

Historic Parks and Gardens - Penmaenuchaf - CADW Reg No. PGW (Gd) 37 (GWY)

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PENMAENUCHAF is situated on the south side of the Mawddach valley west of Dolgellau, with a good view over the estuary. It is a large, grey stone, gabled, Victorian looking house of two storeys with attic dormers. The roof is slated and all the window frames appear to be modern replacements, including those of two oriel windows on the south end of the main block. In the middle of the south side of the house is a new, Victorian-style, white painted conservatory. From the first and second editions of the 25 in. Ordnance Survey map it can be seen that the house was slightly enlarged between 1888 and the turn of the century, and it may be at this time that it acquired its present appearance (there had been a house on the the site since early, in the eighteenth century at least). It certainly cannot have been before this that the oriel windows were added, as they are on the extended part of the house.

The formal gardens were laid out during the same period. A crest over the house door is that of J. [John] Leigh Taylor, who owned the estate by 1902, but from 1865 until, presumably he acquired it, it belonged to Charles Reynolds Williams, who enlarged the house and created the gardens at Dolmelynlyn a few miles to the north at Ganllwyd. Charles Williams obviously enjoyed adding to houses as well as garden planning, as can be seen from

the photographic record of his activities at Dolmelynlyn, and there is a striking similarity, between both the houses and the gardens. Penmaenuchaf also seems to have undergone a change of name about the time he acquired it, to The Cliffe, but was Penmaenuchaf again by Leigh Taylor's time. All these things tend to suggest that Williams, rather than Leigh Taylor, was responsible both for enlarging and updating the house, and laying out the gardens. Though mentioned in documents from early in the eighteenth century, Penmaenuchaf seems never to have been a house of much importance and was let for much of its history, the owners preferring to live elsewhere. The original owners, a branch of the Vaughan family, lived at Penmaen (after the building of Penmaenuchaf sometimes known as Penmaenissa), an older and more low-lying house to the west. Penmaenuchaf seems to have remained with the Vaughans and their relatives, still usually let, until it was sold in 1860, following the death of Hugh Jones. The purchaser was a Reverend John Harvey Ashworth, living in Kensington, who inherited a sitting tenant and seems to have used the estate only for raising mortgages, two of which were with Charles Reynolds Williams, who eventually bought the estate from him in 1865. The name 'The Cliffe' is used on the sale documents.

According to a hotel guide, the existing house was built in 1860 for a cotton magnate, but this does not appear to fit in with the information obtained from papers in the archives. It is perhaps more likely that the house was built or altered by Charles Williams (possibly the 'cotton magnate') after he acquired it in 1865. In the twentieth century Penmaenuchaf passed from J. Leigh Taylor to the Scotts, his daughter and son-in-law, and to their daughter and son-in-law the Wynne-Joneses. Captain, later Major, Charles Llewelyn Wynne-Jones lived at Penmaenuchaf between 1920 and 1973 at least, and the house was then sold to a Mr Miller [Ian Gavin Miller] before being acquired by the current owners. The stable block, located slightly to the west of the house, consists of two-storey, stone-built stables (with a central circular window on the upper floor and a bell turret) and cottage, with single-storey coach house, around three sides of a square; the bothy is an oddly shaped building squeezed into the angle of the north-east corner, on the end of the stables. All have slate roofs and have now been converted to dwellings. The yard is a mixture of concrete and gravel, with a few old stone setts showing (and probably more under the modern surface). The rear drive up from Penmaenpool passes along the south side of the yard, and along this, completing the square, is a row of stone sheds and garages, with another yard to the south containing some semi-derelict corrugated iron sheds, one of which contains a water wheel which formerly provided power to the stable block. These sheds replace apparently more substantial buildings in this area shown on the 1901 map. The stone buildings in this complex look contemporary with each other and with the house, and are probably of nineteenth century date. On the old 25 in. maps, although roughly the same buildings as at present are represented, the layout appears to be slightly different, and it is possible that some

rebuilding took place later. The siting of the buildings would have been equally suitable before and after the alteration to the main drive (see below). The kitchen garden wall is carried on opposite the east side of the Bothy and carriage house (with a track in between), and then a wall continues alongside the disused track off to the south-east; these walls close off the stables area from the curve of the drive and the garden, with a wide gateway giving access. This now has solid wooden gates on rebuilt stone piers. There is a small enclosure behind part of the stable building which may be kennels, chicken run or aviary. It seems to be of fairly recent construction, although some of the materials are old.

The park now consists almost entirely of mixed, ornamental woodlands, which form a setting for the garden. There were some walks and rides within them at the end of the nineteenth century, but open space was provided by a large lawn to the south-east of the house, and the recreational aspect of the park seems to have been a secondary consideration. It seems likely that an open park would have existed in the eighteenth century, and although the woodland looks like natural woodland with added conifers, no really, mature trees were noted and it could all have been planted in the nineteenth century: it was in existence by the time of the 1888 Ordnance Survey map. A few paths are shown on the 1888 map and some of the paths now visible were probably made in the twentieth century. West of the stable block and kitchen garden, which seems itself to have been part of the same enclosure before it was made into a garden, is one small sloping field which, although it is bare of trees, looks like a remnant of parkland. It certainly is not cultivated and has not even been grazed for a while. The old maps show it almost without trees, although there was a strip of shrubbery alongside the drive (the rhododendron remains). This field is not in view from the house and may have been retained, when the rest of the area was planted over with trees, for practical reasons, as somewhere to turn out the horses. The main drive approaches from the east. The entrance gate piers are built of stone dressed with a 'rustic' finish, massive and square sectioned, with heavy stone caps. A wall in similar style revets the bank along the south side of the entrance curve, diminishing in height towards the west and eventually disappearing. On the road side the wall has a coping of large, flat slate slabs; this wall continues alongside the drive all the way up. The drive rises gradually up the steep slope then swings out in a great loop around the house, eventually approaching from the south-west. It is tarmac surfaced and has a low stone wall with slate slab coping on the downhill side, which is the top of a retaining wall. On the other side it is cut into the slope, except immediately below the house, where there is a wall with a hedge above. Tiled gutters are visible both sides in places, where not covered by tarmac. This drive was not the original approach, although it is shown on the first edition 25 in. Ordnance Survey map, surveyed in 1888.

The rear drive shares an access with the model farm belonging to the estate at Penmaenpool on the west, and comes up straight to the stable block. It is a little shorter than the main drive. It too is tarmac surfaced, but is fenced rather than walled on the down slope side. The original main approach came straight to the front (east side) of the house from the east, and then passed to the south on its way round to the stables. It would have run straight through the middle of the formal terraced garden, and the obvious assumption is that it was moved to make way for this garden. If so it must have been done just before the area was surveyed in 1888 by the Ordnance Survey, and the garden laid out just after, for the new drive arrangement appears on the 1889 map but the terraces do not. Although both 1889 and 1901 maps omit the top of the old drive, leading off from the terraces, and the latter indicates it coming to an end not far east of the end of the lawn, well short of the entrance gate, it can in fact today be followed from the terraces to the main entrance, where it is truncated by the new drive. It has a grassy surface in the open, leaf mould in the woods, probably over gravel, and has low walls and revetments on both sides where necessary. At the top there is a hedge on the down slope side and a wall about one metre high, retaining the lawn, on the upper side, with access to the lawn at the top, above the end of the retaining wall, which tapers out. Steps on the south side give access to paths into the woods, only one of which is edged. A track, which is also a public footpath, branches off the rear drive some way west of the stable block, and passes to the south of the house and then up into the woods, serving some other properties. Some steps leading up from just beyond the southwest corner of the stable yard may have given access to a path leading to this, now overgrown. A track from the yard south of the stable yard also goes up to meet it - more recent, as it is not shown on the old maps. Another track, now disused, leads off from the stable area to the south east, passing the tanks and reservoir which supplied the house with water and eventually leading to Wood Lawn, the former keeper's cottage with kennels and pheasantry. Another, more recent track, also disused, branches off from this and runs down alongside the tennis court and lawn to the old drive. These tracks have various grassy, muddy or stony surfaces.

There are several footpaths in the woods, some of which appear on the old maps, though these seem to be mostly those with a practical purpose. One links the old and new drives, and is stone edged, with steps; another goes off to the south from the old drive towards Wood Lawn. The footpath from the rear drive to the station [Penmaenpool Station] is now disused. There is a greater number of paths, more obviously recreational, which do not appear on these maps, and are therefore presumably of early, twentieth-century date; some of these can still be traced, while others are lost in the undergrowth. A very wide grass walk runs east from the end of the lawn to a rocky bluff, where it becomes a footpath; this walk is levelled and revetted with dry-stone walling (to a height of 1.5m on the north), and was obviously created in this position to give an excellent view of the

house across the lawn as one walks back towards it - something not obtained from either drive. There appears to be a semicircular area on top of the bluff, up a few steps, which might well have been a view-point for looking over the Mawddach estuary to the north, although the view is now obscured by trees and shrubs. Three sets of steps up on the south side of this walk presumably led to paths through the woods, one being the continuation of the path from the old drive to Wood Lawn, which is cut by the wide walk; but there is no sign of any stone edgings and the paths are now overgrown and disused. The best of the rhododendrons in the park area are between the old and new drives, where there are some very large specimens of different varieties. The woodland near all three drives contains underplanting of rhododendron and laurel, and this extends some way into the woods around the current and former main drives, but does not appear to be present throughout; along the rear drive it is only a strip either side. There is a monkey puzzle tree (*Araucaria araucana*) near this drive, and a giant sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) just beyond the stable yard gates, near the curve of the main drive. This is in a small group with some other large conifers. There are also some specimen conifers beside the main drive a little lower down. The hand of Charles Reynolds Williams can clearly be seen in the layout of the terraced formal garden, which is strongly reminiscent of that of his home, Dolmelynlyn, a few miles to the north, and he probably also planted many of the garden trees. However, whether he was responsible for re-routing the main drive, and to what extent he altered the park, is uncertain. He may in fact have planted much of the woodland, but as the wooded character of the park is one of the main differences from Dolmelynlyn, there is no strong reason for suggesting this.

Changes continued to be made after the estate was acquired by Leigh Taylor, but whether by him or his successors is not clear. At some point the kitchen garden was moved, the ponds were created and a tennis court was made, as well as recreational walks in the woodland. The informal ponds and the tennis court may perhaps be the latest of these alterations, but it is equally likely that all the changes were made by one enterprising owner at around the same time. The earliest Ordnance Survey maps show the site as almost completely wooded, with open space only north and west of the stables (where the kitchen garden now is), to the south-east (the large lawn) and immediately west of the house, the site of the original kitchen garden. Previous to Charles Williams' ownership, from 1865, there seems to have been little attempt to create a garden, although the first plantings of exotic trees may be earlier. The treatment of the wooded area with small streams and slate slab bridges, south of the ponds, and even the water supply arrangements (installed during the same period) are again very reminiscent of Dolmelynlyn. Given the coincidence of a similar site, though rotated through ninety degrees (Dolmelynlyn is on an east-facing slope, Penmaenuchaf a north-facing one), it is clear that the two gardens have been given similar treatment. All that is lacking is the photographic record of progress at

Penmaenuchaf which exists at Dolmelynlyn. The garden now consists of several small, interesting areas of different character, created fairly recently out of the old kitchen garden; a short viewing terrace on the north which seems to be one of the oldest elements; and the two main terraces on the east, which complete the intricate, formal area around the house. In addition there is the steep bank between the house and the drive, formerly wooded but now cleared and being replanted; the large lawn and tennis court to the south east; the wooded area with streams to the south, and the ponds, which are between this and the house. A small lawn and areas with recent plantings adjoining the house on the south side, together with the car park, replace a Victorian shrubbery in this area. The main drive enters the garden west of the house, and almost immediately widens to form a forecourt used for parking, partly tarmac surfaced and partly gravelled. It continues, gravelled, back to the east beyond this and merges into the house terrace. The paths within the garden vary from the very informal, like those in the woods south of the ponds (which nevertheless have some stone edging), to the formal, such as the slate slab path across the upper garden terrace.

Some are grassy, such as the winding path down the bank below the house to the drive, and some are gravelled, such as the walk along the south side of the garden terraces, or the path leading from the viewing terrace into the area west of the house (which is also stone edged). Some are disused and almost lost, like the one which runs along the northern edge of the ponds and the old walk along the viewing terrace. There is a gravelled terrace around the house on the north and east, with what appears to have been a viewing terrace, now lawned, leading off this to the north-west, and the main terraced gardens are on the east. The latter post-date the change in the main approach, and may have been the reason for it. The terrace round the house and the viewing terrace are shown on the 1888 25 in. Ordnance Survey map, and are thus relatively early features. The main terraces were added around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The main garden terraces are on two levels below the house terrace, with a walk above them along the edge of the lawn, on the south side of the terraces. They have retaining walls on the south and west and balustrades along the other sides, the balustrading is the same as that of the older terraces and is either copied from it or contemporary with it; the current balustrading replacing another edging on the older terraces. The upper main terrace is roughly rectangular, with a central path, borders round the edges, and lawns. There is no balustrading or parapet between it and the lower terrace, the top of the retaining wall being flush with the upper terrace. The lower terrace is also more or less rectangular (both taper on the south side), but with the long axis at right angles to that of the upper terrace. It is gravelled (replacing slate paving), with a central circular pool and fountain surrounded by an arrangement of beds, and with a border along the west side. The walk along the edge of the lawn above the terraces was probably intended to give a view of them (it is shown on the same map on which

they first appear, and is contemporary), but is on a slightly uncomfortable slope. It is now a fairly narrow gravel path with box edging and a border each side; a hedge separates the southern border from the lawn. It may have extended further to the east at one time, as there is some unevenness in the grass, but if so this has now been abandoned. South of the house, on the far side of the drive and forecourt, are two irregularly shaped ponds, or perhaps more accurately one pond divided by a causeway.

These, both in style and by their absence from the early maps, are clearly later than most of the rest of the garden, and probably belong to an early twentieth century phase of improvements. The area of woodland immediately south of the ponds contains small natural streams which make an attractive feature and have been enhanced by culverting and the creation of tiny pools and waterfalls, with narrow, stone edged paths; this area was probably part of the original nineteenth-century design. The tanks which used to provide the water supply for the house are at the top of this slope, and now overflow into the streams, which ultimately join and flow into the eastern pond, over an artificial, stepped waterfall. The culvert to the south which supplied the tanks and waterwheel has a sluice arrangement which would allow water to be diverted into the ornamental system if necessary. The ponds are stone edged on the north side and the ends, giving a straight edge and right-angled north-east and north-west corners, which has a semi-formal effect. A path, now grass surfaced but still visible in the surrounding lawn, runs along the north side. On the south side, however, the ponds seem to have been hacked out of the rock, and the edge is irregular, with a boggy area beyond, giving a contrasting informal effect. The overflow culvert is in the north-west corner, but the water level is currently low and the water does not flow out as intended. There is little clear water in the ponds and much vegetation, but this is certainly at least partly intentional. The causeway dividing the two ponds has a bridge for its central section, allowing the water to flow from one pond to the other, and is reached by steps and a path from the drive and forecourt area. It leads to the small paths through the woods above. The large lawn lies to the south-east of the house, and is an irregular long, narrow shape with the long axis running northeast to south-west. It is sloping, especially at the south-west end, and the tennis court was originally part of it. The narrow strip West of the tennis court is now quite heavily shaded, but the rest of the lawn is open, with a few specimen trees as well as the remains of an old clump next to the tennis court, and a few young and probably self sown individuals near the terraces. There are good views over the Mawddach valley from the top of the lawn, enhanced by the specimen trees planted below the terraces, which add interest to the foreground. The wall running along the south-east of the tennis court continues along the south-east side of the lawn, a wide gap having been made through it where the main wide walk to the east leads off.

The tennis court is not shown on the early maps and is doubtless a twentieth century addition. It lies to the south-east of the house, and must have been made out of part of the lawn. It has been levelled by excavating on all sides except the northeast, where there is a hedge, and is thus slightly sunken, with some revetting. The levelling on the south-east is slight, and the wall of the disused track which passes this side is a more obvious edge to the area. Part of a clump of trees which pre-dates the court, being shown on the 1889 map, has been retained on the north-west side, and under these trees is an area of hard standing which probably formed the base for a summerhouse or small pavilion, with steps down on to the court. The slight rise or low knoll to the west of the house was formerly occupied, by the kitchen garden (shown in this position on both early Ordnance Survey maps), but after this was moved to the present site near the stable block, although the remains of the glasshouses are still in their original position the rest of the area was made into separate small areas with different characters, divided by yew hedges. The area immediately south-west of the viewing terrace seems never to have been part of the kitchen garden, having tree symbols on the old maps, and two large trees, a cedar and a fir, now growing in a lawn here are no doubt survivors. A hedge separates this lawn from a path and steps, with borders either side, on the north-west side, which lead up from the viewing terrace into what was the kitchen garden. The first area reached by this route is a small, rectangular enclosed lawn. South-east of this, reached by a grass path, is the sloping herb garden, from which an iron footbridge crosses tile passageway at the side to the first floor of the house. The herb garden has a low terrace, alongside the path, with steps up to the beds opposite an entrance to the lawn with the large trees. There are twenty-two small beds, mostly rectangular, and a border along the top of the terrace wall. A sundial in the centre is flanked by two L-shaped beds. Each bed is planted with a different herb, and there is also some ornamental planting. The beds are surrounded by lawn. From this area is reached another sloping lawned area to the south, with a circular rose bed in the centre and two small weeping trees. A wide border all around is filled with shrubs and other ornamental plantings. On the south and east a retaining wall supports the borders, and there are steps down to the forecourt area. In the north-west corner is a way through to the area containing the remains of the glasshouses.

One glasshouse retains much of its glass, in a wooden framework on a brick base, and is still in use. The vine rods and ventilation system remain, and the back wall (the glasshouse is lean-to style, although free-standing) is whitewashed. The house is in two divisions, although only about 8m long overall, and has a brick edged path towards the back. Outside it on the east is a border, and the lights from some frames are leaning against the glasshouse wall here. South of this is the brick base of a demolished glasshouse, which was slightly larger. This is not shown on the 2nd edition 25 in. Ordnance Survey map, although there appears to be some glass between its site and the northern glasshouse, perhaps the vanished frames. More foundations to the west may also have

been for glasshouses, again not shown on the map. The large shed in the south-west corner of this area, however, was shown as glass and has obviously been converted since. A corrugated shed next to it is clearly more recent. A fairly steep path leads down from the front of the shed to the drive/forecourt area. The area of and borders south of the house has been much altered in adding a conservatory to the house and making the forecourt or parking, area. It seems originally to have been a shrubbery, but now has two small lawns at different levels, recently planted brick edged borders, including a sloping one joining the two levels and one all along the south side of the drive, and a paved area in front of the conservatory. The enclosure containing the kitchen garden and orchard is situated to the north-east of the stable block, north west of the house, on the north-facing slope of the south side of the Mawddach valley. This site, which slopes quite steeply and required extensive terracing to make cultivation possible, was probably chosen late in the garden's development, in the early twentieth century, when no more convenient site was available, but it seems never to have contained any glasshouses, these remaining on the old site near the house. The 2nd edition 2.5 in. Ordnance Survey map of 1901 shows a boundary crossing the area which later became the kitchen garden, and a long, narrow enclosure running alongside this (neither shown on the 1st edition), but there is no indication of what these might have been. The later kitchen garden and orchard is basically square, with a kink in the southern boundary (at the gate) and the north-west corner cut off; the garden terraces are on the east side, and the west was given over to fruit trees to the south, with apparently an ornamental area north of them.

The garden/orchard does not have high walls, and did not contain wall fruit. The surviving apple trees are planted in freestanding rows, and a few more fruit trees are against the ends of the terraces. The surrounding walls are like ordinary dry-stone field walls, except for the north wall, which is a retaining wall. There is a row of tall conifers planted along it. The entrance in the south side, via a field-type gate, appears to be the only one except for a small, closed-off gateway on the west, which may have led to a path through the woods. In the eastern area there are four terraces, with an extra half terrace at the top, retained by dry stone walls. The half terrace has a lower wall stub with a fence on top. The widest terrace, in the middle, has some box on it and may have had a path or been partly ornamental. The terraces slope down to the east as well as to the north, especially the widest one, which dips quite sharply so that part of its retaining wall, which continues at the same height, is freestanding. A small derelict building lies at the east end of the upper terraces. The top terrace, due to the kink in the wall, extends further south than the orchard area, and is walled across the west end. There is no sign of any surviving planting on the terraces, apart from the box mentioned, and they are very overgrown. Below the lowest terrace wall, on the north, there is a line of box bushes, and a hard surfaced path can be felt underfoot. There seem to be the remains of a small building in the corner under the terrace wall,

but box grows within the walls. There is no wall or fence between the terraced vegetable garden and the orchard and decorative areas, except for the ends of the terrace walls with fruit trees planted against them. This line of trees would have created an informal and decorative division between the two areas. The apple trees have survived well, and not many are missing. The area north of the apple trees is now overgrown but there is a large clump of bamboo in the middle, and some box, especially near the west wall and leading from the gateway in this wall towards the clump of bamboo; it is probably the remains of hedges edging a path. There are also two apple trees in this area which were once trained as espaliers, and there may have been more. Apart from the south side, where there is a grassy bank sloping up towards the stable block, and the south-west corner, which adjoins the field north of the rear drive, the garden is surrounded by woodland.

This now appears to be largely natural, though it is shown as mixed woodland on the early maps; probably conifers were added to the natural woodland, and have now died or been felled. There is planted evergreen undergrowth to the west, but not to the south. East of the grassy bank, south of the garden, another small overgrown area within an iron fence seems to contain more fruit trees and the remains of some small buildings. This is very close to the Bothy and may have been the potting sheds/work area, although it is on a steep slope. Further to the south-east is the small vegetable garden now used by the occupiers of the Bothy, which also seems to be on a sloping terrace. On the grassy bank there are a couple of box bushes and a small rockery, the latter probably quite recent. The grassy path goes up between this and the overgrown area mentioned above, with some revetting on the east side. It leads into the wider path or track which comes round the eastern side of the coach house and past the Bothy, just inside the extension of the garden wall which separates this area from the main drive and forecourt.

Sources Primary

Information from Ms Lorraine Fielding and Mr M. Caton. Catalogue of papers in district archives, Dolgellau, including a plan dated 1860 (Z/DBQ 54).

Secondary

Welsh Rarebits (hotel guide).

REPORT ENDS.