

PANTGLAS

Ref number	PGW (Dy) 11 (CAM)
OS map	146
Grid ref	SN 5485 2569
Former county	Dyfed
Unitary authority	Carmarthenshire
Community council	Llanfynydd
Designations	Listed buildings: House Grade II; Bridge Grade II; Utility courtyard Grade II
Site evaluation	Grade II

Primary reason for grading Much of the Victorian gardens, including a lake, constructed to complement the Italianate mansion built *c.* 1853 remains intact, although the house has gone.

Type of site Formal terraces and gardens around house; informal plantings of woody exotics and shrubs towards the lake; small classic bridge leading to woodland walks and parkland.

Main phases of construction *c.* 1853

Site description

Pantglas is some 12km (8 miles) to the north-east of Carmarthen and just over a mile to the north-west of the ancient settlement of Llanfynydd. This area is one of hilly pasture and, to the north, forestry. Between Llanfynydd and the Towy valley is a network of minor roads that link the long established villages and farms; Pantglas is reached by one of these un-named minor roads and is recorded as late as 1972 as a hospital on Ordnance Survey maps. The site is run as timeshare accommodation, with appropriate recreational and leisure facilities. Access is now via the North Lodge entrance.

The house has gone but it was surrounded by *c.* 26 acres of woodland and garden, which includes the walled garden, ornamental bridge and water features. The valley in which it is situated slopes fairly gently south-west and the land lies mostly between 122 and 152m.

Francis Jones suggests that the first person of note to live at Pantglas was John Jones, an attorney at law who practised in the Great Sessions between 1683 and 1736. The property was eventually to pass to his grandson, who never married but had a natural son, Richard, who was appointed sole heir to the estate. He married Alicia Gratiana Williams, a 'lady of delicious eccentricity'. When Alicia succeeded to the Llwyd estate Richard took the additional name of Llwyd. Richard died in 1799 and left the estate to his wife absolutely. In a will dated 1803, she left the estate to Nicholas

Burnell, who was to take the additional name of Jones; Burnell Jones succeeded to the estate in 1806. At that time over fifty properties made up the holding. On 28 September 1822 Pantglas was sold to a wealthy Llandovery banker, David Jones; it was his son (also called David) who had the new Italianate mansion built and the grounds landscaped.

The title map and apportionments of 1839 indicate that the previous house, which was a simple T-shaped building, may have been incorporated, at least in part, into the new mansion, but all have now gone. The architect for the new house is not known, but Lloyd suggests that there are two likely candidates - W W Jenkins or James Wilson - both from Bath and both with local connections. Mr and Mrs Jones who commissioned the new, ornate Italianate house were socialites and friends of the famous. Mr Jones was the local Member of Parliament and Mrs Jones was certainly a society high-flier and a close friend of the Duke of Wellington; the house was designed to be in keeping with these aspirations. The new residence, set on a gently east-facing slope towards the valley bottom, stood to three storeys with a tower; the lake was to the south of the house, an impressive courtyard stable and utility block to the north-east and the walled garden to the north.

The house, which eventually cost £30,000 to build, was obviously complete by September 1854. On the 15 September the following piece appeared in the *Welshman*: 'Pantglas: On Thursday last this beautiful seat of our respected member, David Jones Esq was the scene of a demonstration of hilarity on the occasion of Mr Jones' arrival home at this elegant new mansion which he has recently erected. Although Mr Jones had declined the request of his numerous tenancy and employees to celebrate the event with a "Grand Gala Day", the persons engaged in the formation of the gardens and the labourers, were determined not to allow the 12th to pass without some memorial that a landlord so respected and esteemed, had returned to his place amongst them'. The same article does then give some useful information, the identity of the head gardener, 'The pleasure grounds and flower garden, under the able management of Mr Barclay, wore their best attire'.

Burke's illustration for his *Visitations*, published in 1853, must have been prepared whilst the house was still under construction and some of the elaborate ornamentation and balustrading were never, in fact, executed. The numerous Allen photographs of the house (c. 1871) show a less fussy facade than Burke suggests.

Thomas Nicholas (1872) records 'Pantglas, a name signifying a green dingle or hollow, is a mansion of considerable magnificence, planted on an elevation commanding an extensive prospect of the vales of Cothi and Towy, and having in front of it the pretty dingle which gave origin to the name, and whose little streamlet has been utilised for fish-ponds and ornamental water'.

The estate was eventually left to the daughter of David Jones, who sold the property in c. 1919. Photographs from the sales document show an impressive well maintained large Italianate house, with a formal grassed terrace to the south-west; whilst within the 'dingle' area are gloriously mature conifers, one of the weeping beeches and rhododendron. The house and grounds were initially bought by Mr Lewis of The Gnoll, who almost immediately sold it to the local authority for use as an asylum.

Pantglas was an asylum until 1965, when it was damaged by fire and left empty. In 1972 it was sold to a private speculator and now all that remains of this once fabulous house is the tower and a small fraction of walling, which have been consolidated to form a folly. However, the utility courtyard survives, as does the walled garden, the bridge and much of the original plantings.

The stable court, which is contemporary with the house, is a substantial stone building on a courtyard plan c. 35m square; the north and south ranges stand to two storeys, whilst the west and east ranges stand only to one storey. The simple classical arched entrance is on the south-west side; the whole central block projecting slightly under a pediment. There is a date-stone over the arch which reads '1851'. On this, south, side are twelve, sash opening windows, six on each floor, of twelve lights. The facade is interrupted by a projecting dressed stone drip course, with the quoins and base courses of the same dressed stone.

From the courtyard are entrances that formerly led to various utility sections of the buildings. There were originally stables, a coach house, rooms equipped for treating sick or injured horses or animals, tack rooms, feed stores and so on, with quarters for the staff over. Later, when Pantglas became a hospital the building was converted into a laundry, with the addition of a utilitarian entrance to the rear, north, of the building. Today this block has been converted for leisure use with a restaurant, bar games room and so on.

The park and garden occupy areas of both sides of a small west-facing valley in which the lands lie mostly between 122 and 152m. From earlier descriptions there was evidently once a stream running through the valley, but this, for the most part, has now disappeared and is recorded only as a drain by the Ordnance Survey.

There were originally three approaches to the house; one from the south through the parkland, one from the north and one entrance via the Keeper's Lodge to the west.

The south drive was the main, grand entrance, through an imposing gateway and past the south lodge. This would have originally been set back behind a pair of recessed, curved walls that were topped with decorative rails, flanking the main gates. The original structure was well built with dressed quoins and, possibly, a small porch. Today the lodge has been much extended. From here the drive followed the contours up the valley, entering the grounds in the southern corner by the lake and sweeping on over the small bridge to the house or stable block. Today, it is still possible to trace most of the course of this carriage drive, which has become a muddy field track in parts. It apparently became disused as an entrance to the property soon after it became a hospital in 1919.

The entrance to the north drive has been changed in recent times. The approach used to be immediately to the west of the lodge, with access through a substantial set of white painted wooden gates. Today the entrance is now to the south-east of the lodge. Built of brick and stone, this small lodge has been extended to accommodate the office/reception functions for the timeshare units. Upon entering the grounds, the drive divides; to the west (straight in front) is a track that leads to the walled garden. This follows the original course of an access drive, but it has been considerably enlarged recently. To the south (left) the drive heads straight downslope towards the utility courtyard and the house.

There is a short drive from the Keeper's lodge (also known as the Gardener's lodge) that appears to be very much the tradesman's or workman's entrance. There are two, rubble built recessed walls marking the entrance, but no other embellishment.

Although extended slightly to accommodate modern living, the Keeper's lodge is the least altered of the three. The name 'Keeper's lodge' apparently relates, not as might be expected to the gamekeeper but to the keeper of the horses and foals.

The lake was a very important visual element within the garden and, to some extent, it remains so today. It is an irregular oval in shape, originally covering an area of just over three-quarters of an acre. In the centre was an almost circular small island on

which a single tree is shown growing both in Allen's photographs (1871) and on the First and Second Editions of the Ordnance Survey maps (1875 and 1907). These early photographs show a very neat, almost formal edge to the lake, which is bordered by trimmed grass. Next to this grass border strip is a gravel path that goes all the way around the lake and, adjacent to this path, at least on the eastern side, is a border containing iris and low growing shrubs. From the southern edge of the lake it is clear that there were marvellous views down the valley to the south, towards Court Henry and Paxton's Tower.

To the east of the lake is a small classical bridge. This is single span of coursed masonry blocks and rendered stone, with a slightly curved back. The abutments and arch have been left plain, but the solid sections of the parapet have been rendered. In the centre of the bridge, on either side of the carriage way, the parapet is balustraded with turned balusters. The whole parapet is capped with dressed stone slabs. The design of the balusters is the same as shown by Burke (1853) as being associated with the terrace. However, it is likely that the balustrades for the terrace were never constructed and that Burke was working from architect's plans and advice from Mr and Mrs Jones.

When Pantglas became an asylum, between the First and Second World Wars, the authorities decided that the lake presented a potential danger to the inmates and the holding wall at the south-west end was breached to allow the lake to drain. An aerial photograph of 1946 shows the lake drained. After 1972, this wall was rebuilt and the lake is again full and the island, complete with lone tree, reinstated.

To the north-east of the main lake was a small, triangular sheet of water, which may have been the fishpond described by Nicholas. Today this area has been landscaped and is lawn, although extremely damp in places.

The terrace garden to the south-west of the house used to be one of well kept gravel paths surrounding the croquet lawn, with yews and other conifers planted at strategic points. Today all that remains is a sloping grassed area and mature specimens of the fastigate yew, *Taxus baccata fastigiata*, which are probably remnants of the original planting scheme. To the east, where the early maps suggest steps for a path to the lake, is a septic tank which has been partially sunk into the ground.

The area surrounding the lake used to be one of specimen trees underplanted with rhododendron, formal borders and gravel paths. Today the walks, with the exception of the southern drive, have disappeared, as have the formal borders. Many of the plantings do, however, still survive including the rare *Cupressus torulosa* and the magnificent weeping beeches, *Fagus sylvatica pendula*.

There has been one modern addition to this area immediately to the north of the Italianate bridge. In 1991 or 1992 excavations were undertaken for a pond, the idea being to extend the water to both sides of the bridge, although this had never been part of the original scheme. The clay lining was broken, allowing water to drain away more rapidly than previously. Now the bank of this hole has been landscaped to form small terraces and the damp area itself is overgrown.

It has been suggested that it was Mrs Jones and her head gardener, Mr Barclay, who designed the Pantglas gardens. Mr Barclay was mentioned in the *Welshman* in 1853, when Mrs Jones placed an advertisement for an experienced puddler for the pond at Pantglas and Mr Barclay was the contact. The advertisement of 2 September 1853 read 'To Pondmakers: Wanted to form, by contract, a pool or pools. An experienced Navigator or Puddler indispensable. The work required to be guaranteed for a certain period. For permission to view the ground and particulars, apply to Mr Barclay, gardener, Pantglas. Estimates by letter to be addressed to Mrs Jones, Pantglas,

Carmarthen'. Alexander Barclay was not to stay at Pantglas: nearly two years later, he is reported as growing *Schizanthus Pinnatus* (sic) for Edward Ab-Adams of Middleton Hall.

From the advertisement and from the evidence of the tithe map, it is clear that the garden was created to complement the new mansion. That the puddlers were successful in their efforts is clear from the CS Allen photographs taken some twenty years later. Allen must have chosen very still days to record his impressions of Pantglas; several pictures show the house across the lake, the lake reflecting the structure almost perfectly. In another view he is looking west, down the valley, and again the stillness of the water reflects the surrounding trees, all very beautiful and serene.

This 'ornamental water' (Nicholas, 1872) was a very important part of the landscape and formed the focus of the informal planting of the 'dingle'. There were initially two distinct areas of water, both below (to the south-west of) the small classical bridge. The upper, smaller area was separated from the lake itself by a 'land bridge', that is the water was piped beneath the turf and path without disturbing it or changing the ground level. From the early photographs it would seem that this was an area for irises and marginal plants. Irises can also be seen in the borders to the south-east of the main pond or lake.

The sale particulars of 1919 make much of the gardens stating 'The Beautiful and Mature Pleasure Grounds: inexpensive to keep up, are a pleasing feature, and have been well maintained. They partly surround the Residence on the south, east and west and consist of Italian Garden Gravel and woodland walks, Tennis and Croquet lawns, Ornamental Lake and Woodlands, the whole combining to add to the Natural Charming Landscape Scenery of the surrounding countryside which is viewed from all the principal rooms. Prolific Walled Kitchen Garden exceptionally well stocked with a choice of varieties of Wall and Standard Fruit Trees, Potting Shed, Fruit Room, Lumber Room. Vinery and Peach House in four divisions, Herbaceous border also'.

The photographs included in the sales brochure show a richly planted Victorian garden. To the west of the house, the land has been levelled and one picture shows a well kept croquet lawn surrounded by two gravel paths decorated with tubs of annuals in place at regular intervals. To the north, at the base of a gentle slope, grow rhododendron and conifers. A fastigiata yew is at the north-east corner of the croquet lawn and behind it (to the north-east of it) is the house and a large conservatory. Interestingly this conservatory is again of a different design from that shown by Burke. Another view included has been taken from the road to the south-east, it shows the mature magnificence of Mr Barclay's and Mrs Jones's plantings; rhododendron and low growing shrubs are interspersed with conifers and the weeping beeches.

At the time of planting it appears that no expense was spared. One of the Allen photographs shows a number of conifers bordering the drive between the bridge and the house, these are reasonably rare examples of *Cupressus torulosa*. Although this species was introduced into cultivation in 1824, it is unlikely to have been held by local nurseries, but there is contemporary evidence that firms of international repute, such as Loddiges nurseries of London, were supplying some of the estates and gardens on the fringes of Swansea. Dilwyn-Llewelyn at Penllergaer and at Sketty received plants from this source at about the same time as the construction of the gardens at Pantglas. One of these trees had survived the changes of ownership and land use.

Local authority ownership and the subsequent use as timeshare accommodation has, inevitably, brought about changes. The southern drive has become disused, although it is still a pleasant walk to the boundary of the garden. The northern area, that

is the area to the north and north-east of the house and the area to the north-west and north-east of the utility courtyard has now been developed with 'Swiss-style' time-share chalets. The laurels that line the drive, which some reports suggest were amongst the tallest in Wales, have been pruned.

The large walled kitchen garden, which is contemporary with the house (c. 1853), is situated to the north-east of the house site, in the corner of the garden area. The wall enclosed just over 1.5 acres but plantings and glasshouses extended beyond the walls. The walls still stand to a maximum height of 3m and are generally in good condition, except that the entrance arch to the north has collapsed. All the external walls are mainly of stone, although brick was used for the stove flues on the external south wall. The internal south facing (north) wall has been lined with brick to retain the heat from the sun longer.

Facing north, against the south wall, are the potting sheds, stores and gardener's room that are shown on the 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey maps of 1906. At the eastern end of this block is a bell-gable, but the bell has now gone. There are also remnants of the glasshouses built outside the south wall. From the brick work it would seem that one of the houses was restored when the site became a hospital, of the second glasshouse shown on the earlier maps there is no trace.

An aerial photograph of 7 July 1946 shows the walled garden under intensive cultivation, the glasshouses associated with the south wall intact and some formal planting to the south of the glasshouses. Now the garden is used as a leisure and recreation area, with a covered swimming pool and tennis courts.

Sources

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