

RUTHIN: RUTHIN CASTLE

Ref No PGW (C) 13

OS Map 116

Grid ref SJ 124579

Former County Clwyd

Unitary Authority Denbighshire

Community Council Ruthin

Designations Listed building: Ruthin Castle Grade I; Ruthin Castle Hotel Grade II*; Gate Lodge Grade II
Conservation Area (Ruthin)

Site Evaluation Grade II

Primary reasons for grading

Well preserved mid nineteenth-century garden situated in castle ruins

Type of site

Landscape park; formal garden; shrubbery walks.

Main phases of construction

1849-52

SITE DESCRIPTION

Ruthin Castle is a largely nineteenth-century rambling castle situated on high ground on the south edge of the town of Ruthin. The ground drops away below it to the south, east, and west, giving fine views out over the park and country beyond. In 1677 the medieval castle of Ruthin came into the hands of the Myddletons of Chirk. By 1826 Frederick West who had married a Myddleton heiress Maria had built the earliest part of the new castle, a double block of grey limestone with castellations. This was situated within the south-east corner of the ruins of the medieval castle. The two parts were joined by a covered bridge.

In 1848 Frederick Richard West son of Frederick West commissioned Henry Clutton to rebuild part of the castle erected by his father. The main block was partly demolished and replaced by a three-storey castellated building in red sandstone, with octagonal corner tower. The northern wing which intrudes on to the garden layout was added sometime after 1879.

The nineteenth-century stableyard is now converted into a house.

The earliest known references to a park at Ruthin are from 1533 to 1538, detailing foresters' fees to a master forester carrying out work at Town Parke, or Ruthin Parke. On the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map it is referred to as Castle Park, and still is today. The nineteenth-century park would also have included the Coed Merchon as part of the hunting grounds of the estate.

Castle Park is a medium sized park situated to the west and south-west of the castle. The land drops sharply to the south-west to the valley of the River Clwyd. The land then rises again to the west of Lon Fawr, to the gentle slopes of Coed y Galchog, Coed y gawen and Coed Merchon. The parkland was extended in about 1850 to the south-east when the new castle

was being extended by Clutton. The land around the castle was consolidated with the re-routing of the Corwen road which until this time had passed directly beneath the castle walls crossing the river by a single span stone bridge known as Connocher's bridge.

The moving of the Corwen road allowed the building of a drive to the south-east, and the incorporation of part of the old Corwen road and the stone bridge over the river, creating a picturesque and rather more dramatic entry than had previously been the case. The entry through the town was retained but heightened by the addition of a castellated lodge and gateway between 1848-53. This is the present main entrance drive, with the gatehouse at the end of Castle Street. During the same period Clutton enclosed the immediate environs of the castle with curtain walls of grey limestone. These are castellated and stand up to 4 m high.

The park is thinly planted. Isolated oaks are scattered throughout, and the only other planting of note is stretches of lime and mixed deciduous avenue along the drive.

The garden layout is most likely to have been initiated by the Myddleton-Wests when they improved the castle between 1849-52. The layout of the garden appears not to have changed very much from that depicted in the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map (1874), except where subsequent building has taken place.

The formal pleasure gardens of Ruthin Castle are situated within the ruins of the old castle in the immediate vicinity of the new castle, on all sides. As a backdrop to the gardens the castle was liberally planted with ivy. The formality gives way to informal shrub plantings and tree plantings in the more distant pleasure grounds on the banks of the castle mound to the west and the south-sloping ground to the south of the castle.

The entrance drive from Ruthin and the grounds immediately to the south of the castle were laid out with sweeping lawns and planted with shrubs and specimen trees. Curving paths were interspersed between these plantings. The moat was planted up with specimen trees at the same time, mostly conifers.

The formal gardens begin to the east of the entrance court with a double shrub border running along the top of the castle wall which leads into a service area of the castle. The main formal garden leads off this yard and is laid out with formal box-edged beds, planted with roses and with a central fountain. Adjacent to this is a double border of rose beds bounded by the old armoury. Leading from this part of the garden are two small courtyards with a collection of millstones set within cobbles. Crossing a wooden bridge leads to another small formal area. This area originally continued through to the east front of the castle but has been reduced by the building of another wing. There are steps from the remains of an old tower which leads to a lower level.

A shrubbery was made in the twentieth century to the south-west of the castle. This is a series of informal island beds and perimeter beds with curving edges, entirely of shrub and tree plantings.

By Victorian standards the walled kitchen garden, dating to the nineteenth century, is small. It is surrounded by brick walls about 2.5m in height. The garden is not in use and all that remains are a few unpruned fruit trees.

Sources

Primary

Nineteenth-century photographs.

Secondary

'Ruthin Castle', J. Hort. and Cottage Gardener, 16 April 1891, pp. 306-07.

Pratt, D., and A.G. Veysey, A Handlist of the Topographical Prints of Clwyd (1977), nos 391-405.

Hubbard, E., Clwyd (1986), pp. 271-73.

MOSTYN HALL

Ref No PGW (C) 14
OS Map 116
Grid Ref SJ 148 807
Former County Clwyd
Unitary Authority Delyn BC
Community Council Mostyn
Designations Listed building: Mostyn Hall Grade I
Site Evaluation Grade II*

Primary reasons for grading

Fine early nineteenth-century layout of parkland, with numerous drives and lodges, and with long winding Marine Walk on the boundary of park and garden from which there are spectacular views over the Dee estuary. Ancient lime avenue flanking the former main drive.

Type of site

Former deer park; landscape park; informal garden; Japanese garden

Main phases of construction

Eighteenth century; early-mid nineteenth century

SITE DESCRIPTION

Mostyn Hall is a large mansion of irregular heights and massing, built of stone under a slate roof. It is situated on a north-east-facing hillside above the sea, with the main entrance front facing south-east. The present house shows an extensive nineteenth-century remodelling in neo-Jacobean style of a seventeenth-century house with fifteenth-century fragments. The work was carried out by Ambrose Poynter for the 1st Lord Mostyn in 1846-47.

On the south-east Poynter introduced a two-storey gabled block now joined on to the rebuilt great hall. A square tower based on a drawing by Thomas Dinely in his Account of the Progress of the Duke of Beaufort through Wales (1684), was reintroduced by Poynter but this time with a truncated apex. The latest addition was the north-west wing in 1855. Although the interior is considerably re-arranged it retains some earlier features.

The earlier parts of the building include the recessed centre of the south-west front (1631-32) overlooking a small formal garden.

Porth Mawr is a gatehouse wing at right angles to the south-west front of the house. It is a two-storey stone building with two three-storey cross wings, one forming the central gatehouse block, the other on the south-east. A half cross wing with bell tower and cupola at the north-west end balances the building. There are four blocked doorways with rounded entrances on the north side. A carved beam in the entrance passage has 'Anno Mundi 1555 W.M. 1570' carved on it.

A large quadrangle of stone barns and farm buildings, including a late sixteenth/early seventeenth-century dovecote, lies to the west of the

house. The dovecote, situated at the end of the east block, originally had a cruciform roof but now has a plain pitched roof with a belfry.

The Park surrounds the house on all sides and at one time must have run all the way to the sea. It falls into two distinct areas: the deer park to the west of the house and the park to the north which is reached by the Dry Bridge Lodge. The land to the east of the hall is taken up with old mine workings and the ground is covered mainly by scrub. The land to the south is pasture.

The park to the west slopes towards the Dee estuary and has a large dingle running north-south through the centre of it. On a map of 1742 this was the only area of open land and extended further south than it does today. This area of the park is bounded on the south side by what is known as the Marine Walk, an extensive serpentine ha-ha topped by a walk, separating the park from the garden. From here there are spectacular views across the Dee estuary to the Wirral and beyond. Thomas Roscoe in his *Wanderings and Excursions in North Wales* (1838) states that 'The marine prospects may be especially noticed, which present themselves at successive openings, among the surrounding foliage of venerable oaks and beech-trees'. Towards the west boundary is a block of six stone-walled stallion paddocks. A wall runs along the north boundary bordered by the A548 coast road. The park to the east of the house is bounded by a wooded dingle. The whole of this deer park is enclosed by mixed woodland.

The original main drive, not now in use, runs south-eastwards from the house to the village of Rhewl Mostyn. It is lined with an avenue of ancient limes, already 'venerable' in 1796 (Pennant). The present-day main drive runs south-west from Porth Mawr, and was made at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The other area of park is situated to the south at SJ 147795. This lies above Mostyn itself and like the Deer Park has views of the Dee Estuary, but with much broader prospects. In the eighteenth century part of this area was known as Park Newydd and was probably associated with the estate of Bychton (not extant) which was the seat of the Pennants, neighbours of the Mostyns. It borders a wood called Whitford Wood, known previously as Plas yn Whitford as there was reputedly a mansion in the area. Whitford Wood is now included in this area of Mostyn park. By extending southwards in this fashion an entrance was made from Whitford, with the building of the Pennsylvania Lodge in a castellated style. The drive curves gently through the new piece of park and from there enters the Whitford Wood, which is marked by another castellated lodge, finally entering the Mostyn demesne via the Dry Bridge lodge. This is an extraordinary castellated 'folly' lodge, built by Ambrose Poynter in 1849. It bridges the public road, with the carriage drive passing through the lodge. Prior to the building of this lodge there was a drive north to the hall from this point. All these later extensions and buildings including the Marine Walk and Stallion Paddocks probably date to the early to mid nineteenth century. The new park became known as Upper Park and was planted up by 1815 as indicated on an estate map of that date. The three lodges and new drive are also marked, although the Dry Bridge Lodge is said to be 1849.

Other drives were made around this time including a new drive and lodge to the west of the Dry Bridge entrance, one directly to the north to Mostyn Quay, another to the east to Mostyn. A curious avenue shown on Badeslade's map of 1742, on the extreme west of the Deer park was also utilised in the early nineteenth century to make an entrance from the west. There are thus six drives in the park.

The main planting in the deer park to the north-west of the house consists of nineteenth-century perimeter belts of mixed woodland. Within the park there are a few scattered oaks and a beech avenue near the west boundary that is nearing the end of its life. The planting of the upper park beyond Dry Bridge Lodge, planted before 1815, is now much depleted. In the centre are two large clumps either side of the drive. Extensive replanting is taking place.

The pleasure gardens lie to the immediate south-west, north-west and north-east of the hall. Thomas Badeslade carried out an extensive survey of the Mostyn demesnes in 1747 and recorded considerable formal gardens to the north-west, north and south-west of the house. Thomas Dinely recorded in 1684 that 'Belonging to Mostyn-house are a fair garden, good walks and excellent walled fruit'. The formal gardens are now completely obliterated by the early nineteenth-century re-planning of the grounds, and have been replaced on the north-west side by an extensive sloping lawn. The garden now consists of shrubberies with mature trees and shrubs interspersed with winding paths and open lawns nearer the house. The garden is bounded on the north side by a long curving ha-ha, which follows the contour along the top of the northward-facing slope. Along the top of the wall of the ha-ha is a walk, the Marine Walk, from which there are fine views to the north. This feature was completed by 1815. The ha-ha and walk continue westwards past the kitchen garden, and beyond along the edge of Maes-William wood as far as the stallion paddocks.

To the north of the house, in a small dell, is a twentieth-century Japanese garden made by the present Lord Mostyn's grandmother. A small formal garden lies to the south-west of the house with a terrace at the back. This is Edwardian in conception but lies roughly on the site of a small seventeenth-century formal garden. An eighteenth-century drawing (pre 1747) shows a range of walled gardens and a garden house to the north-west. Thomas Pennant refers to a 'very handsome summerhouse, built by the first baronet, as appears by his arms quartered with those of his wife, Bulkley of Baron Hill'. This may be the one shown on an eighteenth-century drawing, which has a summer house to the north-west in line with the south-west front of the house. Thomas Badeslade's plan of 1742 shows several buildings in this area including a building with steps.

Thomas Pennant's rendering of Thomas Dinely's sketch of the south-east front of the house throws considerable light on the layout of 1684, and can in fact be easily seen on the ground today. Pennant's interpretation of Dinely's sketch shows an entrance courtyard with terraces on the north and south. These are clearly to be seen although the courtyard is no longer enclosed by walls. The chapel lies at the north-west end of the north terrace which is shown by Pennant as having steps ascending it. These are no longer extant. The terrace was also walled on the north and south sides, with a garden building at the south-east end. This building is also shown in an eighteenth-century sketch but is no longer extant. A set of steps still leads from the south terrace into the forecourt but these are probably Edwardian. This terrace was also shown to be walled on its north side. The entrance court today is now very open with large sweeps of grass to the north and south and a large gravel sweep in front of the house.

There are the remains of old herbaceous borders running north-west/south-east alongside the nineteenth-century kitchen garden.

To the west of the garden is an early nineteenth-century compartmented brick-walled kitchen garden with a line of potting sheds, bothies, boiler rooms etc along the entire north-east wall. The head gardener's house is also part of this unit, at the south end. Entrance to the walled garden is through the potting sheds and then into the glasshouses. A range of

nineteenth-century glasshouses, vineries, and peach houses runs the length of this north-east wall, facing south. This northern third of the walled garden is walled off and the larger area lies to the south.

A stone fountain forms a central focal point, with quartering paths dividing the garden. All the beds are bordered with black edging tiles. The walls are about 3 m. high with brick pillars at regular intervals. There are doors in all the walls. This part of the walled garden is planted with christmas trees and used for rearing game. There is a narrow walled area to the north and adjoining the above, now used for bee hives. Just outside the walled garden to the south is an orchard with brick bays projecting from the rear wall of the walled garden. A well preserved domed brick ice-house is situated between the kitchen garden and the farm buildings.

Sources

Primary

A map of Mostyn Hall, Gardens Park and Demesnes surveyed by Thomas Badeslade 1742, Copy c. 1853. Clwyd Record Office: D/M/5248.
A map of Mostyn House Gardens and Park, also part of the demesne land belonging to Thomas Mostyn Esq by Thomas Badeslade 1742. Bangor University Archives.
Sketch maps of the Upper Park (1808). Bangor University Archives, Mostyn Mss. No 8549.
A map of Mostyn Demesne (1815). Bangor University Archives, Mostyn Mss. No 8556.

Secondary

Pennant, T., The History of the Parishes of Whiteford and Holywell (1796). Reprint Clwyd County Council (1988).
Roscoe, T., Wanderings and Excursions in North Wales (1838).
Pratt, D., and A.G. Veysey, A Handlist of the Topographical Prints of Clwyd (1977), nos 813-21.
Haslam, R., 'Mostyn Hall, Clwyd', Country Life, 31 October 1985, pp. 1338-43.
Hubbard, E., Clwyd (1986), pp. 400-01.