

LLANIDAN

Ref No PGW (Gd) 46 (ANG)

OS Map 114

Grid Ref SH 495 669

Former County Gwynedd

Unitary Authority Isle of Anglesey

Community Council Llanidan

Designations Listed Buildings: house Grade II*, garden walls Grade II, ha-ha wall Grade II, lodge and old house Grade II; Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Site Evaluation Grade II*

Primary reasons for grading An ancient site incorporating a circular churchyard with yew trees and a holy well. Early seventeenth-century features remaining include the walls of a walled garden and traces of a formal park. Llanidan has a small but well preserved late eighteenth-century landscape park in an exceptional position on the Menai Strait, with well framed views to Snowdon. Its sophistication, with a sea shore bank and very fine ha-ha, suggests that a professional landscaper may have advised on the layout.

Type of Site Landscape park, pleasure grounds, walled garden, churchyard with yews

Main Phases of Construction 1606-52; 1772-1802; 1802-82; c. 1937; 1984 onwards

SITE DESCRIPTION

Llanidan Hall is situated immediately next to the remains of Llanidan church, in the south corner of Anglesey on the shore of the Menai Strait, with magnificent views over the Strait to the mountains of Snowdonia. The house is rendered, with a slate roof and has a full-height bay on the garden (south-east) front. The main, double-pile block is three-storey, with the front door on the north side. To the east is a two-storey wing. The house has recently been fully researched and restored. Llanidan Hall has grown organically from an ancient site and has never been completely demolished and rebuilt but has been altered and adapted by successive owners.

St Nidan's church, standing in a circular churchyard to the north of the house, is of ancient foundation; Nidan is said to have been confessor to the priory of Penmon. By the fourteenth century the church had become a possession of the Augustinian priory of Beddgelert and a grange seems to have been established there. By the sixteenth century St Nidan's had been greatly

enlarged and was one of the largest churches on the island.

The earliest reference to Llanidan is in a document in the Baron Hill collection (University College of Wales, Bangor), dated 1342. A document dating to 1360, the 'Charter of Tre'r Beirdd', refers to a monastery at Llanidan. The cellars beneath Llanidan Hall date to this period and form the foundations for later building. The close physical link between church and house was never broken and a corner of the house rests on the wall of the churchyard, making an irregular courtyard also bounded by the walled garden.

In 1537 Llanidan passed to the crown and was bought in 1606 by Richard Prydderch (born 1576) of Myfrian, who is said to have converted the monastic buildings into a 'plas'. This occupied approximately the site of the present main block, with a wing to the west. A stone carved with the date of 1631, set in the north wall, probably indicates the date of completion.

Richard Prydderch died in 1652, leaving most of his property to his son Godfrey, whose daughter and husband, Pierce Lloyd V of Lligwy, lived at Llanidan. In 1690 their son, Pierce Lloyd VI, married Mary Jones of Denbighshire and it is he who was in possession of Llanidan when Henry Rowlands described it in 1710 as 'the noble mansion of Pierce Lloyd Esq... who is continually enlarging and ornamenting his residence at very considerable expense'. A new wing was added during this period, to the east of the main block, its position dictated by the shape of the churchyard. A drawing of the north front dating to this period shows a two-storey house, with two projecting bays, under a steeply pitched roof with tall chimneys. Next to the eastern bay is a three-storey tower with a bellcote and on the west is a single-storey wing. The windows of the main block have been replaced with sashes.

The improved and enlarged mansion was inherited by Thomas Lloyd, the only surviving son. After his marriage in 1728 he lived in Shropshire and Llanidan was occupied by his agent, Francis Dorsett. On Thomas Lloyd's death in 1740 the estate was sold to Henry Paget, 1st Lord Uxbridge, who left it to his nephew, Sir William Irby, 1st Lord Boston. The next phase of development came in the late eighteenth century. By 1772 Llanidan was tenanted by Thomas Williams, agent to Lord Boston and a partner in the Parys copper mine, from which he made a fortune and became known as the 'Copper King'. Llanidan was his main residence for many years and he spent large sums on its improvement. Williams added the projecting bay on the south front of the house and added a bow to the west wing. The house was probably rendered at this time. The work was probably carried out by John Cooper, overseer to the contemporary work at Baron Hill, who as an independent architect worked on a number of other local mansions, including Bodorgan and Plas Newydd.

After Thomas Williams's death in 1802 the Boston family occupied Llanidan and made further improvements, including the raising of the roof of the main block and the west wing. In 1844 the eastern part of the church was demolished, leaving only the western bays as a mortuary chapel. A photograph of 1897 shows the west wing, containing a billiard room and bedrooms. This is also shown on the 25-in. Ordnance Survey map of 1900, but had been demolished by 1918, leaving a double-pile central block and a two-storey east wing, essentially the house that survives today. After 1882 the house was tenanted until its sale in 1958. Alterations in 1937, when the property,

excluding the park, was leased to Alfred Clegg JP, of Shropshire, included the removal of part of a raised terrace to create a new dining room, and the demolition of outbuildings on the eastern side of the churchyard wall. A new chauffeur's cottage was built to the north-east.

The 'Old House', situated a short distance to the west of the present house, is two-storeyed with an attic, built of coursed stone with a slate roof; there is an external stair on the west end. The windows, once mullioned and transomed, have drip-mouldings on the ground floor. There are later extensions to the north. The 'Old House' is thought to have been built by Richard Prydderch in the early seventeenth century. Whether it began life as a house or as stables is uncertain. If a house, then its use as such was short-lived. It is perhaps more likely that it was always intended to be stables, with space above for servants.

There is a large, irregularly-shaped gravelled yard between the 'old house' and the new garage, which stands on part of the site of a shrubbery. The yard extends south-eastwards, bounded on the south-west by the walled garden and on the north-east by the churchyard, to form the entrance forecourt to the house. This has an oblong lawn in the middle of it. Behind the 'old house' is a triangular yard, at present used as a storage and work area. There is a wooden double gate to the Brynsiencyn lane at the apex (on the west), and also an access to the walled garden and another door to the lane, further east. There is a long, single-storey lean-to building against the outside of the west wall of the garden, near the north-west corner, by the 'holy well' pond associated with St Nidan, which is shown on the 1900 map but not the tithe map of about 1845. This retains its original cobbled floor and part of the roof is of glass. This is unaltered and suggests an original greenhouse use.

The layout of the park at Llanidan is unusual, with a fan-shaped area of old parkland lying to the south-east of the house and garden, sloping gently down to the edge of the Menai Strait. The house in turn lies near the northern boundary of the garden, with a public road to the north. Until the 1930s this was a private drive leading to the Brynsiencyn road (A4080) c. 0.75 km to the north, where there are still stone piers flanking the road and a single-storey former lodge on the west side. Another former drive, directly to Brynsiencyn, to the west, is also now a public road. Although not within the park there are plantations to the north-east, kennels in another plantation to the north-west, and the remains of drive-side plantings, protected by a ha-ha, on the southern part of what is now the public road leading from the lodge.

The park is in three enclosures, the north-eastern two having formerly been one. The small stream fed by St Nidan's well runs down the one constant internal division. The park slopes gently towards the sea, the part directly in front of the house and to the south ending with a low artificial bank which hides the muddy foreshore from view. The northern end is bounded by a low stone wall. There is a very fine ha-ha on the boundary of the garden with the park. It is stone built and well preserved, extending all around the side of the garden facing the park. The effect of the combination of the ha-ha and bank on the shoreline is to give a seamless view out from the house and garden across the park to the Strait and Snowdonia beyond. On the shore, in a plantation, is a rubble stone building, the boathouse.

Several small, walled plantations of mixed deciduous trees survive around the edges of the park.

The fan-shaped park is bounded on its northern and southern wings by walled plantations which form a continuous strip of mixed deciduous trees. Towards the sea there are two plantations on the sea edge flanking the central axis so that they frame the view of the Strait and Snowdonia from the house and garden. The largest of the sea-edge plantations is around the boat house, but the only one shown on the 1818 map is one at the south-west extremity of the park. There are several other small groups and a few scattered trees as well. There is also a small triangular wooded area to the west of the walled garden, just beyond the 'holy well' area. This too is walled, and formerly contained a path leading from the road into the garden, now disused, although the stone stile from the road remains.

In 1900 and 1918 all the enclosures were well planted with individual trees, but most of these have now gone, including a row along the outside of the west wall of the walled garden. In low sun bumps and ridges crossing the parkland are very clear; these presumably are the remains of earlier, smaller enclosures.

St Nidan's well is just to the west of the walled garden, immediately outside the wall. There do not appear to be any surviving early structures associated with it, and since before 1900 the water has been collected in a pond, once used for cart washing. The well has clearly always, as now, provided water for the house and garden.

Richard Prydderch was probably responsible for the first landscaping at Llanidan, in the early seventeenth century. He was described by Henry Rowlands as 'by far the most celebrated planter of trees and groves of any in his time', who 'set and laid out for his posterity shady beech trees, pines, chestnuts, ash trees and sycamores in the direction of the sea with beautiful and pleasant avenues ... he ornamented the place southwards with gardens, orchards and most delightful evergreen enclosures, and surrounded them with walls of wrought stone'. The layout of Prydderch's park was formal and much of it was swept away by later landscaping. However, one of the main features, the central axis from the house down to the Strait, shown on a 1783 estate map as one long field, Cae Newydd, has always been maintained.

The next main phase of landscape development came during the tenancy of Thomas Williams in the late eighteenth century. Williams was a well known improver of land and supporter of new farming techniques. The estate map of 1783 shows that a certain amount of landscaping had already taken place, both informal and formal, the latter probably the work of Richard Prydderch. The map shows the house, church and stables at the centre of a compact estate. The house is approached by tree-lined drives to its north and west and Williams is said to have constructed the northern drive. The wall along the drive was built later, when the northern and southern parts of the estate were leased separately. The map shows a long field, Cae Newydd, between the south front of the house and the Strait, with a division between the park and garden which might have been a ha-ha, shorter than the present one. On the west side of Cae Newydd a line of trees leads down to the water; on the eastern side is a clump about half way down. The boathouse is marked in its present position but no trees are shown around it and a track leads across the park to the smithy to the east of the house, which was demolished in c. 1937.

Between 1783 and 1816 (2 in manuscript Ordnance Survey map) the landscape park that largely

remains to this day was formed. The field boundaries south of the house were removed to form open parkland, dotted with clumps of trees, some newly planted. The two on the shore, which frame the view, were not present in 1783 but had appeared by 1816. The raised bank on the shoreline is a sophisticated element of landscape design which suggests either the hand of a professional landscape designer or the strong influence of one. As William Emes was working on Baron Hill at this time it is possible that he advised on the landscaping at Llanidan, but there is no direct evidence of his involvement. The present ha-ha probably also dates to this phase of landscaping in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. There were once two small stone bridges across its ditch and the western one survives. To the north of the house a ha-ha was built to separate the drive from the park. This is still intact, with an avenue of mature chestnuts and limes along its edge.

Since Thomas Williams's day the park has been little altered except for the loss of some parkland trees. A map accompanying the lease in 1937 of the house and grounds, but not the park, by George, Lord Boston to A. Rowland Clegg shows the park with the same layout as today.

The pleasure grounds consist of a fan-shaped level area about three times as long as it is wide running south-west to north-east between the south front of the house and the park. The garden is bounded on the south-west by the walled former kitchen garden and on the south-east by the ha-ha, which curves around at the ends.

The grounds have been developed, along with the house and park, in several phases. Of any monastic gardens nothing is known. Richard Prydderch, in the early seventeenth century, is said by Henry Rowlands to have made gardens, orchards and evergreen enclosures to the south of the house and to have surrounded them with stone walls. This probably refers to the walled garden, which originally extended further to the south than it does now. The estate map of 1783 shows a smaller garden than at present in front of the house, the western end being taken up with the much larger walled garden. Between 1783 and 1816 almost half of the southern end of the walled garden was removed, creating the present fan-shaped garden. An early nineteenth-century drawing shows that this garden was informal, consisting mostly of lawn, with a tree on its east side. This, a beech, still stands. Later in the nineteenth century large clumps of bay and laurel were planted in front of the house, eventually growing to obscure the view across the park to the mountains. In 1900 the garden consisted mainly of lawn, with specimen trees, paths and a shrubbery. The shrubbery is shown in a photograph of 1897 and by the 1980s had become completely overgrown.

In a programme of restoration and redesign in the 1980s, by Adam Hodge of Oxford Botanica, much of the shrubbery was removed, leaving two of the evergreen clumps framing the central view and two more to the east and west. To the west the small pool was restored and a fountain and waterfall added. The stone-edged raised beds either side of the waterfall are probably also the work of Alfred Clegg in the 1930s. To the south of the pond, a pergola covered in roses has been made, which leads to a small enclosed area on the edge of the ha-ha, from which there is a fine view over the park. The old tennis lawn, along the edge of the ha-ha, was replaced by an oblong garden enclosed by a camellia hedge. At the centre is a long pool with curved ends, surrounded by lawns. On its west side a magnolia avenue was created, which follows the route of a path,

through a moon gate, which appears on a nineteenth-century plan. A new tennis lawn has been made to the north. Immediately to the west of the house, over the old cellar, a knot garden has been made, in the shape of a Celtic cross (a recurring theme), using golden *Lonicera nitida* and santolina.

It is possible that the oldest plants in the garden are the beeches planted in a row along the outside of the south-east wall of the kitchen garden. These may have been planted in the late eighteenth century, along what was then the park side of the wall; there was certainly a similar row along the outside of the west wall at a later date which may have been planted at the same time, but has now gone. Beneath the trees there is now a grass walk, planted with daffodils, known as the Daffodil Avenue.

The church was bought in 1994 and the two surviving western bays were restored. It was never deconsecrated and is now a private chapel. The churchyard, whose surrounding rubble stone wall remains, has an old, stone-edged path around it and is planted with ancient yews. The latest gravestone in the churchyard is that of a previous owner of Plas Llanidan, dated 1902; the vast majority of the gravestones, which were levelled in 1903-04, are of the eighteenth century.

The walled garden, which lies to the west of the house, is a peculiar shape, roughly a triangle with one point pushed in instead of out (on the north-west). The garden probably has its origins in the seventeenth century, contemporary with Richard Prydderch's house of 1631. This would accord with Henry Rowland's description of 'gardens, orchards and ... evergreen enclosures ... surrounded ... with walls of wrought stone'. On the 1783 estate map the garden is more or less oblong and nearly three acres in extent. Between that date and 1816 it was reduced to its present shape and size of one and three-quarter acres, the southern end being removed and incorporated into the gardens. In 1783 the garden was described as 'orchard and garden'. In 1900 more than half the total area was orchard but, strangely, there was no glass, and even in 1918 there was only one small glasshouse, now gone. The interior of the garden has been extensively redesigned, to be both ornamental and useful, in the 1980s. The earlier layout was more or less obliterated after the Second World War, when the garden was ploughed. By the 1980s the garden was completely overgrown. The new features fit in a general way into the areas of the garden which existed in 1918. The vegetable garden has removed one path and the canal a portion of the encircling path, but the other paths and the entrances remain in their original positions.

The garden is surrounded by a rubble stone wall about 3 m high, with a flat concrete coping. This is probably of early seventeenth century date. There are entrances on the north, from the yard by the 'old house,' which has a square-headed doorway of dressed stone like the one on the 'old house', perhaps originally the main entrance; on the north-west, from the small area of woodland adjoining the 'holy well', where there is another square-headed doorway; and from the main lawn, where there is a massively-built stone archway, which would have been the main entrance if, as is probable, the garden is contemporary with the 1631 house.

The path layout changed between 1900 and 1918, the garden having seven divisions after the later date as opposed to four before (as far back as 1891 at least). The path all around the garden, just within the wall, remained, however, as it still does except on the west. The rest of

the current paths follow more or less the 1918 layout, although they have been widened, and a short, straight path a little to the east replaces a longer, curving path in the southern triangle. Where the two main paths cross there is now a modern circular pool, with a Haddonstone fountain in the middle, with 'Celtic cross' arms, ending in small pools, running down the centres of the paths.

The northern part of the garden has two rectangular formal areas, one laid out with 32 small wood-edged herb beds and three terracotta planters, the whole surrounded by a pergola with wooden posts linked by chains. The other area is a 'physic garden', with two circular beds surrounded by larger beds in geometrical shapes. This has a similar pergola, and there are large planters in the centres of the circular beds. The area surrounding both rectangles is planted with old roses. Alongside the northern part of the path between the two areas are some very old espalier apple trees. On the outer side of the encircling path, there is an annual border along the north wall, and a herbaceous border along the northern part of the west wall.

To the south-west of the herb gardens is a formal vegetable area, also recently laid out and based on a section of the vegetable garden at Villandry, in the Loire valley, France. The layout is superimposed on the earlier path system. In the centre, a container like those in the 'physic garden' holds water and a tiny fountain. Parallel with the curving west wall is a canal, on a site that was always marshy. It is fed by spring water from the 'holy well' just outside the garden wall, which trickles from a lion mask on the garden wall into a pool, and thence flows a short distance underground to the canal. At the far end is a small stone-surrounded overflow which takes the water out of the garden.

Beyond the vegetable garden to the south is an informal orchard area, where many of the old fruit trees survive and new ones have been added. This area is shown as orchard on the 1900 map, though not on that of 1918. There is a new orangery in the north-west corner of the garden for citrus trees and other Mediterranean plants. A glass-roofed potting shed to its west has been restored.

Sources

Primary

Information from Ms V E Marchant-Mapp

Information from the head gardener

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