

HORSLEY HALL

Ref No PGW (C) 59
OS Map 117
Grid Ref SJ 365 551
County Wrexham
District Wrexham

Community Council Gresford

Designations Listed building: dovecote and gazebo, Horsley Hall Grade II

Site Evaluation Grade II

Primary reasons for grading

Survival of the structure of an extensive Edwardian garden, with some massive rockwork and a few fine ornamental trees.

Type of Site

Edwardian formal garden, with rockwork area

Main Phases of Construction

c. 1907-12

SITE DESCRIPTION

Horsley Hall was a huge, red brick house situated on an eastward-facing slope on the western edge of the Dee valley, to the north-east of Wrexham. There has been a house on the site since about 1540, when Thomas Powell built a timbered and moated house here. A new house was built in about 1875 by F. Potts, agent to the Duke of Westminster, and in 1907-12 this was greatly enlarged, and remodelled in Jacobethan style, by G.H. Kitchin for Mr Philip Ashworth. In 1917 it was bought by Lord Wavertree, who made further improvements. It was sold for demolition in 1934 and was largely demolished in 1963. The house was built of brick with stone dressings. It had long west and east fronts, with the entrance, a large single-storey porch, on the west side. There were two main storeys and a gabled attic storey, projecting bays at the north and south ends, and a tower in the middle of the east side.

The house remains lie towards the northern end of the garden, and are aligned north-west/south-east. They consist of a long, two-storey gabled range, with ruinous walls, very little roof, and a number of tall chimney stacks in Tudor style.

To the north of the house is a derelict stable court of the same style and period.

The garden lies on an eastward-facing slope between the north-south Marford to Llan-y-pwll road and the level ground of the Dee valley. The whole site is very neglected and derelict, with large areas covered in invasive vegetation, and with some parts, particularly along the west side, affected by Second World War military installations. However, much of the garden's structure and some of its planting remain.

The garden dates from the Edwardian period, and was laid out by the architect G.H. Kitchin at the same time as the house was remodelled, in 1907-12. Its layout is largely formal, with a series of garden compartments and terraces linked by straight paths flanked in places by yew hedging (now very much overgrown, but originally clipped). Within this structure are some informal elements, such as a rockwork garden of narrow winding paths and massive stones, and a small informal pool garden. Old photographs show a grand, elaborate garden, with steps, balustrading, urns, formal and informal pools to the east of the house. Features in the gardens that are no longer there include a semi-circular classical portico designed by Kitchin, with a doorway flanked by seats at the end of the walks from the house to the water garden; a baroque gateway from Great Buckingham Street, London, where Peter the Great once stayed, which Philip Ashworth bought for the garden, and which remained in situ until 1978; and a rusticated stone gateway with elaborate wrought iron gate, designed by Kitchin.

The main entrance was originally at the south end of Marford village, where there is a lodge, but this drive is now overgrown and disused. A side entrance off the Marford to Llan-y-pwll road, to the west of the house, runs south-east down the slope to the stable court and house, and this remains, in derelict condition. Old photographs show that Lord Wavertree made the garden in front of the west side of the house more formal after 1917.

The main garden remains lie to the north-east, east, and south of the house. The higher ground along the west side of the site is occupied by mixed woodland, some planted, some invasive. To the north-east of the house are two walled compartments (see Kitchen Garden). At the south-east corner of the westernmost one is a small octagonal dovecote built of brick with stone quoins and doorcases. The dovecote was originally attached to the south end of the dividing brick wall, attached to the gardens' south walls, but these walls have been demolished and it is now free-standing. A ruinous half-timbered gazebo is attached to the south end of the east wall of the easternmost compartment.

The main axis of the garden runs north-eastwards from the house. First is a rectangular level area, beyond which the main cross path runs north-west/south-east the full length of the garden. Beyond this is a rectangular compartment bounded by yew hedging on a stone-revetted bank, then a narrow central path runs between stone walls of massive blocks to a large mound. From here there is a view out across the fields, and the axis is continued, after a field's gap, by a lime avenue. This only extends for one field's length: originally it ran as far as the Crabmill Farm road.

The rockwork is composed of massive blocks of stone. Narrow paths wind through it to the south of the path, and lead to a small pool with a central plinth. Bamboos cover the area, which suggests that there might have been a Japanese theme to it. To the south of this is a rectangular area with rockwork on the north and west sides, some large pine trees, and an overgrown yew hedge on a bank along the south side. Steps on the west side lead up to the main cross path. Next, to the south, is compartment surrounded by yew hedging, occupied by a large rectangular pond (former swimming pool), now dry, lined with concrete. On its west side is a ruinous stone wall with a central alcove whose fan-shaped top has fallen into the pool. To the west is an informal area with an irregularly-shaped ornamental pool, with an alcove-shaped yew hedge to its south, behind which (west) is an area of rhododendrons. The southern end of the garden is largely seedling trees, but interspersed among them are some fine ornamental specimens such as pines, cedars, hollies, horse chestnuts.

The slope to the south of the house is terraced, with some enclosing yew hedging and rhododendrons.

There are two partly walled gardens to the east of the stable court, north-east of the house. They are large rectangular compartments on ground sloping to the east. High brick walls, standing to their full height, survive on all but the south side, where they have been pulled down. In the middle of the dividing wall is a pointed-arched doorway. Against the north wall of the eastern compartment is a fallen glasshouse. All traces of the interior layout have gone, and they are now just rough grass with some seeding trees.

Sources

Primary

Sketchbook by G.H. Kitchin: RIBA Library, London.
1920s photographs (private collection).

Secondary

Hubbard, E., Clwyd (1986), p. 388.
Lloyd, T., The Lost Houses of Wales (1986), p. 25.

