

PLAS TAN-Y-BWLCH

Ref No	PGW (Gd) 19 (GWY)
OS Map	124
Grid Ref	SH 655 406
Former County	Gwynedd
Unitary Authority	Gwynedd
Community Council	Ffestiniog
Designations	Listed buildings: House Grade II, mill, house and kiln Grade II; Snowdonia National Park.

Site Evaluation **Grade II***

Primary reasons for grading The survival more or less intact of a fine mid-Victorian landscaped estate of house, garden, wooded park, valley and estate village, set in the magnificent scenery of the Ffestiniog area of north Wales. From the house and its garden terrace there are outstandingly beautiful views across the landscape, and conversely the house and garden form a conspicuous and picturesque object within it.

Type of Site Mainly informal gardens, terrace with views, woodlands, remains of walled gardens.

Main Phases of Construction Nineteenth century

SITE DESCRIPTION

Plas Tan-y-Bwlch is situated on the north side of the western part of the Vale of Ffestiniog (locally known as the Vale of Maentwrog), part way up the very steep valley side and looking south-eastwards over the Vale, the Afon Dwyryd and the village of Maentwrog, with the mountains of Meirionnydd beyond. The house is built on a relatively narrow terrace, its long axis running with the hillside, south-west to north-east, and there is a narrow courtyard behind with outbuildings against the hillside at the back. There are further courtyards outside, to north-east and south-west, both used as car parks, the former now tarmac-surfaced and the latter with a variety of surfaces including tarmac, slate waste and paving. On the slate paving near the west end of the house, under a nineteenth-century covered way, is a carving of a 38-lb. pike caught in Llyn Mair.

The position, although restricted, does give the house a magnificent view, and the garden front on the south-east, which looks out over the Vale, is therefore the main facade, with a slightly projecting portion at the south-west end, with a stone-mullioned three-storey bay. There is a similar, slightly narrower, bay in the centre of the main part of the house.

The preceding house on the site was probably built by Robert Griffith in about 1748, and may have been the first, the original house having been located elsewhere. Parts of the eighteenth-century house are preserved in the present structure, although it was extensively rebuilt by William Edward Oakeley in the late nineteenth century, and the garden front, with its two bays, and much of the rest of the exterior is of this date. The bays may have been the last addition, as a drawing, thought to be by Oakeley's daughter, Mrs Inge, dated about 1890, shows the garden front plain, although other improvements had already been made.

The Plas is built of dark grey local stone, dressed, in flattish slabs, with sandstone window surrounds and granite quoins, and a slate roof. It has three storeys, and the whole complex of house, arches and outbuildings, except for the stables, is battlemented. From the north-east the rear yard is entered under an archway, with portcullis and doors, and from the south-west through a gateway, with tall, slim pillars topped with stone balls, similar to others near the house. The yard is thus entirely enclosed. Most of the outbuildings are hidden by the house, and those which extend to the south-west are similarly hidden by the handsome stable block, so that despite the awkwardness of the site a neat and coherent appearance is presented. This was particularly important in view of the fact that, in its elevated position, the house is visible for miles around.

It is interesting to note that Plas Tan-y-Bwlch was one of the first houses in Wales to be lit by electricity.

The stables are set slightly back from the house, immediately to the south-west of it, and, like the house, they face south-east. There is a small yard in front, terraced out over the slope, and with a cobbled strip remaining along the front of the stable building. A mounting block stands nearby.

The stables were single-storey with a loft, which had a large dormer window with a pointed gable in the centre, and a smaller one at either end. There are two pairs of double doors and three single doors in the south-east front, but as the building has now been converted into a two-storey lecture theatre and offices (without raising the roof), the internal layout has been lost except for a few surviving stalls at the north-east end. According to the 1910 particulars of sale, the stables could accommodate 13 horses and two coaches, and had a harness room as well as lofts.

The present stable building is not the original one belonging to the 1748 house, which was to the east, as can be seen from many contemporary illustrations. It was still in this position until at least 1810, but had been moved before the house was rebuilt, as there is a nineteenth-century photograph showing the new stables but the old house. The masonry is similar to the main south-east front of the house and rather different from the rest of the outbuildings, which suggests that the new stables and the rebuilt house might be nearly contemporary, but the tithe map of 1844 shows buildings in the positions of both old and new stable blocks, so this may date the change fairly closely.

The main three-storey block of outbuildings behind the house, built in a slightly

different style of masonry to the main facades of the house and stables, was separate servants' quarters and kitchens. It was in place by 1844 and was later, during the late nineteenth-century rebuilding, linked to the house by a passageway over the arch on the north-east.

In 1910 there was a billiard room amongst the outbuildings to the rear, described as 'matchboarded, with top light, and Two W.C's. in rear.' It was still there in 1962, but there does not now appear to be a matchboarded building.

One of the outbuildings at the rear of the house contained a salt-water swimming pool, which was supplied by sea water brought up on the train and sent down a sluice from the private station above the house to storage tanks above the pool. By 1910 this had a dressing room with bath (hot and cold water) and the pool was probably filled from a stream rather than with sea water as a 'constant soft water supply' is mentioned. The pool is still in existence.

A group of buildings either side of the A487 Porthmadog to Dolgellau road, where it is crossed by the stream coming down from Llyn Mair, included a flour mill, mill house, saw mill and smithy. These stone and slate buildings still stand, constricting the road, and suffering occasional damage as a result. Some of the buildings of the home farm, just to the south-west, have become a pottery and tea rooms.

The laundry was at a surprising distance from the house, alongside the road well over 1 km to the south-west, near the River Dwyryd which presumably supplied the necessary water. The stone-built laundress's cottage still stands, immediately beside, and below, the main road.

There is now very little ornamental parkland within the designated area, and although there were some parkland enclosures below the garden, in a strip along the north-west side of the A487, most of the farmed parkland was always on the far side of the road, to the east. There is a large area of woodland to the north, on the steep slope above the house, which probably originated as natural sessile oak woodland; areas of rough open land within this, at the top of the hill, were known as the 'deer park' in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but have since been largely planted over for commercial forestry.

The park around the house falls roughly into three parts, of which the first two have now amalgamated: the woodland on the steep slope above and behind the house, known as Coed y Plas, the deer park above and to the west of this, and the enclosures to the south and east of the gardens which fan out down the slope below the house. It is a difficult site on which to build a house, let alone create a park and garden, and it is clear that the view must have been the main reason for its selection, the pre-1748 house having been located elsewhere. The sale catalogue of 1910 mentions 'romantic and magnificent scenery', and later devotes a whole paragraph to a detailed description of the view, clearly still regarded as a selling point.

Although references to the estate, under its older name of Bwlch Coed Dyffryn, and to the family which owned it go back to the fifteenth century and earlier, it is

unlikely that there was a house on the present site at an early period, when other considerations would have been more important than the beauty of the view. It is not certain when the first house was built on the hillside site, but there was certainly a house there by the later eighteenth century, when it was painted and drawn by Thomas Pennant, Francis Towne, S H Grimm, J Ingleby and others.

The 'old' house of 1722 must presumably have been built in the first half of the seventeenth century at the latest, in which case it would have been built by one of the Evans family, descendants of Iorwerth ap Adda who was connected with the Welsh princes, and is one of the first people mentioned in connection with the Tan-y-Bwlch estate (under its previous name), in the fifteenth century. A bardic *cywydd* (panegyric) of 1722 describes the house as old but beautiful, with magnificent windows and walls covered with coats of arms; it clearly already had a garden as the bard mentions 'sweet bushes' and 'green foliage', as well as woods and fields. There is a possibility that there was also a vineyard, as the bard calls it 'a house of wines', and there is a field at Maentwrog still called 'Gwinllan' (vineyard). However, this house may have been on a different site, perhaps where the Oakeley Arms now stands, a short distance to the east. The fact that there is a further area of parkland north and east of the Oakeley Arms, and the main area is opposite the hotel, south of the road, may support this suggestion.

The Evans line eventually died out with an imbecile son, and the estate went by marriage to the Griffiths of Bachysaint. By this time an earlier marriage had already increased the estate, bringing among other property land at Rhiwbryfdir which was later to become the most valuable part of the estate - the site of the Oakeley slate quarries. There are references to either rebuilding or new building in the middle of the eighteenth century (in 1748 Robert Griffith was left £100 towards the cost of a house he was then building), and to restoration towards the end of the century, so it is perhaps most likely that the 1748 house was the first on the present site.

Robert Griffith, as mentioned above, was building in 1748, but died aged only 33 in 1750; whether the house was finished or not is unknown, but the first reference to 'Plas Tan-y-Bwlch' is in 1756. Robert's widow Ann certainly lived there, later with her daughter-in-law, Mary, also a widow, and Mary's daughter Margaret, the eventual heiress.

Thomas Pennant, who visited in 1773, wrote of convivial hospitality carried to the lengths of 'a Bacchanalian rout', and the Griffiths seem to have been known for good living and generous hospitality. As Pennant's visit was made during the period when the two widows were in sole control, it seems the liking for good living was not restricted to the men of the family. Mary died young, but Ann lived to the age of 85 and presided over the marriage, in 1789, of her granddaughter Margaret to the Englishman William Oakeley, who then came into possession of the estate.

William Oakeley was from Shropshire; his father was a cleric but the family was by no means impoverished, having lands in Warwickshire as well as Shropshire. William was able to count a Governor of Madras and distinguished churchmen amongst his forebears. He is said to have been able to speak Welsh, but it is more likely that he learned it after marrying a Welsh wife and taking on a Welsh estate; in

any case he arrived on the scene at a time when the Welsh landed gentry were keen to be as English as possible, and seems to have been accepted by his neighbours very readily. He was Deputy Lieutenant for the county by 1793. He immediately began to spend large sums of money on improving the house and estate (the latter probably ran to about 12,000 acres at the time), both perhaps neglected while the widows were in charge, and later directed his energies to draining the Vale and putting embankments alongside the river to control flooding. He rebuilt the church at Maentwrog and was instrumental in other local improvements. William received a gold medal from the Society of Arts in 1797, for his work on the river, and was known as 'Oakeley Fawr' (the Great), from which it is clear that these improvements were well received and the man was well liked.

At the time that he came to the house, the stables were to the east, and he is said to have moved these to the west of the house and either built or enlarged eastwards the long terrace which now runs along the garden front of the house and extends well to the east of it. However, the stables were almost certainly moved after his death, and the terrace cannot have been enlarged before this was done; and on the other hand the terrace seems to have been already in place by 1777, before Oakeley arrived. The numerous illustrations of Plas Tan-y-Bwlch of various dates in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries differ as to whether or not they show this terrace; it seems to have depended more on the taste of the illustrator and the angle of the view than whether or not it was actually present. A view by Francis Towne in 1777 does seem to show it quite clearly, although it seems to be equally clearly absent in certain later views.

William Oakeley was succeeded by his son William Griffith Oakeley, who was only 21 at the time. William Griffith continued his father's work on improving the estate, especially with buildings, in the village as well as the demesne. He spent so much that he was eventually compelled to raise capital by selling some of the further portions of the estate. This was necessary despite the revenues from the slate quarries at Rhiwbrydir, which began to come in in the form of royalties in the 1820s. William Griffith is remembered for having successfully sued Lord Rothschild for trespass on his land when the latter was prospecting, with Crown permission, for slate in the area.

In 1823 William Griffith left Tan-y-Bwlch and went to live in Berkshire, though he returned at intervals to supervise his interests. His nephew, also William, came to live in Maentwrog to act as his agent. William Griffith, who died in 1835, originally intended to leave the Tan-y-Bwlch estate to this William, having no children of his own, but nephew William predeceased him, and he made a new will leaving the estate to his wife Louisa Jane for her lifetime and thereafter to William's son, William Edward, as tenant-for-life, and to his heirs.

William Edward was a child when his father's uncle died, and Louisa Jane returned to Tan-y-Bwlch and ran the estate herself, very ably to begin with. However, she later became rather eccentric and eventually more or less a recluse, making life difficult for William Edward, who could do little without her co-operation. Finally, in 1868, she suddenly left Tan-y-Bwlch without warning. William Edward tried, unsuccessfully, to have her certified insane, but he did

ultimately, in 1869, persuade her to sign over management of the estate to him, although it remained her property until her death nine years later. Louisa Jane clearly valued her view, as she stipulated, when giving permission for Nonconformist chapels to be built in Maentwrog, that they should be invisible from the Plas, and so they are.

William Edward, like his great-uncle, spent heavily on improving the estate, beginning after 1869, when he gained control, but escalating after 1878, when the estate was his own. His improvements included rebuilding the house, and later again rebuilding the church in Maentwrog. It is uncertain how complete the rebuilding of the house was, but William Edward certainly added the large bays on the front and the extension on the south-west, changed the main entrance and built the bridge over the archway on the east side of the house to connect the servants' block and kitchens at the rear of the yard with the main part of the house. This is dated 1886, and was probably one of the last improvements, although the bays may have been added to the house later. If the stables had been moved by William Griffith (or Louisa Jane), he may have re-faced them, as the masonry is remarkably similar to that of the new south-east front of the house.

The artificial lake, Llyn Mair, above the Plas, was made by William Edward, who clearly had a good eye for landscape, by building an embankment across the neck of the narrow valley which divides the hills north-east of the Plas. The lake filled naturally and a most successful feature was thus created with relatively little trouble. It was probably also William Edward who created the deer park and introduced the red and fallow deer, and he so arranged the planting of trees on the slopes opposite the Plas that his and his wife's initials could be seen from the house as a different shade of green.

This expenditure, combined with problems with the quarries, caused money troubles, and the Tan-y-Bwlch estate was first mortgaged and then, including the Plas, put up for sale in 1910, the family having already ceased to live there. It failed to reach its reserve, but some of the farms were sold, and although it was offered for sale again in 1912, William Edward was later able to pay off the worst of his debts and leave the estate to his children. His son, Edward de Clifford, received the Plas and the part of the estate north of the river, while his daughter, Mary Inge, already a widow, inherited the part south of the river, including the village of Maentwrog. She later reunited the estate by inheriting the rest from her daughters, who predeceased her, the eldest having bought the Plas and the northern estate from her uncle, and left it to her sister.

Mrs Inge lived to be 96, eventually leaving the estate to a fairly distant relative, who was forced to sell it in 1962 to pay death duties. The estate was broken up and the Plas and about 100 acres was bought by a businessman who planned to turn it into a country club and holiday apartments, with 40 holiday chalets in the grounds. Luckily only nine of these were built before the estate was sold again, for financial reasons, in 1968, and came into the hands of the Snowdonia National Park.

The site of Plas Tan-y-Bwlch does not lend itself to the laying out of a classical landscaped park and the grounds have therefore probably always consisted mainly of

gardens and woodland, with the parkland mainly on the flat ground to the south-east. A strip of land alongside the road, running from beyond the south-west drive to the north-east lodge along the foot of the gardens, is divided into several enclosures which were grazed, but seem not to have been planted with parkland trees except for a few in the easternmost enclosure. Some of these enclosures are now managed along with the garden, and some young trees have been planted. The only area on this side of the road which still looks like parkland is the triangular enclosure at the extreme north-east, leading up to the main lodge.

The woodland above the house probably originated as natural oak woodland, and was never cleared as the slope is too steep for farming. It was managed by the Oakeleys for timber, using both the native oak and larch and fir planted to supply the quarries. Parts, particularly Coed y Plas, were enhanced by the planting of exotic and other varieties of trees. Trees were also added around the edges of Llyn Mair and in strategic places on the skyline. An area on the flatter land within the loop of the Ffestiniog Railway was made into a deer park, probably in the later nineteenth century; this may always have been relatively rough open ground, or the woodland may have been cleared at this time. It has now mostly been planted over with conifers, deciduous trees remaining in areas which were never cleared. The valley of the stream has several artificial waterfalls, designed to be appreciated from the drive.

By the late eighteenth century it appears that, although the woods were much admired, little had been done in the way of making the park accessible for recreation. The Hon. John Byng, in 1784, remarked that there were 'no walks, or rides, cut in the wood', and on a later visit, in 1793, noted that Oakeley had added 'neither walks, nor improvements', and that the streams were still natural. An illustration of the main waterfall in the stream along the east side of the park, by S H Grimm in 1777, is rather exaggerated but shows that at this time there were indeed no artificial improvements. By 1796, however, perhaps stung by these criticisms, Oakeley had begun to make walks and rides, and part of the existing system may date from this period, although it was much enlarged a century later. Improvements to the stream were probably made when the new drive from the north-east was constructed in the early nineteenth century. By 1838 Thomas Roscoe could write 'Few things can surpass the pleasure of a ramble through the woods which clothe the heights above the Hall, or the splendour of the prospect from the terrace over the vale.'

This period of activity is likely to have made Plas Tan-y-Bwlch one of the houses on which Headlong Hall, the house in Thomas Love Peacock's eponymous satire, was based. The book pokes fun at the contemporary taste for 'improvements' in search of the romantic and the picturesque, and several descriptions are reminiscent of features at Tan-y-Bwlch. Peacock was also concerned by the wholesale alteration of the landscape, as exemplified by William Madocks' draining of the estuary and constructing of the Cob at Porthmadog, and Oakeley Fawr's embankments would again have drawn his attention to Plas Tan-y-Bwlch. He must have known the house in any case as he married a Griffith cousin.

The area above the house, including Coed y Plas and up to Llyn Mair, is now

mainly managed for commercial forestry and public recreation; a very extensive network of paths has been created, based on the old system. The paths are mostly not public rights of way, but are open almost all year round for unrestricted public use. Many of these paths follow old paths and tracks shown on early maps, but others are entirely new. The now disused drive down the valley below Llyn Mair, past the mill pond, is included in the network.

There have been at different times at least four drives, the main approach at present being from the north-east, with the lodge and gates opposite the Oakeley Arms. There is also a later south-west drive, from the Porthmadog direction, passing the kitchen gardens, and a north drive from the road over the pass, which joined the north-east drive near the house. The last is now disused except as a footpath, but the others mentioned are both tarmac-surfaced and in constant use. A track which used to curve across the eastern part of the largest, central field or enclosure below the house, from the home farm, was also once a drive, pre-dating the longer, grander north-east drive. A sketch by Pennant, made in 1793, shows the drive approaching from the east, but unfortunately does not include the beginning of it.

The north-east drive was probably the main approach from the time it was built, although the main entrance of the house was not changed to the north-east side until the later nineteenth century. The west drive post-dates both those from the east, and access to the entrance on the west would have been via the rear courtyard after the terrace was constructed, though before this the drive could have crossed in front of the house. The date of the north-east drive is probably early nineteenth century; the Grimm sketch of the waterfall shows that it did not exist in 1777, and Pennant's 1793 sketch probably shows the drive from the farm. The 2-in. manuscript sketch survey for the 1st edition Ordnance Survey 1-in map, made in 1818-19, shows both the new north-east drive and the farm drive, now joining the new drive part way along, but the final version of this map, published in 1840-41, does not show the farm drive.

The north-east drive is undoubtedly the most scenically effective approach. At the entrance are simple stone gate piers and a wooden gate, flanked by a single-storey stone-built lodge dating to the late 1860s or early 1870s. The drive is hacked out of the rock face, giving dramatic miniature cliffs on the upper side, and looks out over a low wall with slate slab coping to the gardens and the view beyond on the other. There are some magnificent specimen trees on the open side, and woodland with rhododendrons on the overhanging rocks. About half way up the drive crosses the valley of the little stream on a high stone bridge, and there are pretty views up and down the valley, with artificially improved waterfalls. The low parapet wall is the top of a retaining wall supporting the drive along most of its length, which is over 5 m high where the slope is steepest.

The south-west drive is less dramatic, passing the kitchen gardens, and, although it is steep, lacking the cliffs on the upper side. The view is blocked by the trees in the woodland part of the garden. There is semi-natural woodland on the other side. Like the north-east drive, for part of its route it is supported by a high stone retaining wall on the downhill side, of which the top few courses form a parapet. It is not shown on the 1818-19 manuscript map but appears on the published version of 1840-

41.

The north drive comes down from a lodge, now a private house, just below Llyn Mair, and is also a later addition. In the particulars of sale of 1910, however, its lodge was described as the 'second lodge', with the south-west lodge and drive relegated to an afterthought third position. It follows the wooded valley of the small stream, past the mill pond and with good views of the waterfalls on the stream. It rejoins the north-east drive a little nearer the bridge than the house.

There is an extensive network of paths and tracks in the woods, over the area of the former deer park and around Llyn Mair. These link up with other paths going further afield and are mostly well used and fairly well maintained. Many of the paths follow the routes of paths shown on the 2nd edition 25-in. Ordnance Survey map of 1901, although some are new.

The status of the old paths is now unclear. Some of them were undoubtedly functional tracks serving the gamekeeper's cottage in the deer park and used for forestry purposes (as they still are), but others may have been principally recreational walks and rides. A tourist of 1784 (Byng) noted that there were no walks or rides in the woods at that time, but another in 1800 (Skinner) mentioned woodland walks, so it seems that a recreational network was begun at the end of the eighteenth century, by the first William Oakeley. This was undoubtedly much extended by William Edward Oakeley towards the end of the following century, and most of the designed view points probably date from this period, although some may survive from the eighteenth century.

The deer park, which ran to about 218 acres in 1910, is now mostly planted over with commercial conifers, deciduous trees remaining in areas which were wooded even when most of the space was open. The gamekeeper's cottage, in the middle of the area, is now a private house. The earliest references to the deer park are in the later nineteenth century, and it may have been laid out by William Edward Oakeley, who created Llyn Mair; it contained red and fallow deer and 'also some Japanese deer' and covered an area of about 218 acres in 1910. It was walled, with gates for access on the footpaths, but although some of the gates remain the wall has mostly collapsed to a stub. Deer were still present in the 1930s but must have been dispersed when the house was sold, if not before.

The wooded part of the park is based on ancient natural sessile oak woodland, to which decorative trees were added near the Plas and in the valley to the east, near Llyn Mair and where they could be seen to good effect on the skyline. Otherwise the oak woodland, with added softwoods, was managed for timber, and there is no clearly defined edge to the park on the north-west, where the woods extend for some distance. Modern commercial forestry has added greater numbers of utilitarian conifers to several areas of the woodland.

The garden is separated from the former park enclosure on the south-east side by a ha-ha. This is in the direct line of view from the house and terrace, and runs across the bottom of the lawn between the wooded areas on either side. Its presence suggests, as do maps, that the bottom of the lawn was formerly a good deal more

open than it is now - the huge rhododendrons of the 'rhododendron tunnel' (not, apparently, planted until after the turn of the present century) obscure the area of the ha-ha completely, looking from the house.

Llyn Mair was created by William Edward Oakley in the 1880s, mainly it seems as a landscape feature though perhaps also with a view to stocking it with fish. It is certainly mentioned in the particulars of sale of 1910 as a source of trout - 515 rainbow and brown trout had been caught in it the previous year. Llyn Hafod-y-Llyn, north-west of the deer park, is also an artificial lake, probably created chiefly for fishing.

The sixteen-acre Llyn Mair was constructed by building a dam across the top of the little valley running down the east side of the park; the work was carried out under the direction of Mr Roberts, the head gardener. There was a boat house on the south side of the lake, still present in 1962, which has now gone. The 1889 Ordnance Survey map shows a viewpoint near this with a small hexagonal building, but the building had already gone by 1901.

The mill pond was clearly functional, controlling the flow of water to the flour and saw mills below (the latter was served by an aqueduct); and it certainly pre-dates Llyn Mair. However, its position in the little valley on the east edge of the park, which was one of the areas to which ornamental trees were added, and through which the drive from the upper lodge approached the house, made it an obvious choice for treatment as a decorative feature. An ornamental waterfall over the dam was created about the same time as Llyn Mair.

After leaving the mill pond, the stream continues down its little valley in a series of small falls, which can be appreciated from the north and north-east drives. The falls have been artificially improved and controlled. This too may have been done in William Edward's time; but it is perhaps more likely that improvements to the stream had already been made, around the time that the north-east drive and its bridge were constructed. Practical arrangements may also have been altered for aesthetic reasons - a drawing of 1777 shows the beginning of an aqueduct on the east side of the stream, but the aqueduct which later served the sawmill was on the other side.

The Ffestiniog Railway, built to transport slate from the quarries at Blaenau Ffestiniog to the harbour at Porthmadog, passes through the park in a wide loop. It crosses the steep slope immediately above the Plas quite close to the house, and there was a private station serving the house, though with pedestrian access only. This was closed and moved to a new site to the north-east of the house relatively recently. The Act of Parliament permitting construction of the railway was passed in 1832 and it was opened in 1835, partly in response to strikes by the ferrymen on the Afon Dwyryd. William Griffith Oakeley was one of the prime movers in its planning and development.

Much of the railway is on a stone-built supporting wall on the lower side, and when it was built the Oakeleys insisted on a high stone wall alongside the track near the house, to protect their privacy and reduce the noise.

In a drawing by Pennant which seems to be of the Plas from the north-east, but not included in his drawing from the south-east mentioned above, is a small tower on the top of the hill to the north-east of the house, showing above the tops of the trees. A drawing by P E Becker entitled 'A Little Ruin in the Wood of Tan y Bwlch' (1812) shows a tower, probably built as a ruin, in a vaguely classical style. There seems to be little further reference to this and it is not shown on the old 25-in. Ordnance Survey maps, so had presumably already disappeared by the later nineteenth century.

The garden, of about 80 acres, occupies a shallow triangle on the slope below the house, with the long side against the north-east and south-west drives and the front of the house. The truncated point of the triangle meets the road due south of the Plas, but either side there are enclosures, formerly parkland, between the road and the garden.

The slope is generally rather steep, with outcropping rock in many places, and the layout of the garden shows various responses to this topographical problem. The garden front of the house opens on to a long terrace. This is the most significant single feature of the garden, running along the south-east front of the house and extending well beyond it to the north-east. It is broad and gravelled, with a parapet wall a little less than a metre high. At the south-west end there are steps down to a lower extension, and from there to the gravel walk which runs below the terrace. At the north-east end of the house there are gates through a dwarf wall with low, decorative iron fencing, to the courtyard north-east of the house, by the main entrance. Beyond the courtyard entrance there are retaining walls with parapets both sides of the terrace, which is free-standing, but this end of the terrace is currently unsafe and inaccessible.

The view from the terrace over the Vale of Ffestiniog, the village of Maentwrog and the mountains beyond is exceptional, clearly the reason for the choice of site and to a great extent for the building of the terrace. The terrace is supposed to have been built by the first William Oakeley, but it seems to be clearly shown in a view by Francis Towne dated 1777. If this date is correct, the terrace must pre-date the Oakeley era. Confusingly, later views exist which do not show it, but there is a possibility that some are incorrectly dated, and much depends on the angle of the view and the approach of the artist.

William Edward is certainly credited with having extended the terrace eastwards in the 1880s, following removal of the stables, which used to be east of the house, to the west; and this had been done before the house was rebuilt, as can be seen from an undated photograph. This shows apparently established plants against the western part of the terrace wall, but what appear to be large double doors under the eastern part, which is the part at present unstable.

The terrace adjoining the south-west end of the main terrace is wider as well as lower, as the single-storey extension of the house at this end is set further back. It too is gravelled and has a low parapet wall, and a stone-edged border along the back. There are steps down to the south-west at the south-west end and to the south-east at the north-east end, to the gravelled walk under the main terrace.

Below the terraces is a steeply-sloping lawn, crossed by paths and planted with specimen trees and groups of shrubs. At one side of this is a small rockery and water garden on a natural outcrop, and at the other a pond (both twentieth-century features), and beyond these lie wooded areas, amounting on the south-west to a large woodland garden. Over half of the total garden area is now wooded, rather more than indicated on the 2nd edition 25-in map, and the woods too are traversed by a network of paths.

The kitchen gardens lie in the south-western corner of the site, and the open area in the truncated point of the triangle is being partly developed as a new orchard; this area, which is less steep than the woodland above, may always have been utilitarian.

One of the most noticeable features of the garden is the network of paths, laid out to cross the site from side to side and so rarely presenting awkwardly steep stretches. One long flight of steps deals with the climb up the side of a rock outcrop, to a point offering a view over the kitchen gardens. The wooded park has a similar concentration of paths, and although both areas are now open to the public and the paths have been improved and added to in places, by far the greater part of both networks is shown on old maps and is obviously original. There can be no doubt that park and garden were intended to be used for recreation and seen at close quarters; perhaps because from the house the more distant view claims the eye and what can be seen of the park and garden is both limited by the shape of the land and overshadowed by the magnificence of the natural landscape.

The garden contains many fine specimen trees, planted both in the woodland areas and on the open lawn. The older shrubs are for the most part rhododendrons, some now huge specimens, and the varieties have been carefully chosen to give continuity of flowering throughout the season. Thomas Roscoe, writing in 1838, commented on '...magnificent specimens of rhododendron...', at that time already nearly 30 years old and 40 yards in circumference, but he does not say where these were growing.

In the woodland garden, on the lower main path, there is a small viewing platform with a slate floor and diagonal iron railings set in a dressed stone edging. The angle of the railings suggests that they were originally used with a flight of steps. The view is now rather obscured by trees, but there is still an opening, formerly no doubt wider. This feature is not shown on the 1901 map, but is not modern, and may date from the early twentieth century.

There is a small gardeners' hut just below the east corner of the terrace, now almost hidden in vegetation, which is stone-built in gothic style. This was probably built in the 1880s, when the terrace was extended.

There is a small, stone-built derelict building, in existence in 1901, near the gates at the north-eastern end of the garden, beside a path. It is overgrown with shrubs and climbers and its function is now unknown, though it was probably originally a gardeners' building or both of some sort.

There is little information to be found amongst family papers about the garden in

the early nineteenth century, apart from one letter from Louisa Jane Oakeley, the wife of William Griffith, to the then head gardener, William Williams; but it is clear that some planting had taken place under the first two Oakeleys and the gardens had begun to be developed. Roscoe mentions the '...luxuriant growth of plants and trees...' and describes the gardens and plantations as 'tastefully laid out'. Later in the century, however, there are detailed records of gardener's accounts, nursery orders, records of produce, letters about the management of the gardens and so on. This may be due to the vagaries of the preservation of records, but taken with the consistency in the layout of park and garden and in the planting, and with what is known of William Edward Oakeley's activities, it does seem to represent an increased interest in the garden. It is therefore tempting to see the surviving layout of park and garden as being largely his work, undertaken between 1869, when he gained control of the estate, and the beginning of the twentieth century, when he ceased to spend the summers at Tan-y-Bwlch.

William Edward created the artificial lake in the park, Llyn Mair, probably created the deer park and is said to have extended the terrace; he spent so much money that despite his income from the slate quarries he was in severe financial difficulties at times. His great-uncle, from whom he inherited, is likely to have been responsible for some of the improvements to park and garden (the south-west drive, for instance), but it is unlikely that his widowed great-aunt, who remained in control between 1835 and 1869, would have gone to great expense in this cause as she had only a life interest in the estate, being childless. The first William Oakeley may have planned the wooded western part of the garden, and there are a few trees in that area which appear to be too old to have been planted by William Edward, but there are no contemporary records of this.

The evidence tends to suggest, therefore, that the well-preserved garden landscape of today, together with much of the park, is largely the work of one man, undertaken during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. The contribution of the head gardener, John Roberts, should not, however, be overlooked; Roberts may have played a fairly significant part in the developments, as garden records show that he had a particular interest in exotic trees, and he appears to have been a talented and imaginative gardener.

The garden is now managed by a Trust, and maintenance and new planting continues at a steady rate. Some new developments considered to be in keeping, and such as might have been made if the garden had continued in private hands, are planned for the future.

The main kitchen garden has now been cleared and made into a car park. No detail of the internal layout remains, though the walls survive, except on the north-east. Groups of young trees have been planted for shade and the area is surfaced with slate waste. The glasshouses and sheds in the extension have been converted to a dwelling (aptly named 'The Potting Shed').

The main area covers about one and a half acres and used to have two large glasshouses against the rear walls (probably for peaches and vines) and two frames in the south-eastern half. There was a well in the centre. The south-east side is now

bounded by a natural rock outcrop, up which two flights of steps (one stone and one made of railway sleepers, the former not original but certainly older than the latter) lead to join the path network in the woodland garden. It is clear from the old map and photographs, however, that this side too was originally walled.

The north-west side is cut back into the slope (the garden is still not, however, quite level), and the rear wall is a retaining wall, of mortared stone and about 3 m high with a rough stone coping. This has been rebuilt, and the layout here is not as shown on the 1901 25-in. map. A grass bank rises from the top of the wall to the retaining wall of the drive (which has a slate coping, like the other garden walls), whereas on the map there seem to be buildings behind the glasshouse towards the north corner, and, except in this corner, no open space within the drive wall which could correspond with the bank. The present wall is merely retaining infill on the south-east side of the drive wall, which once doubled as the garden wall.

The entrance is in the west corner, as it always was, but has been much enlarged. There is no inner wall here; the drive wall was the garden wall and is over 4 m high. The south-west wall is about 3 m high, sloping, with a slate coping, and the south corner is cut off. The south-east side has a lower wall, which has the remains of the slate coping and was clearly always this height - the height rises across the cut-off corner to the 3 m of the south-west wall. A pile of rubble from the clearing for the car park still lies in the south corner. There is a piece of decorative iron fencing leaning against the north-west wall which was presumably at one time in use in the garden.

The south-western extension is now the garden of 'The Potting Shed'; no glass remains, but there is a row of sheds along the south wall which appears to correspond with some buildings on the old map.

The gardener's cottage is stone-built with a steeply-pitched slate roof; there are also a bay window with stone mullions and a gothic porch. It has a single-storey extension on the north side which was already present at the turn of the current century, and which has a chimney similar to those on the main building; it probably dates from the rebuilding of the 1880s. Despite the 1910 sale details, which mention the gardener's house and separate lodge, it seems likely that this cottage also did duty as a lodge for the rear drive.

The kitchen gardens are shown, fully laid out and with plenty of glass area, on the 2nd edition 25-in. map (1901), and they are described in the magazine article of 1888. How much earlier than this they were created is hard to say, but the area is shown as enclosed and free of trees on the 1818-19 manuscript map, and the gardens were obviously well established by 1888, with a thousand peaches being produced from five trees. The gardener in William Griffith's day was William Williams, as is recorded in a letter from Louisa Jane Oakeley, and in William Edward's time it was John Roberts. The latter was head gardener for many years, but there must have been at least one other incumbent between the two. Roberts had eight gardeners working under him in 1883 and 13 in 1886, and the expenses of the garden were considerable; they were strictly curtailed when financial trouble struck, and Roberts had to manage on a much tighter budget. In 1909, when the Plas was let,

Roberts was still head gardener, and had fallen out with the tenant.

There is an enigmatic area in the truncated southern point of the garden, where a new orchard is currently being created. There is the stump of an old plum tree here, and it is thought to have been an orchard in the past, but was not shown as such on the 2nd edition 25-in. map nor mentioned in the 1888 magazine article or the 1910 sale details.

The area consists of two more or less rectangular plots on ground which slopes to the south-east, but less steeply than much of the rest of the garden; there are tracks top and bottom and one dividing the plots, all running north-east - south-west, and all shown on the old map. There was also a small building beside the top track until recently. An illustration with the 1888 article shows this area quite clearly, but viewed from a distance; the layout appears to have been slightly different, and the building open-fronted. Other views show strips running north - south, up and down the slope rather than across. It was, however, as now, clear of trees and shrubs. If it was used as an orchard it seems it must have been in the twentieth century, and what its function was before that is unknown. A possible suggestion is as a nursery, but it is not named as such on the map; it may equally well have been extra kitchen garden space.

South-west of the new orchard part of the area has been planted with young trees, and a new greenhouse is planned for the area which will be sheltered by these. A shed has already been erected.

Opening on to the central track is a small stone-built structure which has no obvious purpose, but may have been a hide for shooting. It is semi-circular in shape, with the straight side closed by two inward-angled walls with an entrance between them. In one corner is a well. The walls are of dry-stone construction, about 1 m high with a flat coping, and the interior is slightly hollowed. The whole structure measures about 10 m across. The well presumably supplied water for the garden/nursery area, and its inclusion within the feature is odd if it is a shooting hide; the central position also tends to suggest the structure relates to the garden. It may have been intended to provide wind protection for plants standing in pots, or simply for storage.

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