

## GLANSEVERN HALL

<b>Ref No</b>	<b>PGW(Po) 31 (POW)</b>
<b>OS Map</b>	136
<b>Grid Ref</b>	SJ 196001
<b>Former County</b>	Powys
<b>Unitary Authority</b>	Powys
<b>District</b>	Montgomeryshire
<b>Community Council</b>	Berriew
<b>Designations</b>	Listed Building: House Grade II*, Garden Gate and Railings Grade II, Coach house Grade II, Brew house Grade II.
<b>Site Evaluation</b>	<b>Grade II*</b>
<b>Primary reasons for grading</b>	Fine early nineteenth-century classical house in picturesque landscape setting on the banks of the river Severn associated with one of the premier Welsh families, the Owens. Gardens structurally intact and includes a nineteenth-century grotto, gates and glasshouse.
<b>Type of Site</b>	Simple landscaped park with lake, avenue and parkland planting. Formal garden with walks and new planting. Remodelled walled kitchen garden.
<b>Main Phases of Construction</b>	c. 1800

## SITE DESCRIPTION

Glansevern Hall is set back, hidden from view from the A 483 by a high stone park wall and a long drive which runs beneath an avenue of sweet chestnut for about 1/2km before reaching the house. The house lies on a level terrace facing south-east over gently sloping parkland, which drops down on to the water meadows surrounding the undulating river Severn to the east. The position of the house within this broad part of the Severn valley is particularly outstanding. The main block of the house is square, with two-storeys, five south facing bays and a hipped slate roof. The house was executed in a severe Greek Revival design in Cefn ashlar, the central three south-east bays being highlighted by four giant Ionic pilasters and a

central Ionic porch on the ground floor. Lewis, in 1842, described the house as a 'handsome edifice' while Hilling, in 1976, remarked that the east façade was reminiscent of the Petite Trianon, Versailles. The west and east fronts have three bays, the east with a central full-height bow. All of the windows in the main block are sashes with moulded cornices.

To the north of the main block is a small inner courtyard with an entrance flanked by stone gate piers and brick wall on the west. On either side of the gateway there are semi-circular recesses in the wall. On the north side is the coach house and on the east side is a garden house, probably formerly a brew house.

The house is attributed to a Shrewsbury architect, Joseph Bromfield, who built it for Arthur Davies Owen in 1800- 1807, having produced a variety of plans. Few external alterations are believed to have been carried out since, although the porch was added in c. 1910. The interior includes an unusual library which contains a traceried screen from Llangurig Church and other panelling obtained from Montgomery Church. The house became the principal residence of the Owen family, at the centre of a vast estate which included most of the surrounding land (the rest being in the hands of Vaynor Park, Berriew) and land throughout Montgomeryshire. The house and park covered quite a small area within the overall land holdings of the estate. Sale Particulars were prepared in 1928, but the surviving Owens, Elizabeth and Diana, remained until 1950, when the property was sold to the Davies Barker family. After the Second World War sales reduced the once extensive landholdings to about 120 acres, little more than the park. The Davies Barker family farmed the park and cleared much of the timber and the property was subsequently bought by the Jones family before the present owners acquired it in 1982.

The stable court, dating to c. 1800, lies to the north of the house and inner courtyard. Along the south side is the former coach house, with a central arch, which now has a foot passage running through it. A set of paired wooden carriage doors, now for garages, lie on either side of the arch. A clock lantern is sited in the centre of the roof. The upper storey of this building has been converted into a private flat which is lit by leaded windows. A carriage house connects to this on the east and continues up the east side of the court for a short distance. A disused door connects with the kitchen garden on the east. At the north end of this range there is a wood store. The main entrance to the stable court lies in the south-west corner, but no gates remain. A two-storey range runs along the west side of the court, at the north end of which stables have been converted into accommodation. In the northern part of the range there is a tea room. On the north side of the court is a two-storey range with a central, bricked up carriage arch. The west kitchen garden wall links the north and east ranges. The stable court buildings are all of red brick and have hipped slate roofs. All are in good condition and provide a fine example of their type. The centre of the stable court has been laid out as a reception and refreshment area for visitors. It is surfaced in pale pea gravel. In the centre a large raised square flower bed has been constructed. The brick walls stand about 0.5m high and are topped with stone paving slabs which serve as seats. To the north of this, and on line with it, is an identical brick and stone structure containing a working three-tier Victorian iron fountain with a dragon spout.

The park surrounds the house and garden at Glansevern, covering about 100 acres. It runs from the main road east towards the river Rhiw, south-east towards the river Severn and

south towards Lower Garthmyl farm. The park is gentle in appearance with little sign of earth moving. To the south of the house the stream below the lake runs along the boundary between the garden and park. The park still contains some parkland planting, most notably the avenue and shelter belts in the northern area, although some of the western plantations were probably removed when the A 483 was widened in the 1970s. It was at this time the lodge and entrance gates were demolished.

The history of the land which constitutes the park is unclear before 1800. It is assumed that the Owen family created a park contemporary with their new house on land they already owned. According to map evidence the extent of the park at Glansevern altered during the Owens' tenure, although the site of the drive and a service drive have always remained the same. A tithe map of 1844 records the park extending only one field south of the garden, not extending to the river, whereas by 1888 the park is marked extending further to the south, incorporating the drive to Lower Garthmyl and, south-east, to the river bank. Some relict park planting still survives in this area. It does not appear that the park ever extended east to the banks of the Rhiw, rather it stopped just beyond the orchard where a narrow plantation separated it from a field beyond. The Ordnance Survey maps of 1888 and 1901 record shelter belts around the north and east side of the park. Extensive tree felling which took place after 1945 severely diminished these plantings, as well as the wider parkland planting. A plantation recorded on the 1888 Ordnance Survey map, designed to hide the stable court, has been lost.

On both the tithe map of 1844 and the Ordnance Survey map of 1888 cottages with plots are recorded along the north-west boundary of the park. These houses, Redgate Cottage and the Smithy, survive as modernised dwellings, both now under different names and in private ownership. A new house, Tal-y-llyn, has been constructed to the east of the smithy. A building was also recorded on the 1888 Ordnance Survey map to the north of the stables inside the park on the site of which there is now a modern bungalow. No rights of way are recorded through the park on either the tithe or the Ordnance Survey maps but, according to the Glansevern Papers, there was an on-going dispute between the Glansevern and Vaynor estates over access to the river during the mid 1800s. Nineteenth-century field boundary fences also still survive within the park. It is believed that the park was split up following the departure of the Owens in 1950.

The main drive, which is tarmacked, enters the site from the A 483 in the hamlet of Refail. Due to road widening in the 1970s it now progresses through a modern, recessed entrance. The drive is about 1/2km long and heads towards the house on a south-east alignment. The drive is enclosed by modern wooden rail fencing and is flanked by a mature sweet chestnut avenue. It splits to the north just to the west of the stable court where a short branch enters a new visitors car park. The main drive is now private and it continues on, curving to the east after about 30m to approach the house. A second branch leaves the drive to link with the small courtyard to the rear of the house. A red brick wall standing about 1.6m high runs along the south side of this connecting drive. The main drive continues past an area of shrubbery, set on a triangular lawn, to enter a large rectangular court on the south of the house. This was the site of a turning circle, is now surfaced in pale pea gravel and it is enclosed on the south by a new brick and stone balustrade. In the centre of this area there is a reproduction stone fountain surrounded by planting. The line of this drive is believed to be

contemporary with the house. The chestnut avenue appears to date from the mid to late 1800s. The drive has been upgraded by the present owners to accommodate visitors. The owners are also responsible for the remodelling of the turning circle.

The service drive enters the site off a small lane which runs along the north-eastern boundary, near the river Rhiw. It enters the site to the west of what was a cottage and is now a bungalow. The drive runs south-east through the park, originally entering the stable court through the north-west archway but now terminating at the new bungalow. The continuing line of the drive to the stables has been lost.

The lodge was demolished in 1978 during road improvements. No sign of it remains. A water colour of the building survives recording a small, sandstone square flat roofed single-storey classical lodge in a strict Doric style with a pair of columns at either end. The lodge was either built by Joseph Bromfield in about 1809 or Thomas Penson in 1827. The lodge stood on the north of the main gates to the park and was connected to them by a low wall set with railings. The park wall connected to the north wall of the lodge.

The park wall runs along the east and south-east side of the A 483 for the extent of the old park boundary. It is of capped grey rubble and block, standing to about 2m high, and contains a set of railings over the western end of the lake and a GR V post box opposite the Refill garage. The wall also contains an iron footpath gate to the north of the lake, but there is no footpath. This wall is believed to have replaced the original brick wall following road work in the 1970s. The same road work saw the removal of the lodge and the remodelling of the entrance. The park walls now curve in for about 3m connecting to a 1920s iron gate set between stone piers.

In the west of the northern park the remains of shelter belts still survive inside the park wall. The belts consist of mixed woodland, with a high proportion of beech and some natural regeneration. Relict shelter belts also survive along the north-east boundary of the site and these have been replanted, predominantly with broadleaves, in 1996-97. A few mature isolated trees including oak and lime were also noted in the northern parkland. The park was once noted for its abundant trees and the fellings of earlier in the century have been redressed by planting of specimen trees, notably oak and lime, in 1996-97, in the northern, western and eastern parkland. Some park planting also survives in the degraded south and east park. On the flat land, toward the river Severn, a short line of mature limes and a group of Scots pine were recorded. Both of these plantings appear to date from the mid to late nineteenth century.

The gardens at Glansevern lie to the north-east and east of the house, the pleasure grounds to the south around a lake. The garden and pleasure grounds cover about 12 acres, the lake covering an additional three acres. On the south front of the house there is a rectangular gravelled area, once the site of a turning circle. This is raised above the general level of the garden by about 1.5m. A new period brick and stone balustrade has been erected along its south-east side, connecting to a rectangular lawn below by two sets of steps. At the south-east end of the lawn there is a free standing screen wall and iron gate, serving as a *claire-voie*, which dates from the nineteenth century. About 3m to the north of this feature there is a linear depression in the lawn and between the screen wall and the balustrade four

symmetrical rose beds are cut into it. To the east of this lawn there is a second large lawn extending to the east garden boundary. The central part of this lawn is level, the south and east parts rise towards the garden boundary. The eastern part is dominated by two large curving herbaceous borders backed by a tree planted lawn. A wide stone paved and gravel terrace runs along the east front of the main block of the house. This is on the same level as the south front gravelled area and stands above the garden on the east by about 1m. A gravel path runs below this on the east separating it from an uneven area of lawn beyond. To the north of the terrace there is a small area of gravel between the east front of the servants' wing and the south wall of the kitchen garden, from which it is separated by a young beech hedge. This gravel is planted up with drought resistant plants.

The lawn to the east of the house is also rectangular, but smaller. It is enclosed on the north by the south wall of the kitchen garden. Half way along this there is a Victorian greenhouse/conservatory which extends out into the garden by about 6m. A set of steps on the north-east of the east terrace lead on to a straight gravel path which proceeds east for about 12m underneath a planted metal pergola to reach a stone fountain basin which is surrounded by trellis. Other paths, partly mossed over, run around the area to connect the glasshouse with the fountain and the terrace. The path, which runs between the glasshouse and the fountain, has beds of peonies along its western side and exotic trees, including specimens of Ginkgo biloba, to its east. From the fountain basin a mossed over path continues east to reach a low, mossed over dome, probably a raised island bed, before continuing north-east over a tree planted lawn towards a large rock garden and grotto sited on the eastern boundary of the garden.

The grotto is a very fine example of its type. It is quite extensive, about 20 x 8m, standing to about 6m high. The kidney shaped structure is made of rough stone and quartz blocks. Two smaller triangular 'segments' of rock garden fit into the curve of the grotto creating an overall oval feature. Two sets of narrow quartz steps ascend the west face of the grotto. Large stone blocks on the 'roof' make it possible to sit and look out over either the garden or the orchard and park to the east. Narrow, steep sided rock paths lead between the rock gardens to enter a cut stone passage which runs through the grotto. The passage is about 15m long and twists and turns under the rocks re-emerging in a cut stone recess on the north-west. Iron clamps embedded in the walls of this recess suggest that the rock surface was once ornamented with tufa or quartz. A small reproduction stone nymph in a stone basin has been sited on the south-east of the grotto. Both the surface of the grotto and rock garden have been planted up. Some of the plants, such as trees, including a cedar on the north of the grotto, are mature and are damaging the structure. Others, including alpines, are new. To the south-west of the grotto and rock garden the ground dips into a shallow valley which concludes in a small, deep stone lined pool.

The date of these features is unclear. In style and scale the grotto would appear to date from the early nineteenth century, the rock gardens and pool possibly being slightly later (little quartz appears in the rock garden suggesting a separate build). They are recorded on a title of 1844 and Ordnance Survey maps of 1888 and 1901. The sale particulars of 1928 mention 'an alpine rock garden, containing a summer house'.

To the north of the grotto, and the east of the kitchen garden, there is a small rose garden

surrounded in yew hedging. Further yew hedges continue to the north leading into an enclosed area to the north of a swimming pool. On the west of the house a small area of shrubbery and lawn separates the house from the drive and the pleasure grounds beyond. A magnolia grows against the west side of the house.

The pleasure grounds lay around a linear lake to the south of the house, separated from the park by nineteenth-century park rails to the north and modern stock fencing to the south-west. The ground to the west of the south lawn drops away to the lakeside. A walk runs around the lake between new and mature tree and shrub plantings. At the western end of the lake, on the north side, there is a small oriental water garden laid out in a series of quartz and stone lined paths. A single arch iron bridge crosses a spit of land at the northern end of the lake. In the centre of the lake there is an island on which an iron aviary-like folly has been erected. A floating bridge connects the island to the shore. Swans and other water birds congregate on the lake.

The garden and pleasure ground are believed to be contemporary with the house. The lake, screenwall, fountain, grotto and paths date from the early and mid nineteenth century, the surviving mature plantings, including exotic trees and conifers, being slightly later. All the historic features are attributed to the Owen family. The screen gates in the garden were originally closer to the house, their position marked by the depression in the south lawn. They were resited in the late 1980s. This style of 'enclosure' is a common feature among gentry houses in Montgomeryshire but its appearance at Glansevern is unusual as the enclosures are usually enclosed on all four sides, whereas this appears not to have been. They are also usually associated with older houses. The lake was dredged in 1994 to remove accumulated sediment. The only known illustration of the nineteenth-century gardens is an engraving, taken from a drawing by H. Gastineau, from the south-west showing the lake and surrounding shrubberies. Unfortunately any view of the garden is blocked but according to the 25 in. Ordnance Survey map of 1865 the paths, greenhouse and fountain were in place by that date. Surprisingly there is no map record of either the grotto or rock garden. The south-east lawn is believed to have originally been a croquet lawn. The survival of one raised bed suggests that the east lawn was laid out in the late Victorian period in island beds, or as a parterre.

The clearest record of the garden in the early twentieth century is found in the 1928 sale particulars which noted that the gardens were 'a great feature of the property'. It records a tennis lawn and croquet pitch on the south-east lawn, the fountain, the grotto - described as a 'rock garden' - and the conservatory/glasshouse which contained a vine, peaches, palms and ferns. The rose garden was apparently already developed to the north of the kitchen garden and there was a rhododendron walk along the east boundary. Accompanying photographs also record a gentle grass slope between the south-east screen wall and the gravelled turning circle and a pair of Italian cypresses planted on the south-east edge of the turning circle, which frame the front door. On the sale map, zig-zags are recorded on the east corner of the turning circle which suggests that the ground in this area descended the slope in a series of irregular terraces.

Between 1928 and 1982, when the present owners bought the property, the gardens were in a period of decline. The major loss during this period was the wings of the conservatory which

were taken down at an unknown date.

Since 1982 the present owners have constructed the terrace along the east front of the house, the balustrade, pergola, trellis, replanted the rose garden, and erected the lake bridges and folly. Work on the rose garden and grotto started later as these areas were not sold with the house in the early 1980s. The oriental water garden to the north of the lake is older, probably dating from 1900-1930 but it is not specifically mentioned in the sale particulars of 1928. This contains many mature Asiatic plantings including rhododendron and bamboo which have been augmented by recent additions including katsuras. The present owners have extensively replanted the gardens, creating the herbaceous borders and cut rose beds. Many new trees and shrubs have been planted. Older plantings include the peonies and exotic trees on the east lawns.

The walled kitchen garden lies to the north of the house and covers approximately one acre. The pentagonal garden lies on a west/east alignment, its western wall being shared with the stable court. The two eastern walls are assumed to have been fruit walls and these are supported with regularly spaced brick buttresses. The garden walls are intact and are of red brick with stone coping and stand up to 3.5m high. The garden is in use as a small nursery supplying both the gardens and the public. A wide cart entrance, set with a simple timber gate, connects the garden with the stable court on the west. Internal wooden doors connect to a northern walled area, the formal garden to the south, the carriage house/stable on the west and the grotto area to the east. A single-storey brick, slate roofed bothy, in use as a general garden shed, abuts the southern wall to the east of the south doorway. The centre of the garden is filled with narrow nursery beds and flower borders, which are separated by simple paths, to the east of which there is a small area of new orchard. No trace of any internal greenhouses or frames survives within the garden but the walls all bear nail holes. On the exterior north-east wall there is a new utility and compost area and a small freestanding greenhouse.

To the north of the walled kitchen garden there is a second walled enclosure of about 1/4 acre. On the west this area is enclosed by the east end of the north stable court range and, on the north, by a red brick wall identical in height to that of the kitchen garden. The eastern boundary is created by a pair of clipped yew hedges. This area has been extensively remodelled; what appear to have been bothies on the west and north sides have been respectively converted into an open loggia and changing room. A swimming pool, surrounded by a grass strip and a pergola walk, has been constructed in the centre of the enclosure.

The walled kitchen garden and the northern enclosure are believed to be contemporary with the house. The northern area was probably a service area for the gardens, containing an extensive range of fine Victorian glasshouses. These were derelict and beyond resurrection by 1982, but parts of their iron framework were incorporated into the folly on the island. No internal glass structures are recorded on the tithe map, but they are shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1888. From map evidence it also appears that the eastern end of the northern section has been remodelled. The northern bothy had an extension to the south from which a wall ran, enclosing the area on the east. The north wall continued around parallel to the east end of the kitchen garden to which it was linked by another wall, creating a third enclosure.

All of these walls have subsequently been removed. It is believed that the walled kitchen garden has been in continuous use since its construction and in 1928 was described in the sale particulars as containing standard, cordon and bush fruit trees, on the walls and besides the paths, forcing frames, a bothy, a tool and machine shed and a potting shed. In addition there were 'several areas of thriving orchard, to the north and north-west. However the gardens subsequently declined and the northern enclosure, the old frame yard, was eventually used as an animal pen until it came into the ownership of the house in the late 1980s. It is unclear when this area of the garden passed into separate ownership. The present owners renovated the northern area in the early 1990s constructing the pool and surrounding garden.

## Sources

- Primary**
- Engraving by Varrall from a drawing by H. Gastineau 'Glan Severn', early nineteenth-century. National Library of Wales, P 8311.
  - Watercolour of Glansevern Hall lodge c. 1830, National Library of Wales, PG4584 (framed)
  - The Glansevern Papers. Vols I-VII. National Library of Wales.
  - Glansevern Hall Estate Map (taken from the 1844 tithe), National Library of Wales.
  - Sale Particulars, 1928. Shropshire Records and Research Centre, 4654/33
  - Photographs c. 1870-90. Private collection
  - Tithe map 1844. National Library of Wales.
- Secondary**
- Anon., 'The Owens of Glansevern', The Montgomeryshire Collections Vol. 15 (1882) p. 203
  - Davies E.H.C., 'Glansevern - the buildings of', The Montgomeryshire Collections Vol. 72, (1984), pp. 58-63
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  - Lewis, S., Topographical Dictionary of Wales (1842)
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  - 'Glansevern Hall Gardens' 1996 leaflet; garden walks and tree list.
  - 'Glansevern Hall Gardens' 1996 general information leaflet.