

## LLANLLYR

<b>Ref number</b>	<b>PGW (Dy) 28 (CER)</b>
<b>OS map</b>	146
<b>Grid ref</b>	SN 543 560
<b>Former county</b>	Dyfed
<b>Unitary authority</b>	Ceredigion
<b>Community council</b>	Llanfihangel Ystrad
<b>Designations</b>	Listed building: Llanllyr lodge (Grade II) Scheduled Ancient Monument: Llanllyr inscribed stone (Cd 112)
<b>Site evaluation</b>	<b>Grade II</b>

**Primary reasons for grading** Llanllyr is an ancient site, several phases of whose history are reflected in the layout of the grounds. These include a small park with unusual planting, a rare cob-walled kitchen garden of the early nineteenth century and interesting formal and informal gardens of the 1980s and 1990s laid out and planted by Mr and Mrs Gee within an early nineteenth-century framework.

**Type of site** Landscape park; formal and informal gardens; walled kitchen garden

**Main phases of construction** c. 1830-40; 1980s, 1990s

### Site description

Llanllyr is a substantial house situated on low-lying ground in the Aeron valley, about half a kilometre south of Talsarn. The river Aeron runs westwards between Llanllyr and the village. The house is elongated east-west, with the entrance on the north front and two service wings extending westwards from the main block, enclosing a small cobbled courtyard between them. The house is of rendered stone and brick, with a hipped slate roof, brick chimneys and mullioned and transomed sash windows. The east end of the main block is two-storey, the west end three-storey, although of the same height. The service wings are two-storey but much lower. On the north and south sides of the cobbled court between them are verandas with pent roofs. The entrance on the north front has a projecting pitch-roofed porch. Along the east front is a veranda with a pent slate roof, slender alternating single and double wooden piers and a flagstone floor.

To the west of the house is a north-south range of stables, with a double-doored coach house at the south end. The range is two-storey, of painted and rendered rubble stone. Over the coach house doors is a small dovecote under the pitched roof. Modern garages are built in front of the stables. The stable yard is bounded on the

south by a rubble stone wall 3 m high, with a doorway in it through into the garden. Behind, to the west, are ranges of single-storey and two-storey farm buildings.

The history of settlement at Llanllyr dates back to 1180, when the Lord Rhys ap Gruffydd founded a nunnery here as a daughter house of the Cistercian monastery of Strata Florida. The nunnery stood in the field to the north-west of the farm buildings and there are no remains of it above ground. The nunnery appears always to have been small and in 1536, when it was dissolved there were only about eight nuns in residence. Llanllyr passed to the Lloyd family through the marriage of Joan, daughter of Griffith ap Henry, who occupied the property, to Hugh Llewelyn Lloyd. Hugh's son Morgan (died 1604) became a prominent squire in the late sixteenth century and was High Sheriff of the county four times. It is likely that either Hugh or Morgan converted the nunnery to a house or built one on its site. An estate map of 1768 shows an elongated house with an entrance court on the west and a large formal garden on the east. This may be the house depicted on p. LXXI of Thomas Dineley's *Beaufort Progress* (1684), which has the Lloyd coat of arms beside a two and three-storey Tudor house with a storeyed porch and a barn enclosing one side of the entrance court, as shown on the estate map. Morgan's grand-daughter Bridget married Richard, 2<sup>nd</sup> earl of Carbery, of Golden Grove, Carmarthenshire, who thus became the owner of Llanllyr. He exchanged it for other land with David Parry of St Dogmaels (died 1642). Subsequent owners sank heavily into debt and in 1696 the house was described as decayed and in the hands of a tenant.

Llanllyr was sold in 1720 to John Lewes and it has remained in the family ever since. The present owner are Loveday Gee, being the daughter of Captain J. Hext Lewes, and her son, Matthew Lewes Gee. Mr and Mrs Gee came to Llanllyr in the mid 1980s. During the eighteenth century Llanllyr remained a farmhouse, in the hands of tenants, John Lewes's son having inherited Llysnewydd. In 1826 a subsequent John Lewes ('Waterloo' Lewes, died 1860) was given Llanllyr on his marriage and decided to live here. To that end he demolished the old house, which stood to the north-west of the farmyard, and built most of the present house, in about 1830, using stone from the old house and brick made on the property. A schematic plan of the old house and its surroundings by Colonel John Lewes, John Lewes's son, (*Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 1896), shows another building, used as a stable in 1835, behind it, a graveyard and pavement to the side and an old tower, which he remembered as ruined, just behind the 'old building'. The diagram should probably be orientated with the tower at the north end, giving its position as just to the south of the green lane running west from the lodge. The tower was probably a dovecot. While the old house was being demolished the early medieval inscribed stone, the surviving half of which now stands in the garden, was found. The farm buildings were added slightly later: the date of 1848 is carved into a beam in one of them.

Colonel John Lewes married Mary Jane Griffiths, of Llwyndyrns, in 1858. Her wealth allowed further work on the house and a third storey and the two wings were added in about 1870. At this time the estate extended to 1,300 acres. When Colonel John Lewes died in 1900 half the estate had to be sold to pay death duties and debts. Two subsequent generations of the family lived at Llanllyr.

Llanllyr's small park lies to the north, east and south of the house and gardens. It occupies a rectilinear area of level ground, which drains from south to north and east to west towards a small stream, the Afon Llan-Llyr, which runs north and then north-west along the west side of the park and gardens. The park is bounded on the east by the B4337 road, on the south by a field boundary, on the west by a belt of

deciduous woodland and by the gardens and on the north by a green lane lined with old oak trees and flanked on the north side by a ditch. This was the original access to the medieval monastery.

There are two drives, both off the B4337. The present-day back drive is from a lodge at the north end of the park. The lodge stands on the north side of the entrance and is a small, single-storey, stone house, with a hipped slate roof and central chimney. It has similar windows to the house and has a toll-house appearance. It has a modern extension at the back. Opposite it, the drive is flanked by a curved stone wall. There are no entrance piers or gates. The drive leads southwards to the farm buildings and then turns eastwards to the stable yard and house. The main front drive runs eastwards across the park from a small forecourt on the north side of the house. Near the boundary it turns south-eastwards to a modern entrance on to the road. This last stretch is modern. The original drive continued straight to the road. A track still follows its course, although the entrance is closed. The entrance is flanked by splayed, mortared stone walls about 1.2 m high leading to a pair of wrought-iron gates flanked by square stone piers about 2 m high, with overhanging coping and overgrown ball finials. This entrance arrangement was made in the late 1940s; before that there had been a wooden gate at the entrance.

The park is divided into a few large pasture fields, dotted with some parkland trees. The field to the east of the gardens has some conifers, oaks and unusual Huntingdon elms (*Ulmus x vegeta*). The field to the south has further single Huntingdon elms and there are two oaks and an alder in the field at the south-west end of the park. In the field between the two drives is a single Japanese elm (*Ulmus japonica*). There is a narrow belt of mixed trees and shrubs along the B4337, widening at intervals into more of a clump. The entrance east of the house lies in a small area of woodland dominated by beech and pine. To the south of the east-west drive is a narrow area of trees planted towards the end of the twentieth century and a large, mature pine tree.

Because of the low-lying nature of the ground the drainage system at Llanllyr is complex and most watercourses, including the Afon Llan-Llyr where it runs through the park and garden, are artificial. This explains the peculiar course of the stream in the south part of the park, where the water crosses the park in an east-west ditch, turns a right-angle bend at its west side and then flows north in a straight, canalised channel. Opposite the south end of the garden there was originally a division into two channels, with the stream to the west and mill leat to the east. Now the stream runs in what was the mill leat in a straight artificial channel as far as the garden summerhouse, where it turns north-westwards and runs along the edge of the wooded area to the west of the farm buildings. Behind the summerhouse the stream widens into a boggy area bounded on the north and south sides by stone walls, standing up to 1.5 m high. This was probably a drinking pool for animals; it lies adjacent to the track from the farm to the fields to the south. The mill was probably on the leat's north side, near the north end of the wood. At the south end of the garden the stream originally turned to the west and flowed northwards in a gently curving channel to the edge of the wooded area. Only the north end of this channel still holds water; the remainder can be seen as a dry, sometimes boggy, ditch.

Just outside the south-west corner of the garden, on the edge of the strip of woodland which bounds the west side of the park, is a small, ruined, cob building. It is single-storey, with a sloping roof, now caved in. The back wall, on the west side, is about 2.5 m high and there are side walls but no sign of a front wall. The floor is

cobbled. It is probable that this is a utilitarian building, possibly an animal shelter, and not an ornamental one. It lies next to the track from the farm to the fields to its south. The woodland belt to the south is mostly of oak and ash; further north the belt widens and includes some beech and a few conifers.

The earliest plan of Llanllyr is an estate map of 'Llanlleir Demesne' dated 1768. This shows the old house, to the west-north-west of the present house and farm buildings, a building to the west of its south end, which is probably the mill, and another outbuilding to its north. The approach was along the present green lane. A large formal garden lay to the south-east of the house and this was flanked, to the north and south, by wooded areas. Both the stream and the mill leat are shown on the map, the leat running up to and then along the south side of the formal garden. The area occupied by the park is shown as fields, with no indication of an ornamental layout or planting. The tithe map of about 1830 shows the same layout, just prior to the demolition of the old house and building of the new. By 1886 (1<sup>st</sup> edition 25 in. Ordnance Survey map) the present layout of house, garden and park had been created and it is reasonable to assume that the park, with its two drives and lodge, all shown on the map, was made soon after the new house was built, in about 1830. The 1905 25 in. Ordnance Survey map shows that at that time there were a few more trees dotted about the parkland than there are now but that in all other respects, except the short stretch of new drive, the layout has remained unchanged to this day.

The gardens lie to the east and south of the house. The ground drops slightly to the south, giving the opportunity for some shallow terracing. Drives approach the north front of the house from the east and west and lead to a small forecourt. Old photographs show that there was once a central round bed but this has now gone. To the west of the forecourt is a stone-edged raised bed with a weeping willow and a cypress planted in it. Both beds are shown on the 1905 Ordnance Survey map. Mixed trees and shrubs border the drives and forecourt.

To the east of the house is a lawn bounded by a curving shrub border. The lawn continues around the south side of the house in a sweeping curve. Between the lawn and the house on this side is a slightly higher area bounded by a low stone revetment wall. This area has several different features. First, there is a flagstone terrace next to the south side of the house, in front of which is a semi-circular lawn. Secondly, next to the Victorian block is a circular box parterre consisting of four compartments, with cross and perimeter gravel paths. The compartments are ingeniously laid out and planted so as to form a pun on Mrs Gee's Christian name, Loveday. Thirdly, the western end of this part of the garden is densely planted with a few small ornamental trees and many different shrubs and herbaceous plants. This area, known as the shrubbery, is roughly triangular and lies between the lower lawn, the house and the east wall of the kitchen garden. A winding gravel path leads along its north side through mixed borders to a Gothic arched door in the south wall of the stable yard. Another runs southwards from the door parallel to the kitchen garden wall and a third, which is curving, bounds the shrubbery on its east side. The paths are original, laid out at the time that the garden was first made when the new house was built in about 1830. The shrubbery contains many choice plants, including a *Cornus kousa chinensis*, a tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), a *Parrotia persica*, two *Acer griseum* and camellias.

At the south end of the path along the east wall of the kitchen garden is an L-shaped modern wall, which is rendered with brick facings and an overhanging, pitched, tile top. In an alcove in the south wall is a shallow alcove in which the

Llanllyr inscribed stone has been placed. An arched doorway in the west wall leads through to a long gravel walk, parallel with the south wall of the kitchen garden, leading to a summerhouse. Flanking the walk are wide rose borders containing a great variety of old and modern shrub roses. The south border is backed by a yew hedge planted on a serpentine revetment wall. These form the north side of the water garden to the south. Half way along the main path is a short cross path, with a sundial on the central axis. On the north side the path leads to a Gothic arched doorway, with a wooden door, into the kitchen garden. On the south side the path leads to the water garden. The summerhouse at the west end of the rose borders is a single-storey modern building replacing an original wooden one. Two wide concrete-paved steps lead up to it. It is rendered, with a pitched slate roof, central double door and flanking single doors. There is a side door on the south side and three windows in the back wall. To the north a path leads past the summerhouse to two steps down to an iron gate opening on to a track that runs down the west side of the garden and kitchen garden.

The sunken water garden lies to the south of the rose borders and is parallel to them. It was made in 1989. It consists of a linear lawn with serpentine sides and curved ends, bounded by low concrete walls and yew hedges. The depth of the garden is about 0.8 m. Down the centre of the lawn is a narrow canal lined with concrete. The central cross path of rounded cobbles, which leads from the rose borders, crosses the water garden. Semi-circular steps, with circular top steps, lead down to it at each side and there is a gently humped bridge over the canal. In the centre of each half of the canal is an octagonal pool with a single jet fountain in a small, scallop-edged bowl in the centre. Water enters the garden from a stone lion's mouth into three small stone-lined pools, one above the other, and then drops into the canal. Each concave curve of the serpentine walls has a cast iron down-pipe head fixed to its centre. These come from the house and are alternating Georgian and Victorian (the Georgian ones being more squat and decorated with medallions).

The lower lawn is bounded on its south side by a similar stone revetment wall to that on its upper side and by a narrow border. Towards the east end a flight of four stone steps leads down to an informally planted area of shrubs, a small bog garden and a linear fish pond. The pond is orientated east-west and lies in a slight dip. Its west end is lined with a curving stone wall, in the centre of which is a narrow flight of steps down to the water. Beyond, to the south, is a large rectangular area, bounded by a hedge, which is the old orchard. It is now an area of grass, some fine mature trees, including two large Huntingdon elms (*Ulmus x vegeta*) and walnut trees on the boundary. A single large Irish yew and another sprouting from the base are all that are left of an original row of five, which was probably an early planting in the nineteenth-century garden. Young trees include liquidambers, crab apple and Japanese cherry avenues planted in 1995/96 and sorbus. Near the south boundary is a laburnum arbour planted in 1995. An allegorical labyrinth was laid out on the north side of the area, towards its west end, in 1998/99.

There are three distinct phases of garden making at Llanllyr, of which the first has gone completely. This was the garden attached to the Tudor house on the site of the nunnery, shown in an estate map of 1768. As depicted, it lay to the south-east of the house and was a substantial formal garden of two adjacent walled compartments. That next to the house was rectangular and the smaller of the two, with central and perimeter paths. The second was square, with perimeter paths and cross paths that met in a central circle. The style of this garden would suggest that it was Tudor or

Jacobean and not eighteenth-century. Now its site is a pasture field to the north-west of the farm buildings.

The second phase came with the building of the new house in about 1830 by John 'Waterloo' Lewes. At the same time the small park, the garden and the kitchen garden were made. It is clear from the 1886 and 1905 25 in. Ordnance Survey maps that the nineteenth-century garden occupied the same area as the present-day one and that the paths on either side of the shrubbery and down the rose borders were in place by 1886. The rose border area was bounded by a straight wall, not a serpentine one, and there was no summerhouse at that time. There were lawns in the immediate vicinity of the house; the remainder of the garden was planted with mixed trees and shrubs. The pond was not in existence but was preceded by a culvert taking the small watercourse below the garden.

The third phase began in 1986 and is the work of the present owners, Mrs Loveday Gee being particularly responsible for the design and planting. This layer has been sensitively superimposed on the Georgian structure without removing its essentials. Several stylistic influences can be detected: the Arts and Crafts movement of the Edwardian period; the compartmented gardens of Sissinghurst and Hidcote, with exuberant planting within a formal framework; and the garden designs of Edwin Lutyens, particularly in the water garden. The garden is also a very personal and referential one: knowledge of family names and history is needed to unlock the meaning of certain features and planting.

First, the shrubbery, which was overgrown with *Rhododendron ponticum* and weeds was cleared and replanted. The lawns were terraced with low retaining walls. In 1989 borders north and east of the house were planted and the fishpond and water garden created. The shrub rose borders were planted in 1990 to a design of the author and rose expert Hazel le Rougetel. During the mid 1990s the old orchard area was planted with new trees, a laburnum arbour and lastly, in 1998/99 the labyrinth. Further planting is planned.

The kitchen garden lies to the west of the house. It is five-sided and orientated north-north-east/south-south-west. The garden has very unusual, well preserved, mud, or cob walls, covered for the most part in a thin layer of lime rendering. The walls stand to their full height of about 3.5 m and are topped with pitched, overhanging roofs - a necessary feature to keep the walls as dry as possible. The cob walls are built on low stone footings; the old rendering leaves them uncovered but the modern rendering extends right to the ground. The south wall has stone facing around the central door. It has been re-rendered by the present owners on the outside. The east wall is similar and has also been re-rendered on the outside. The west wall is also similar but the north end, including the entrance on this side, was destroyed in the 1960s to make way for a modern farm building. The north wall is the same height but of mortared rubble stone. It has a similar tiled top to the other walls but parts of this have fallen. A few old pear trees grow against the wall. At the east end is a door into the coach house and stables, the south end of which forms the short fifth side of the garden.

The interior of the kitchen garden is at present partly overgrown, partly productive. Two original north-south paths and part of a central east-west path remain, with old fruit trees flanking them. Some of the fruit trees are espaliered.

The kitchen garden probably dates to about 1830 and was probably built by John 'Waterloo' Lewes at the same time as, or soon after his new house. It is not shown on the 1768 estate map or the tithe map but there is a plan of it dating to 1860.

This shows it in diagrammatic form, with cross and perimeter paths and another north-south path in the east half. Part of this path system remains. The plan indicates the position of fruit trees, including apples, pears, plums, cherries, peaches, apricots and nectarines. There were no glasshouses. The varieties of apples and pears are listed, with their current health and fruiting characteristics.

## Sources

### Primary

Estate map of 'Llanlleir Demesne' 1768: private collection.

Estate map of 'Llanlleir Demesne', n.d.: private collection.

Tithe map, c. 1830: National Library of Wales.

Plan of 'Llanlleir Garden' 1860: private collection.

Letter of 11 November 1895 from Colonel Lewes to Professor John Rhys: private collection.

Letter of 16 November from Colonel Lewes to Professor John Rhys: private collection.

Information from Mr and Mrs R. Gee.

### Secondary

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