west extreme of the park is a small quarry belonging to the estate, no longer working but with disused buildings, tips and tramways in and around the valley of the Maesgwm. The traces of this activity now form part of the foreground of the main view.

Near the north-west edge of the park, along the edge of the valley of the Croesor, and running the full length of the park, is the route of a disused tramway and incline which served Croesor quarry, higher up the valley to the north-east. The drum house at the top of the incline is a conspicuous feature, and was converted by Clough Williams-Ellis, after he acquired the property, into a summer house. He also planted a row of oaks along the incline.

There is a mine adit and traces of other small quarrying experiments north-east of the house, in the wooded area north of the old drive. The surrounding area is full of the signs of quarrying activity, and particulars of sale of 1932 also mention copper deposits in the park, although these do not seem to have been exploited.

An interesting feature which does not appear to be connected with this industrial phase, but to pre-date it, is a track which runs close to the Maesgwm stream along the south-east edge of the park. This is hard-surfaced and well made, and climbs at an even gradient, passing close to the garden enclosures, crossing the old drive and meeting the new drive not far from the present gate. It cannot be traced beyond the park to the north, but to the south-west the line can be followed down to the old coastline. The waste tips and tramway of Parc quarry overlie it in the southern corner of the park.

The gardens lie on the north-western slope of the Afon Maesgwm valley, below and to the north-east of the houses. There seems little doubt that the main gardens were laid out during the seventeenth century, and it is likely that the present small vegetable garden, probably the oldest

surviving garden on the site, belongs to the latter part of the sixteenth century, being associated with the first house of about 1550. It is, however, also possible that this garden relates to the later rebuilding of this house.

Approaching the houses via the old drive, one would pass through the main garden areas after passing the gatehouse and before reaching the houses. The old drive survives as a hard-surfaced track, but once within the gatehouse its route has clearly been changed, and the old route is uncertain.

The main terraces descend the hill to the south-east of the drive, and there are some smaller terraces, bounded by grass banks, above the drive to the north-west. There may even have been some garden terraces on this side beyond the gatehouse, to the north-east, although these must be of a later date if the park was, as has been suggested, smaller in the seventeenth century than at present. Originally, one would have entered park and garden simultaneously, at the gatehouse.

The three massive, walled, garden terraces represent no mean feat of engineering and construction. They are high and relatively narrow, retained by massively-built dry-stone walls. They were described in 'The County Families of Merionethshire', quoted in the particulars of sale of 1932, as '...four terraces, 150 feet long by 50 feet wide, supported by walls 12 feet high'. (The fourth terrace was probably the small enclosed garden, although its dimensions are quite different.) The walls enclosing the ends of these terraces, being free-standing, are more tumbledown, but probably contemporary. A small lean-to shed against the top terrace wall near the gatehouse has been built of stone gleaned from the wall at the north-east end of the terraces. Towards the southern end of the middle wall is a ruined small, square structure, possibly a tower base.

From the available historical evidence it is most likely that the dynamic person responsible for the terraces was William Lewis Anwyl, who may well have had knowledge of contemporary terraced Italianate gardens. The curious position of the terraces, on the steep slope to the north-east of the houses and bearing no relation to them, suggests that they may have been made to accompany a grand house, never built, at their head.

As the gardens now are, it is impossible to assess what features may once have been present, although tower footings offer a tantalising hint, but it seems likely that later attempts at gardening on the site have been fairly superficial, and much information may remain to be discovered through detailed survey and perhaps excavation.

There are signs of at least two rougher terraces across the slopes below the later houses, and the whole area is enclosed within a wall. So too is a long, narrow, now distinctly boggy strip running along below both this area and the main terraces, filling the space between these areas and the engineered track which runs alongside the river. This walling may suggest that the enclosed areas were once also part of the gardens, but their status and layout can now only be guessed at.

Other garden areas include the two walled areas mentioned, of which the upper at least may always have been woodland, providing shelter for the houses. South-west of the latest house is another, sloping, area, which may have been an original garden area; that it was at a later date, at least, is indicated by the presence of one or two surviving box bushes. Beyond this is a large, square walled garden, probably later in date than the terraces, which seems at one time to have been a flower and/or vegetable garden, but has now been returned to agricultural use. This is the only part of the gardens which is laid out on level, agriculturally useful, ground above the lip of the river valley.

The bard Huw Machno, in celebrating the life of the recently deceased William Lewis Anwyl in the 1640s, mentions gardens, orchards, walls, parks and 'fair towers'. Gardens, walls, and the park are all still clearly to be seen, and the 'fair towers' may well be represented by two small building stubs, one on the terraces and one at the corner of the earliest small garden. If so, these are certainly unusual and remarkable features. The location of the orchards, unfortunately, can now only be guessed at.

The houses are surrounded by courtyards which now contain a few trees, but were originally undoubtedly functional areas and not intended to be part of the gardens. Nevertheless, they now contribute much to the setting of the houses, especially the main courtyard in front of the latest house in which there is a small pool supplied by a spring on the north-west side. This has a shallow square basin with slate steps and seating around it. Latterly the well was known as 'the laundry', and it may be that the current arrangement of slab seating was constructed with this use in mind. The courtyard slopes gently from north-west to south-east, and the basin is terraced slightly on the south-east, the water being piped away under the courtyard from this side and reappearing in a second basin below the south-east wall of the courtyard. This lower basin was constructed in the 1930s.

None of the garden areas are currently in use as such, except the small, probably earliest, walled garden, which is used as a vegetable plot by the tenant of the gatehouse. The rest are overgrown to a greater or lesser extent, except the large walled garden, which is in agricultural use.

The kitchen garden has a clear relationship with the first house, which it was opposite, with a small yard area between. It is highly probable therefore that this garden dates at least from the seventeenth century, and as the house was probably built around the middle of the sixteenth, it may be earlier still. Local folklore suggests that it was the site of a sixth-century church, but there is no evidence for this, and if it does pre-date the first post-medieval house, it is more likely to be associated with one of the three probable medieval houses whose remains lie nearby.

The garden is small, about 25 m by 12 m, and is terraced out at the top of the steep part of the Maesgwm valley, walled all round. The north-west wall, nearest the top of the slope, consists of a retaining wall up to 2 m high (at the north-east end), with a free-standing wall on top which is a little over 1 m high on average. This upper wall is built of a mixture of flattish slate and more rounded stones, and the top course consists of a decorative finish of matched stones. It

was very probably built or rebuilt at the same time as the courtyard wall, possibly in the nineteenth century, and the retaining wall below may have been all or partially rebuilt at this time too, as it shows some similar work. The northern third of the free-standing wall has probably been rebuilt again more recently - there is a distinct join, and the material to the north of it is nearly all slate.

Towards the south-west end of the free-standing wall is an entrance, through a doorway in the wall with a slate lintel over and a couple of courses of walling, including the decorative top course, above that. As the wall is not much more than 1 m high, the entrance-way has been excavated into the ground and is very steep, with some rough steps at the bottom. It is noticeable that at this point the free-standing wall is not directly on top of the terracing wall, which is lower at this end, but set slightly back.

This entrance is clearly not original, though the damage caused by its use may have destroyed or masked the remains of the original entrance, as there is no other obvious route. Near the other end of the free-standing wall, however, is a narrow gap which now contains a little iron gate; this would probably have been nearer the door of the sixteenth-century house, and may mark the place where a descent into the garden was originally made, perhaps using wooden steps or a ladder. As the main doorway was obviously made when the wall was built or rebuilt, relatively recently, and this gap is in the still more recent part of the wall, there seems little point in making it unless it was to retain an earlier feature.

The other walls, more massively built and with little slate, are presumably all more or less original, although the central section of the south-east wall has been lowered at some time, probably to allow appreciation of the view. In the part of this wall which remains to the original height, at either end, there is a small window opening, and it seems likely that these occurred all the way along, offering glimpses of the view.

The end walls each have a little niche, possibly bee boles, the one on the south-west now containing a water tap and small stone trough, and on the far side of the south-west wall is the base of a structure which may perhaps have been a tower of some sort (one of the 'fair towers' mentioned in William Lewis Anwyl's *cynwydd*, perhaps). It was used by Clough Williams-Ellis as the base for the garage he built in the courtyard, and the remains of the upper storey were removed and the stairs filled in. There is now no sign of a similar tower at the northern end, but another possible origin for the two niches in the walls is as windows lighting the lower levels of the towers. In the south corner is a tiny stone lean-to building or shed, with a doorway through from the garden.

This garden is the only part of the grounds now in cultivation, and is used as a vegetable garden by the tenant of the gatehouse. There is a mulberry tree (of no great age) in the east corner but no other permanent planting. The designation 'kitchen garden' is therefore a modern one.

South of the farm buildings and touching them at the corner is a walled enclosure about 40 m square which is grassed and contains sheep pens in its south corner. These are themselves of interest, being built of slate fencing and partly slate-floored, but are almost certainly a later

addition to the enclosure, which probably started life as a garden. It is difficult to date this garden, the wall of which is similar in style to several others on the site and has in any case probably been rebuilt to some extent. It is likely to be contemporary with or later than the terraces, perhaps replacing the small walled garden if this had been functioning as a utilitarian plot and then became part of the ornamental scheme. The only clue to the internal layout is some slight bumps which may represent former beds; if so, they were fairly small, rectangular, and ran north-west to south-east. The surrounding wall is dry-stone, high (about 1.5 m) and well built, using some shaped stone. The entrance is on the north-east, across another enclosure from the latest house, and not directly accessible from the farm buildings or from the park.

Sources

Primary

Information from Mr R. Haslam

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Sites and Monuments Record (PRNs 4737 and 4742)

Sale Catalogue (1932), County Archives, Dolgellau Z/F/60

Secondary

Hemp, W. J., and Gresham, C., Park, Llanfrothen, and the Unit System, in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* (1942), pp 98-112

Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments, *Inventory of the County of Merioneth* (1917), p. 121