

MELLINGTON HALL

Ref No	PGW (Po) 28 (POW)
OS Map	137
Grid Ref	SO 258923
Former County	Powys
Unitary Authority	Powys
District	Montgomeryshire
Community Council	Churchstoke
Designations	Listed Building: House Grade II Scheduled Ancient Monument: Offa's Dyke, Mellington Hall Section 17/1761/MG039(POW).
Site Evaluation	Grade II
Primary reasons for grading	Interesting late nineteenth-century house and formal terraced gardens set in small park on site of at least two earlier houses, one dating from about <u>c.</u> 1600.
Type of Site	House and formal gardens set in small park with lake and avenue.
Main Phases of Construction	<u>c.</u> 1600, <u>c.</u> 1860, <u>c.</u> 1870

SITE DESCRIPTION

Mellington Hall is set on level ground, facing north-east and east, looking out over the surrounding park and farmland to which it is connected by a series of garden terraces on the north-east side. The house is enclosed by a sparse woodland on the north. The present house is a rather plain late Victorian Gothic block, built in stone. It sits heavily on the landscape and looks larger than its two storeys as octagonal towers stand on the north-east and south-east corners. All of the windows, and the house dressings, are in a yellow sandstone, with the exception of a moulded string course which is the same red/grey colour as the house. On the ground floor, the principal rooms of the house lie on the east side. Large, high bay windows, which are embellished with ornamental parapets, light these rooms. On the north front there is a recessed bay containing a large, panelled wooden door. A flight of stone steps, lined with a stone balustrade, connects this door with a forecourt area below. Above the door there is a stone tympanum which is decorated with a carved coat of arms and the date 1876. A simpler two-storey service range abuts the house on the north side. This range continues to a gate

tower, about 30m to the north. The house is roofed in slate with central stone stacks. The service and stable area lie directly behind it to the north-west and the combination of these buildings provides a varied roof line.

The house is dated 1866 but it is believed that it was finished slightly later. It was built for a Mr Wright, who had made a fortune in import trade in Liverpool and was designed by Evan Powell, an architect from Welshpool. According to sale particulars of 1872 the porch was originally located in the north-east corner tower and relocated to the north front in about 1876. This was at least the third house built on the site. Mellington Hall had been in hands of the Brownes, an important border family, since at least 1600. The history of the site prior to this is unclear. The Brownes built a brick, or partially brick, mansion to the south-east of the present house. A small fragment of this house still stands and it is surrounded by traces of what could be ornamental grounds. The appearance of this house is unknown. In the early nineteenth-century Col. Browne built a second house to the north-west of the old hall on the site of the present house, which was noted by Samuel Lewis. Bills for fixtures and materials, including orders for Kilkenny marble fire grates survive from 1806. According to map evidence, by 1842 the new house, and associated ancillary buildings, were complete and the original house, although marked, had been demolished, quarried or burnt down. The appearance of this new house is also unknown. From at least 1842 the family no longer lived at Mellington Hall, but rented it. The tenant in 1842 was a John Russell. It is unclear when the family moved out, or where they moved to. In about 1860 they are believed to have remodelled the house just prior to its sale to Mr Wright. In 1902 the house, gardens and wider estate were sold, possibly to a Mr Pugh. The whole was advertised as a sporting estate and, in total, extended to more than 13,000 acres. After the Second World War the estate is believed to have been substantially reduced in size. The house and park remained private until the late 1960s when they were sold again, resulting in the creation of the caravan sites. The house has operated as a hotel for at least 15 years.

Abutting the house on the north-west there is a extensive service/stable area, dating to c. 1876, which creates an overall L-shape to the house and ancillary buildings. This area was reached by a service drive which ran to the north of the house, running along the north side of the service range, having passed underneath a large Gothic tower/bridge which abuts the north end of the staff range of the house. The tower has three storeys and a castellated parapet which encloses a foot bridge that connects with a wood and park to the north. On the north-west corner of the tower there is a stair turret and on the first floor north face there is an ornate oriel window. To the south of the hall, on the west, there is a large stable court in a similar style to the house. Stables and carriage house still appear to surround the cobbled yard, but some of this area has been converted into accommodation and the yard is now used for parking. The yard is enclosed on its east side by a high capped stone wall which stops at the site of a gateway, to the west of the house, in which there are no longer any gates. On the north of the gateway what appears to be a Gothic-style chapel projects from the east wall into the yard by about 15m, in effect creating two smaller courtyards. Two flights of ten wide dressed stone steps connect a wide door on the east of this building with the garden area below. The building contains a deep pool which dates from at least 1900 which was used for exercising horses. It is no longer in use. A second wide carriage entrance enters the service/stable court about 15m to the south of the tower/ bridge. This entrance contains wooden gates but they are locked up.

This is the second set of ancillary buildings to have been constructed in this area. A map included in sale particulars of 1872 shows two separate right-angle ranges to the west and south-west of the house on the periphery of an irregularly shaped yard. These buildings contained stables and carriage houses and were built for the Brownes in the early nineteenth century when they built the new house. A small plantation is also recorded on the north side of the buildings, separating them from the approach to the house. It is unclear when these buildings were demolished, but the present service area is believed to date from the time of Mr Wright, designed by Evan Powell.

The park at Mellington Hall lies mainly to the north-west of the house. It is relatively small in size, extending to about 100 acres. It is surrounded by farmland, divided up by hedges which probably date from the time of the Enclosures. This gives the impression that the park has contracted over the years. The main area of the present park lies on either side of the main north drive in a linear strip of approximately one field's depth. On the west the park is bisected by Offa's Dyke and this monument separates the open park from its main plantation; Mellington Wood. The dyke is clearly visible throughout this section of the park. Mellington Wood merges into a boundary wood to the north of the house, which hides it from the drive. The wood is bisected by the drive; a second block stands to the north-east. In the open northern park some particularly old oak trees have survived. To the north-east of the house open parkland descends a gentle ground slope to the north-east. There is no obvious evidence to suggest that landscaping took place in either the north or north-east park. About 200m from the north-east garden boundary there is a large, and now partly overgrown, lake. A young belt of poplars encloses the lake around its north and west sides. To the east of the house and garden there is a third large area of land which extends east to a natural stream boundary and appears to contain relict parkland planting. An avenue ran through the centre of this area, from north to south, and this has recently been replanted.

The park and farmland is set within a bend in the B 4385. The main drive enters the site from the north, at a small cross roads. An entrance, dating from at least 1870, leads the drive south underneath an ornate Gothic gatehouse. Due to the present use of the grounds of the Hall as a caravan site a new wider and more substantial entrance has recently been created about 100m to the east of the gatehouse. This new drive intersects the older drive about 70m along its length. On a triangular piece of land between the two drives there is a small, old brick cottage which has been renovated. The drive proceeds to the south-east, across the park, for about 1 1/2 km before reaching the garden boundary which is defined by a Victorian ornamental stone gateway set in the boundary woodland. Just to the west of the drive at this point there is a group of very large stones, lying on the ground which may be the remains of an ancient field monument or rocks extracted from the actual dyke. At the garden gates a rough farm track leads around the garden boundary to the north-east towards the lake. A circular planting of poplar stands to the west of this track in the north park. The track passes to the east of the lake before heading to the west, where it leaves the site to the south of Shirley lodge, which stands about 1 km south of the B 4385 on the road to Cwm. From the north-east corner of the lake the land loses its park character and becomes a farmland.

The park of Mellington Hall was created across the ancient monument of Offa's Dyke and it continued to retain historical associations with the feature until at least 1842 when the north-

west park, adjacent to the dyke, was known as 'Camp Close'. A map of 1872 suggests that trees were planted along each side of the park to create the appearance of an avenue. The early history of the park is, however, unclear. It is known that the Browne family had established a house here by about 1600 and it is therefore possible that they also laid out an enclosure or park, but no reference to one has been found. An avenue, which has recently been replanted in the east park, is traditionally associated with the old house and is clearly marked approaching the site of the house on a map of 1872. The earliest known record of the site is a tithe map of 1842 which records the new Browne house, on the site of the present house and 'Welling's house' on the site of the old house. The map also records the present drive and track, the lake, the avenue, the lodge and the park much in its present form. It appears from this map that the orientation of the site changed after 1872, the north drive becoming more of a service drive and the present track the principal drive, which entered the site off the road from the local town of Church Stoke. According to the map of 1872 the later gatehouse replaced 'Three Jacks and the Smiths Shop' which stood on either side of the track/drive, the Smithy becoming the present cottage. Even on the tithe of 1842 the area to the east of the houses is not marked as 'park' despite it containing a marked avenue. Also, a track, instead of a drive, was marked along the line of the avenue at this time showing that the possible use of the avenue as a formal approach had already changed. The track survives today as an informal footpath. Interestingly, in the eastern area, to the north of the site of the old house, there are what appear to be earthworks, or terraces, which extend out into the pasture area for about 20m, in this otherwise level area of landscape. These could be the remains of a garden, or simple landscaping, associated with the old house. About 40m to the west of these undulations a level rectangular feature extends out from the garden into the pasture, standing about 1m above the level of the surrounding land. This is the site of a tennis court which was constructed in about 1920. These features, particularly the tennis court, illustrate that the land to the east of the house, over which it had clear views, did have an ornamental, as well as practical purpose, even though it was not officially recognised as park. The area of park between the north-east front of the house and the lake also appears to have had a dual purpose. In 1842 this area was recorded as 'meadows, known as the lawns'. They are separated from the garden proper by a stone ha-ha. The park appears to have survived more or less intact from at least 1888 when the only notable addition to the maps of 1842 and 1872 was an ice-house on the north-east of the lake.

In the early nineteenth century planting in the park probably still included a large percentage of ancient woodland. Bills, included in the house expenses of 1806, and individual timber sale bills of the same year, survive which record several large timber sales; '72 oak, 38 oak pollards, 185 and 119 ash', held by the Brownes in Montgomery, possibly to finance the building of the new house. However it appears that the family proceeded to lay out other plantations, possibly incorporating existing woodland as plantations marked on the tithe map of 1842 survive on a map of 1872 and on the Ordnance Survey map of 1888. The form of these plantations survives but oak and ash have been largely replanted with poplar or larch. New planting has occurred within the northern park area within the past 15 years.

The gardens of Mellington Hall lie to the north-east, east, south-east and south of the house. They are divided into three main areas with an additional area to the far south, that was a large orchard, but has since been integrated into the garden. Immediately to the north-east, east and south of the house there are formal terraced gardens. Further to the south the gardens

become more characteristic of wooded pleasure grounds. In the south-east the gardens are more heavily wooded and surround the site of the old house and the walled kitchen garden.

The north drive enters the garden area to the north of the house through a set of stone gates set in a boundary fence. Inside this fence ornamental woodland stretches to the east, out into the park, and to the west, merging into a denser woodland to the north of the stable and service block. This woodland has a thick shrub layer of laurel. The drive approaches the house on the north-east, a branch splitting off to the west, entering the stable area underneath the gate tower. On the north-east front of the house a narrow, steep grass bank runs along the house on either side of the entrance steps, down on to a narrow strip of lawn. Beyond this lawn the drive widens out into a rectangular forecourt which is about 10m wide. This runs the length of the north-east front before continuing along the east front as a drive. To the north-east of the forecourt there is another level strip of lawn which continues for about 6m before sharply sloping down to a stone balustrade/wall which is about 20m long. A double set of wide stone steps descends from each end of this balustrade on to a second level, from where a third set of steps leads down on to two irregular grass terraces.

The terraces descend the hill side for about 4m concluding above a dry-stone ha-ha which stands about 1m above the level of the park beyond. On the north-east side of the ha-ha a strip of ornamental wood, enclosed by nineteenth-century iron fencing, stretches out into the park land by about another 10m, balancing the woodland on the north. On the east of the house a central set of steps descends from a central French window on to the drive. Opposite these steps a further two sets of four and ten steps respectively connect with a large, rectangular sunken grass terrace. A second set of identical steps lies about 30m to the south, along the terrace. Between the north-east and east terraces there is a dense area of shrubbery. In the north-east corner of the east terrace a set of sixteen modern concrete steps leads down into a small rectangular enclosure surrounded by overgrown yew. A bank of shrubbery beyond connects this to the north park and east pasture. A path, backed by clumps of rhododendrons connects the concrete steps to a set of three dressed stone steps at the south-east end of the east terrace. These steps lead into a short serpentine walk, between overgrown rhododendrons, which opens, after about 10m, into the southern garden. About 6m to the east of this path there is a large timber shower/toilet block set beneath a particularly fine beech tree. The shower block overlooks the site of a tennis court in the east pasture.

To the east, on the south of the house, there is a large, rectangular level grass terrace covering approximately one acre. The drive continues around the east side of the house and runs along the east of this terrace on a terrace between the south and east areas. The south terrace stands about 1m above the drive. At the south-east end of the terrace a set of stone steps connects with the drive. The drive continues on in to the southern area of the garden as an informal, unsurfaced line but a short branch heads back to the west to meet the service drive on the south of the south terrace. Both the east and south terraces are enclosed along their east and south sides by low stone capped walls. The service drive, which ran to the north-west of the stables, loops back around to approach the house on east, between the stables and the south terrace. On the south face of the house, at the northern end of the south terrace, there are the footings of a conservatory.

The southern areas of the garden are now used as static and visiting caravan sites. The static

caravans are based in the south-west, on the site of an old orchard, and in a semi-circular area of about two acres taken out of the south-east of Mellington Wood. Visiting caravans use the area south of the south terrace. Rough metalled tracks run through these areas and small private areas of garden and hard standing have often been made around the static caravans. No obvious signs of any paths remain but there are some small sets of broken up or abandoned stone steps in the southern area. A continuation of the service drive runs on south and then south-east from the stables towards the kitchen garden. A path line leads from the south-east corner of the south terrace towards the site of the old house which is set on an overgrown terrace overlooking the east pasture. Lower earthwork terraces appear to extend beyond the house site into the east pasture. The path crosses a small stream over an elaborate Victorian ornamental bridge. To the north of the bridge there is a medium sized pool and to the south a long dried out and overgrown channel containing water features. The service drive, which connects the house with the kitchen garden, crosses over this stream channel over a second ornamental bridge about 30m to the south. A small, partly coppiced lime and beech wood stands between the stream and the site of the old house. To the north of the stables, set in the woodland, there is a derelict kennels or fowl house.

The early history of the present garden site at Mellington Hall is unclear. It is likely that no ornamental grounds were laid out to the north and west of the old house until a new house was built in the early 1800s. In 1872 the area around the old house included a kennel block and the keeper's cottage. The later watergarden was also described as 'fishponds' which could well have been associated with the original house. The general layout of the present garden, including the ha-ha and shelter belts, was recorded on a tithe of 1842 when it was described as 'house and shrubbery, gardens' and is believed to have been implemented in about 1806. In 1872 the grounds of the Browne's house were recorded in sale particulars which included sketches showing the east front. At that time the grounds appears to have been simple, with lawns to the north and east, including a croquet lawn to the south of the house, and steep grass banks running down to the east garden boundary which was marked by a wooden palisade fence. The surviving garden features, including the balustrade, steps and terracing are all marked on the 1888 Ordnance Survey map and are believed to date from about 1872, following the purchase of the site by Mr Wright. On the 1888 Ordnance Survey map the south part of the garden appeared to be laid out as a series of serpentine woodland walks. In 1902, a sale catalogue described the gardens as having a 'delightful character' and containing 'terraced and serpentine walks, shrubberies, banks of rhododendrons' and 'level and sloping lawns'. Interestingly, the remains of the old house were included as a 'garden feature', the kennels having been relocated to the west of the stable block. It is unknown if any landscape or garden designer of repute worked on the grounds. The grounds have generally deteriorated since at least the end of the Second World War. In consideration of their subsequent history it is perhaps surprising how much does survive. Photographs included in the sale catalogue record no parterre or cut flower beds in the vicinity of the house and very little architectural ornament. The appearance of the earlier, Victorian garden is also unknown beyond map evidence.

The walled kitchen garden at Mellington Hall lies about 1/2km south-east of the house to the south of a service drive. It stands on a level piece of ground, is rectangular and covers about 1 1/2 acres. Four red brick walls, with stone capping, surround it. The walls are intact but deteriorating. A door enters the area from an adjacent service area on the centre-west of the north wall. Service doors also lead into the garden near the northern end of the west and east

walls. At the mid-point of the south wall a wider gateway, ornamented with brickwork, leads into the garden. Doors, or gates, remain in all of these entrances but the doors are rotted or blocked up with timber planks. The centre of the garden is lost beneath a thick covering of rough grass. Broken bits of stone edging and path surface remain and it is possible to work out that there was once a cruciform path structure. In the centre of the garden there is a small circular stone feature, possibly a pool, which has been filled in. To the west of this feature, along the side of a the line of a path, there are three overgrown standard gooseberry bushes.

Along most of the south face of the north wall there is a magnificent, but derelict, vine house. It is held together by ivy and overgrown figs. Some of the glass, and all of the ironwork, precariously survives in place. About 12m to the east of the centre of the garden there is a derelict free-standing, single-aisled greenhouse, facing west/east, which is about 10m long and 3m wide. It has a brick base and contains heating pipes. The roof has collapsed but it still contains some glass. Behind this greenhouse, on the same line, there is a line of three sunk glass-roofed pits which are the same size. The centre pit has a double aisle. All contain heating pipes. Like the greenhouse all of the roofs have collapsed. The pits all back on to a narrow brick stoke hole on which a chimney still partially stands. A door on the north leads down to where the boiler was. It is not known whether this is still in place. To the rear of the pits, and joined on to the stoking area, there is a fourth pit on a north/south alignment which is about 12m long. No roof structure remains on this pit but the surviving iron roof tresses lie in the grass nearby. On the south-west corner of this pit there is a large iron water tank. A few overgrown trained fruit trees survive on the internal faces of the south, west and north walls. These trees appear to be apples, plums and one cherry. The door to the west of the vine house opens on to a narrow flight of five stone steps which descends into a narrow enclosed service yard to the garden at its eastern end.

The entire service area is consists of red brick single-storey lean-to buildings with slate roofs. A 4m high wall at the eastern end contains a pair of cart gates which are now partially blocked up. All of the buildings in this area are in a state of collapse. On the north of the north-west garden wall the buildings appear to be, from east to west; a compost pit, a potting shed, a possible root shed and two stables, which still contain their cobbled floors and mangers. On the north side, from west to east, there is a mess room, or journeymen's accommodation, two work shops or potting sheds, a seed room or office, which still contains a table and seed shelves, a bothy, a possible packing room or alternate potting shed and a second mess room or journeymen's quarters. Both of the mess rooms/journeymen's quarters contain small fire places with tiled surrounds. The central bothy contains a rudimentary cooking range. Rough quarry tiled floors have survived in these rooms. The centre of the yard was overgrown but a hard core, or cobbled, surface was apparent beneath the weeds and grass. Entrance into the garden was obtained through a side door on the northern wall of the service yard which opened on to a service track. The head gardener lived across the track in a small red brick cottage.

From map evidence there was 'a garden' on this site, and within the surviving boundaries of the kitchen garden, in 1842. It is, however, believed that the surviving kitchen garden probably dates from the latter part of the nineteenth century, probably from the tenure of Mr Wright as no walled garden is marked here, or described, in the sale particulars of 1872. Instead a large orchard, which extended to the west, was recorded. In a sale catalogue of

1902 the 'capital walled kitchen garden' was recorded as containing three glasshouses, a lean-to vinery '100ft long', a pair of 'three-light cucumber frames', furnaces and stoke holes. Productive internal fruit trees and an 'adequate' supply of water were also advertised. At this time the site was sold as a sporting estate and so the potential buyers would have been considered to have been wealthy enough to have maintained this area. It is unclear how many gardeners Mellington Hall employed at the turn of this century but it is likely, in comparison with other similar sized estates, that it could have been as many as a dozen. It is presumed that the garden has gradually deteriorated, it is certainly very unusual to find so much left, even though it is in a poor condition.

To the south of the walled kitchen garden there is a large rectangular field which has a small water tank in its south-east corner. This was a large orchard. It was recorded in 1872 and 1888 and probably dates back to 1842. However, nothing remains, the area has been left as rough grass.

A second area of orchard lay to the north-west of this area. This was also an orchard area, marked on a sale map of 1872, and it still contains a few trees. However, although the second orchard was included with the kitchen garden in the 1902 sale catalogue due to its subsequent change of use to a caravan park and integration into the south garden, it was considered appropriate to include it in the main garden section.

Sources

- Primary**
- The Mellington Papers, 1044 - 104, 131, 115. Shropshire Records and Research Centre.
 - Mellington Hall sale particulars, 1872. No. 3691/2, Shropshire Records and Research Centre.
 - 1902 Sale catalogue. National Library of Wales.
 - 1842 tithe map. National Library of Wales.
- Secondary**
- Beamon, S. and Roaf, S., The ice-houses of Great Britain (1990) p. 538
 - Haslam, R., The Buildings of Powys (1979) p. 94
 - Hyde, H. A., Welsh Timber Trees (1946) p. 112
 - Lewis, S., Topographical Dictionary of Wales (1842)