

HARTSHEATH

Ref No PGW (C) 21
OS Map 117
Grid Ref SJ 285 603
County Flintshire
District Flintshire

Community Council Leeswood

Designations Listed building: Hartsheath Grade II

Site Evaluation Grade II

Primary reasons for grading

Small nineteenth-century park and terraced and informal garden surviving in their entirety, with unusual feature of sunken servants' walk doubling as a ha-ha.

Type of Site

Landscape park; formal and informal garden

Main Phases of Construction

Nineteenth and twentieth century

SITE DESCRIPTION

Hartsheath is a square stone house of five bays, rock-faced with a coursed rubble service wing and hipped slate roof. In the centre of the entrance front, on the north-west side, is a porch with Doric columns and later glazing. The house was first built for the Lloyd family in 1702, and there were further building phases in 1770 and 1810. The present house is the result of a re-modelling of 1825 for a short-lived mining company. The work was carried out by the architect and actor Charles James Mathews. The Joneses bought the house in an unfinished state in 1829 and the family has owned the property since that time.

The stables consist of a stone built rectangular block with hipped roof blocks at each end, united by a nine-bay Doric colonnade. This re-modelling was carried out by Mathews at the same time as the 1825 re-modelling of the house.

The park lies to the north and north-west of the house. The area is undulating, with a belt of trees concentrated on a low ridge to the north-west of the house. A small lake, now silted up, forms part of the north-eastern boundary. The river Alyn forms the boundary to the south-west. The western part of the park was disparked in c. 1938, and some parts of this area were planted with deciduous trees in 1990.

The present drive runs eastwards from the Pontblyddyn-Wrexham road just to the south of the river Alyn to the gravel sweep on the north-west side of the house. The entrance is flanked by simple square stone piers. The drive was built in about 1825, and the stone bridge carrying it over the river is by Mathews, the architect of the

house. It replaced an earlier drive which ran directly from Keeper's Cottage on the north boundary of the park, then a public road, south-eastwards to the house. The line of this drive was subsequently disrupted by quarrying. In about 1840 a new drive was constructed from a lodge in the north corner of the park. This ran along a ridge to the east of the earlier drive, joining it to the south of the quarry. In the early twentieth century a branch was built from the junction to Park Cottage north of the house. When the drive to its west became disused in about 1950 this drive was connected to the gravel sweep in front of the house. Subsidiary drives lead to the Plas Newydd, the home farm which lies to the north-east of the house. Both entrances are flanked by nineteenth-century rusticated stone gate piers. A further short stretch of disused drive, with a lodge dated 1840, runs from the A5104 (former Corwen Turnpike) to the A 541 Wrexham road to the south-west of Fferm.

A curious and unusual feature of the grounds is a curving sunken passageway revetted in stone in front of the house. This was a servants' walk, sunken so that they could not be seen from the house, but also serves as a ha-ha, giving uninterrupted views across the park from the front of the house. A bridge of 1916 crosses the walk to the park.

The ridge in the north-west part of the park is covered with mixed deciduous woodland, mainly replanted after clear-felling in the Second World War. Small clumps of lime and oak are situated within the central area of the park. An extremely large, multiple-stemmed sycamore dating to the early nineteenth century is sited just to the north of the servants' passage. The land to the south along the river Alyn and the present driveway is densely planted, with recent planting of exotic trees along the drive. A conifer plantation lies just south of the river.

The garden lies immediately to the south of the house, sloping down to the river Alyn. Most of the garden is thought to date from the nineteenth century, with twentieth-century overlays, particularly of planting. The 1811 survey shows a rudimentary garden next to the house and two ponds in the valley bottom. The ponds remain, albeit silted up, and near the house the stone wall bounding the garden on the north side is probably the one shown on the survey.

The garden can be roughly divided into three areas. The first area immediately adjacent to the house is a lawn with perimeter shrub planting. A double herbaceous border, made in the 1920s, is centred off the main axis of the house. The borders are aligned on the middle window of the dining-room, and replace Victorian parterres that are visible as parch-marks in the lawn. This area also includes a small rectangular pre-war formal garden with paved perimeter and cross paths on the south side of the house. The garden is bounded by a stone wall on the north side. The north-westward extension of this wall, which bounds the north-east side of the forecourt, has two ice-tunnels, facing north-east, built into its base.

The land drops sharply away from the lawn south-westwards to an area of informal woodland garden which slopes down to a level area of wild garden. The steep slope is scarped into a series of narrow terraces, and earthen paths lead across the slope from the upper to the lower parts of the garden. The valley bottom is planted with mixed trees, shrubs, and bamboos, and two elongated rectangular former ponds, now silted up, lie parallel with the river, which bounds the garden.

The nineteenth-century kitchen garden forms the third area. This lies to the south-east of the pleasure garden on ground sloping slightly to the south-east. It is circular in shape, and unwallled on all but the north side. Its southern perimeter is a post and rail fence, which replaced a hawthorn hedge c. 1960. There is a grass perimeter path and

a cross walk which is planted with old fruit trees. The quarters are edged in box. The centre point is marked by a late nineteenth-century stone Japanese lantern removed from the woodland. It replaced the (ex-situ) marriage stone now in the Dutch garden. The north side is bounded by a brick-lined stone wall, with a ruinous lean-to glass house against it. Another glass house was demolished recently. In the north-east corner, outside the garden, is a small cottage, formerly the gardener's house. North of the kitchen garden is a small triangular grass area, probably a frame yard, bounded by a revetment wall on the east and the garden wall on the west. A narrow space left open behind the revetment wall may indicate that it was originally heated in some way.

A Dutch garden is situated in the northern part of the kitchen garden, consisting of box hedges and a simple cross path made of slabbing. Part of this was constructed by the present owner's parents, although a small garden of some kind is indicated by pathways on the 1871 Ordnance Survey map.

Sources

Primary

1811 survey for G.L. Wardle: private collection.

Secondary

Dickens, Charles, Life of C.J. Mathews (undated).

Harbron, D., 'Minor masters of the XIXth century. V. Charles Mathews, or Architect into Actor', Architectural Review LXXX (1936), no. 477, pp. 77-80.

Hubbard, E., Clwyd (1986), p. 378.