

ABERYSTWYTH: UNIVERSITY OF WALES, ABERYSTWYTH: PLAS PENGLAIS, PENGLAIS CAMPUS AND LLANBADARN CAMPUS; THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF WALES

Ref number	PGW (Dy) 47 (CER)
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Grid ref	SN 594 822; SN 598 818 and 603 811; SN 598 817
Former county	Dyfed
Unitary authority	Ceredigion
Community council	Aberystwyth
Designations	Listed buildings: Plas Penglais (Grade II); National Library of Wales (Grade II*)
Site evaluation	Grade II*

Primary reasons for grading The landscaping of the University of Wales, Aberystwyth campuses, particularly the earlier Penglais campus, is of exceptional historic interest as one of the most important modern landscaping schemes in Wales. The sophisticated layout, including the landscaping, is sensitive to the character of the site and the planting, which is unusually choice and varied, both enhances the buildings and helps to integrate the sites. One section of the Penglais campus was designed by the well known landscape architect Brenda Colvin and is one of the very few of her schemes to have survived. A number of women have played a key role in the development and planting of the whole site.

The gardens of Plas Penglais, part of which were laid out as a Botany Garden for the university, contain many choice and half-hardy plants.

Type of site	Informal gardens and former botany garden; landscaped university campuses; landscaped library grounds
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Main phases of construction	1770; 1947 - 48 (Plas Penglais); 1911 – 27 (National Library of Wales); 1937 – 1959; 1965 onwards (Penglais Campus); 1970s (Llanbadarn Campus)
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Site description

Plas Penglais, the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, and the National Library of Wales lie on the eastern edge of Aberystwyth, on high ground overlooking the town and the sea to the west. Plas Penglais, formerly a seat of the Richardes family, is now the official residence of the Principal of the university. Its grounds have partly been

adapted for institutional use and were at one time the botanic garden for the university. The main campus of the university and the National Library occupy a single large site to the south of Plas Penglais. A separate part of the university, the Llanbadarn campus, lies just outside the town at Llanbadarn Fawr, about 1 km to the south-east of the main campus. For the purpose of description and history Plas Penglais, the university campuses and the National Library will be treated separately.

Plas Penglais

Plas Penglais is a compact, mainly late Georgian, country house situated on a south-facing slope on the north-east edge of the town. Its gardens descend the slope between the house and a small stream running westwards. Beyond, to the south, lies a field, bounded by the A487 road. Above the house, to its north, is a mixed deciduous woodland threaded with a number of paths, some of which have fallen into disuse and become overgrown.

The house is two-storey, with attic dormers in the hipped slate roof and sash windows. On the west side is a lower two-storey wing, which is of later date than the main block. The entrance is on the east side. In the middle of the south front are French windows giving out on to a raised platform, from either side of which flights of stone steps descend to the garden.

The Richardes (or Rhydderch) family is first noted as living at Penglais in 1671. In 1770 Roderick Richardes was High Sheriff and also built the present house, at that time known as Penglais Fawr. The estate amounted to 1,610 acres in the Rheidol valley in 1873 but overspending and mismanagement, particularly by Roderick Eardley Richardes, who became the life tenant of Plas Penglais in the 1820s, led to its downfall. By 1925, when Roderick Richardes, who was the last of the male line to live at Penglais, died there was nothing left but the house and its grounds. The remaining estate of Penglais Farm and the Cae Melyn area of Aberystwyth became the property of a distant Warwickshire branch of the family. After 1925 this was gradually acquired by the University College and developed into the Penglais campus. The house and its grounds were acquired by the College in 1946 as the Principal's official residence and to this end the house was renovated and extended by Sir Percy Thomas.

The entrance to the grounds is off the A487. It is flanked by slightly incurved walls of coursed, mortared stone, about 1.5 m high, terminating in square piers about 2 m high. Both have concrete capping and the pier tops are gently pyramidal. There are no gates but hinges indicate that gates were once present. Inside the entrance there is a small lodge on the east side. This is single-storey, of white painted stone with a slate roof. Three mullioned and transomed windows face the drive. The tarmac drive runs straight northwards and then curves round north-westwards to a small forecourt, flanked by large evergreen shrubs, in front of the house. A path leads from the forecourt down to the lawn. A short extension to the drive continues to the back of the house where there is a small detached stone building, with a pitched slate roof. This has the appearance of having formerly been a pair of servants' cottages but is now a single residence. It has two mirror-image halves, each with a door; the east half is now mostly converted into a garage. To the west is a small lawn, cut into the rock slope, with a flight of five slate steps up to it. To the west is a path up into the woodland above. To the east a stony track, bounded on its lower side by a stone wall about 1 m high and with a flight of stone steps above its upper side, leads from the forecourt up to a network of tracks in the woodland.

Inside the entrance the drive is flanked by banks of hebe and cistus, with a *Griselinia littoralis* hedge on a low stone wall flanking the east side and partly screening a service area of modern buildings and glasshouses behind it. To the west a mixed holly and beech hedge runs along the boundary of the field to the south and there is an iron gate into the field. *Griselinia*, planted both as a large shrub or small tree, and mixed holly and beech hedges are recurring features throughout the university grounds. The drive continues to the house, flanked by grass, larger evergreen shrubs, including rhododendrons, and conifers. It crosses the stream on a dry-stone bridge, which has a single buttress on its lower side. The parapet on the lower side is low, modern, mortared and inset from the bridge wall; that on the upper side is dry-stone, with no concrete capping. The single, pointed arch of the bridge has been blocked with stonework and the stream now passes under the bridge in a pipe and flows down a series of concrete steps below it. A gravelled lower drive leads westwards off the main one, curving gently down the slope to the south-east corner of the former Botany Garden. Its upper side is revetted with a low dry-stone wall and flanked by a bank of azaleas and camellias. The drive passes a hard tennis court on its south side and then runs along the south edge of the main lawn.

The eastern half of the garden is largely taken up with a sloping lawn. Below the house the upper part is built up into a level, rectangular lawn which was probably originally either a croquet lawn or tennis court. Banks of predominantly evergreen shrubs flank the lawn and there is a specimen cedar tree in the south-west corner. Shrubs include holly, osmanthus, euonymus and Portugal laurel. A stream running southwards from the woodland above is piped under the lawn and emerges below the lower drive. The upper half of the western part of the lawn was once an orchard and a single fruit tree remains. It is bounded on its south side by a belt of mixed shrubs, including hamamelis and *Garrya elliptica*. Immediately below the house is a small sloping lawn with a more steeply sloping bed below it, revetted at the top and bottom with dry-stone walls about 0.3 m high. The bed contains mixed shrubs, most of them low-growing, including hebe, cistus and *Phlomis fruticosa*. In the middle of the bed, on the central axis of the house, leading towards the French doors and steps, is a flight of five slate steps on rough stone risers, with low parapets of uncut large stones. On its east side the lawn is bounded by a short stretch of escallonia hedge, berberis shrubs and evergreen trees, including golden cypress. Below the French windows, and reached from the house by two flights of stone steps, is a small, semi-circular bed of roses and lavender bounded by a low hedge of golden euonymus.

The lawn and shrub bed, here planted with heathers and cistus, next to the house continue along its west side, with five rough stone steps down the bed to the lawn below. This is bounded on its west side by a bank of larger evergreen shrubs, beyond which is the former orchard, reached by a flight of slate steps at the north end. This is built against the revetment wall of a terrace above the former orchard.

The terrace runs east-west along the top of the garden, to the west of the house. Its revetment wall is about 1.3 m high, built of coursed mortared stone, with concrete capping. The back wall of the terrace is similar and about 3.2 m high. The terrace has a central grass path, flanked by wide borders planted with mixed but mostly evergreen shrubs, some of which, such as pittosporums and hoyas, are half-hardy. The west end is bounded by a wall about 2 m high, of similar construction to the revetment wall, with a wooden door through to modern steps leading down into the former Botanic Garden to the west. Against the wall, above the door, is a wide-arched alcove with a pent slate roof, whitewashed walls and a brick floor. In the south wall is a small niche. In front of the alcove is an area of concrete and slate paving on

which stands a large table of a single slate slab, standing on grey brick legs. To the south of the path, at the west end, is a small, rectangular pool, about 4.6 x 1.6 m, with a surround of concrete paving. Reeds and water lilies grow in it. Towards the east end of the terrace the bed south of the path has a low stone revetment wall in the middle and concrete paving slabs form a disjointed path into the bed. At the east end the terrace is bounded by a wall and simple iron gate. The wall is 1 – 1.7 m high, stepped up the slope. To the east is a small area of concrete and slate paving and a flight of concrete steps against the back wall of the terrace up to the tarmac area behind the house. Above the back wall is a grass walk, bounded by the parapet of the wall, which is about 1.2 m high. The walk continues westwards past the terrace, skirting the woodland above the former Botanic Garden. A branch path leads to the woodland above.

The former Botany Garden occupies the western half of the garden. It is informally laid out on the south-facing slope, with conifers and island beds in grass. The informally-shaped island beds were originally Order beds but are no longer. One bed has a low rockwork mound in it. The garden is bounded on the west by a belt of scrubby deciduous trees and a bank of evergreen shrubs. The conifers are planted singly and in groups and running across the middle of the slope is a shelter belt of cypresses. Plants include ornamental grasses and bamboos, yuccas and three Chusan palm (*Trachycarpus fortunei*) in the south-west corner. There are considerable numbers of half-hardy shrubs both in this area and throughout the garden. These include pittosporums and hoyas.

The valley running along the south side of the garden has a canopy of mixed deciduous trees, beneath which choice specimen shrubs, such as rhododendrons, are planted in places. Unsurfaced paths run down both sides of the small stream, which is crossed in the middle by a narrow, rubble stone bridge. It has a single, small arch and low parapets with slate slab tops, one of which is missing. Iron footings in the slabs indicate former railings. Above the bridge the north side of the stream has a dry-stone revetment wall. A small tributary stream runs southwards into the main one above the bridge and a branch path winds up the slope beside it, reached from the path south of the main stream by a concrete bridge. The main paths along the north and south sides of the stream are cut into the rock or revetted with dry-stone walling in places.

There is only scant information as to the layout of the garden prior to the late nineteenth century. It was restricted to the area immediately adjacent to the house, extending southwards to the lawn below the present sloping border and west to the end of the terrace and former orchard to its south. The 25 in. Ordnance Survey map of 1890 shows the present drive and lodge, with the entrance and lodge flanked by mixed deciduous and coniferous trees. The south boundary was planted with a few trees and there were one or two conifers within the garden. The terrace to the west was in existence, as was the alcove at its end. To the south and south-west, on the site of the remainder of the present gardens, were fields. The valley to the south was wooded and although no paths are shown the bridge is, perhaps indicating that the paths were in existence but omitted.

When the university took over the grounds in 1946 its Buildings Office found them in poor shape. They had not been maintained for at least 15 years. In 1947-48 H.A. Hart, a member of the Botany Department, submitted plans for the framework of a new Botany Garden at Plas Penglais to Professor Lily Newton, professor of Botany, who acted at that time in an advisory role to the Buildings Office on the botanical and horticultural development of the site. Hart's plans were passed and work began immediately on clearing and preparing the site. The garden was planned informally,

the island order beds planted with the more primitive plants at the bottom of the slope, rising to the most evolutionarily advanced at the top. This had its practical problems and now the beds are no longer planted in orders. After Lily Newton retired in 1958 her successor, Professor P.F. Wareing, aided by Professor M. Hall, took over her advisory role for the Botany Garden. In 1960 Basil Fox became its Curator.

At the same time as the Botany Garden was developed the garden of Plas Penglais was improved and extended to its present layout, also with the advice of the Botany Department. A wide range of choice plants was used in its planting, including *Phormium colensoi*, *Cornus capitata* and *Cytisus sessilifolius* on the terrace and *Cistus palhiniae* below the house.

University of Wales, Aberystwyth: Penglais campus

The Penglais campus of the university occupies a site of about 80 acres (32 ha) to the south of the A487 road, on the north-east side of the town. The site is an exceptionally fine and dramatic one. The ground slopes down from 106 m at the east end of the site to 16 m at the west and from many parts of the campus there are panoramic views westwards over the town and out to sea. The proximity to the sea and hillside site, facing the prevailing south-westerly winds, make the campus one of the most exposed in Britain and severely limit the choice of plant material. Most of the university buildings are on the Penglais campus, the remainder being at Llanbadarn.

The buildings are roughly grouped in several tiers down the slope. The vehicular and pedestrian circulation systems are dominated by a main north-south drive in the heart of the campus, which runs the full length of the site, from the main entrance on the A487 past the Hugh Owen Building and the Students' Union. From this further drives give access to the buildings to the east and west, with a peripheral route around most of them. Superimposed on this system is a separate one of pedestrian walkways, some of which follow the drives, some of which are separate. Student accommodation halls occupy the top of the site, faculty and other administrative buildings the centre and a large hall of residence, Pantycelyn, the lowest end. Interspersed between the buildings are car parks and the south-west end is taken up with a large sports pitch.

The whole campus is extensively and attractively landscaped with planting that has been carefully chosen to complement the modern buildings, to suit the sloping site, to tolerate the salt-laden air and to take advantage of the mild, seaside location. Now that much of the planting is mature its remarkable effectiveness is apparent. Planting has been used to screen buildings from one another, to enhance buildings and their settings, to screen car parks and other utilitarian areas and generally to create a very attractive environment. The density of planting is remarkable; no corner is left unplanted, mainly with evergreen shrubs and conifers. The foreground to many buildings is banks and mounds of greenery, both tall and low-growing. The dominant tree species, mainly planted along the boundaries and flanking drives, is the pine. A wide variety of shrubs is grown but characteristic species include eleagnus, griselinia, ligustrum, hebe, heathers, olearia, phlomis, berberis and escallonia. Mixed holly and beech hedges (as also seen at Plas Penglais) are also characteristic.

The whole site is screened from the A487 by a belt of pines and evergreen shrubs. A belt of pines also screens the faculty and administrative buildings from the halls of residence above. The main entrance, which has no gates or piers, is flanked by banks of heathers. The main drive, extending southwards from the entrance, has

plantings of pines and evergreen shrubs beside it. The steep bank below the Hugh Owen Building, which flanks the upper side the drive soon after the entrance, is completely clothed with *Cotoneaster microphyllus*. This is a characteristic and very effective treatment of the steep slopes on the site and makes a good foil to the horizontal emphasis of the buildings. At the top of the steep slope, next to the Hugh Owen Building, is a bank of larger evergreen shrubs, particularly *Griselinia littoralis* and Portugal laurel. Opposite, there is a grass bank planted with pines. A flight of steps and sloping path lead down to a lower tier of buildings. The steps and path are flanked by densely planted evergreen shrubs and trees, with a group of conifers below. Towards the south end of the main drive it is flanked on its lower side by pines and hollies. The concrete wall opposite, which supports the raised open court by the Students' Union above, is completely clothed with creepers. Below the drive is a grass bank, planted with pines, down to a large sports pitch. Conifers are planted at its south end, near the boundary of the campus. Tucked away in the south-west corner of the site, behind the National Library of Wales, is an old, stone-edged path flanked by shrub borders, which leads up to the back of the swimming pool and sports hall. This small area appears older in layout than the remainder of the campus.

To the north of the main sports pitch is an area devoted mainly to science faculty buildings. The southernmost of these, to the east of the access drive, is the striking Physics Building, with its curving wall of random, polychrome stone slabs. Virginia creeper grows up it and in front of the south end are holly and cypress shrubs. To its north is a sloping lawn planted with three pines and one deciduous tree, with a berberis hedge along its upper side. The Llandinam Building, to the north, has a bank of shrubs below it. Opposite, to the west, is a rectangular lawn planted with three oaks at its south end and bordered by shrubs.

At the west end of the campus lies the earliest hall of residence, Pantycelyn Hall. This is set slightly apart from and below the rest of the campus. The large, grey stone building is aligned along the slope, with four, evenly spaced, slightly projecting blocks on the lower side forming three courts, open to the west. The main access to the building is by a short drive off the A487. The entrance is flanked by stone walls, capped with concrete, about 1.8 m high. In front of the north end of the building is a small lawn bordered by an *Escallonia macrantha* hedge. The main garden attached to the hall lies on its west side. The southern half is fronted by a lawn bounded by an *Escallonia macrantha* hedge. At the south end of the hedge is a simple iron gate, set between stone piers about 1.8 m high, leading to a tarmac path. This runs along the south side of the lawn, bounded on its outer side by a two-course stone revetment wall. Behind is a bank sparsely planted with trees and shrubs and beyond a sports pitch. The southernmost court next to the building, which is slightly raised above the level of the lawn, is concrete paved, bounded by a low, concrete-capped stone wall and a shrub border planted with mixed shrubs, particularly evergreens such as cistus, hebe, griselinia and hydrangea. A path, here tarmacked, flanks the border and runs the full length of the building. Half way along the building, two wide steps lead from the path up to the central court, which is also concrete-paved. A flight of steps leads down to the northern half of the path, which is gravelled and flanked on the upper side by a shrub border and a lawn. Below is a further border, with rocks dotted through it, and a narrow lawn. The shrub border, planted with mounds of low-growing plants such as hebes and heathers, continues to the north end of the building. The northernmost court is concrete-paved, with a wide flight of steps up to it, flanked by low parapet walls.

A concrete-paved path curves gently up the slope above Pantycelyn Hall, leading to the Edward Llwyd (Botanical Sciences) Building. This slope is the area that

was designed by Brenda Colvin in 1963. At its lower end the path is flanked by narrow strips of grass, backed by banks of mixed shrubs, which in turn are backed by pines and cypresses. Further up the slope the grass strips narrow and disappear. The shrubs form dense banks and are mainly evergreen. To the south is a sports pitch, screened by pines.

The Penglais site was purchased for the university in three stages. First, Lord Rendel, President of the College, bought 14 acres in 1897. In 1929 a benefactor, Joseph Davies Bryan, bought 87 acres and vested the land in trustees for the benefit of the College. In 1946 a further 205 acres were donated by another benefactor, D. Alban Davies, when the site was threatened with development as a housing estate. The site was almost totally undeveloped when acquired, consisting of a few fields, one small copse and in the south-east corner a small farm, Brynamlwg, which was modernised, extended and converted into a staff sports and social club. The National Library lay to the south-west.

In 1929 the architect of the National Library, Sydney Greenslade, was invited to design a scheme for the site but declined, due to ill health. A bird's-eye view of 1931, painted in watercolour, by T.A. Lodge, which hangs in the Old College hall, shows a very formal, axial layout that was not implemented. A poplar-lined main axis runs from the National Library up to the university, whose buildings are arranged in two tiers around a central court. H.V. Lanchester was appointed but in 1935 his commission was withdrawn and Percy (later Sir Percy) Thomas was appointed. His plan, less axial than Lanchester's, was formal and limited to the western half of the site. The Institute of Rural Research (1937), swimming pool and running track (1939) and Pantycelyn Hall (1948) were built to this plan and the Biology Building (completed 1959) on a slightly altered layout. A second bird's-eye view, dated 1942, by J. Harvey, also in the Old College hall, shows this layout.

In 1957 a further plan was prepared by Sir William Holford (later Lord Holford). This abandoned the earlier formality and grouped buildings more loosely, linking them with curving drives. The Penbryn Halls, the Physical Sciences Building and the Llandinam Building were built within this layout. In 1965 a new plan was prepared by Sir Percy Thomas and Son (later the Percy Thomas Partnership). The purpose was to harmonize new buildings and layout with old and to integrate the site as a whole. The plan, which was followed, gave the whole site a strongly horizontal, tiered character, with most of the buildings kept deliberately low so as not to impede views. The site was unified by a new main, north-south axis through its heart, leading to the Great Hall, library, theatre and Students' Union. Many of the buildings were designed by a partner in Sir Percy Thomas and Son, I. Dale Owen.

Landscaping of the site was an integral part of its development, the Percy Thomas Partnership, in particular, being very aware of its importance in creating an attractive university environment. Both buildings and layout were considerably influenced by ideas from Scandinavia, where buildings and landscape were being designed and integrated in a way that was sensitive to the character of the site. This was particularly the case at Aarhus University, Denmark, laid out between 1932 and 1946 by C.F. Møller, Kay Fisker and P. Stegman. The campus was landscaped by C.Th. Sørensen. Sir Percy Thomas also designed the campus layout for Nottingham University in 1948.

Not only was a great deal of planting carried out but there was also a considerable amount of earth-moving. This created level areas for car parks, buildings and sports pitches, smooth slopes, for instance on the lower side of the main axial drive, and screening banks around some of the car parks. Three main courts were

made – west of Llandinam Building (converted from a car park), the main, raised, concourse in front of the Students' Union and the 'Chapel Court' east of the Great Hall.

Planting was mainly the responsibility of the Botany Department but the overall plan was guided by the landscape architect John Ingleby, who advised the Percy Thomas Partnership. In 1963 the Botany Department drew up a long list of plants 'likely to succeed in exposed situations' that were grown on the Penglais campus. A revised list was produced in 1973, which took account of the successes and failures in the intervening years. Thirty plants were withdrawn and 90, which had done unexpectedly well, added. Under the tutelage of the Botany Department the planting of the campus became choice and varied, with an emphasis on South America and Australasia.

Once the overall plan of the campus was established in 1965 planting could and did precede buildings, which were fitted into the spaces between. From the earliest period of planting, soon after 1959, shelter belts, mostly of pine (chiefly *Pinus radiata*), to keep out the salt-laden winds were important. These now protect and screen the site. In 1963 the distinguished landscape architect Brenda Colvin was commissioned, through Mr Marsden, to lay out the area between Pantycelyn Hall and the Biology Building. She drew up two plans. The first, dated January 1963, gives the layout of the area. The main feature – the curving walk – remains as Brenda Colvin designed it. Other sports facilities above Pantycelyn Hall were not built. The second plan, dated June 1963, gives the planting for the area, from the A487 to the football pitch. The suggested planting appears to have been adhered to in general terms, with heathers and mixed shrubs flanking the path and screening planting along the road and around car parks and sports areas. This area is of exceptional interest in being one of the very few of Brenda Colvin's designs to have survived.

A series of old photographs, dating from the early 1960s onwards, shows the gradual development of the site. An aerial photograph, which dates to the early 1960s, shows the site still bare, with no planting at all. A lone tree stands to the south-east of the Physical Sciences Building and the copse remains to its east (the area above the Arts Centre). Hedged field boundaries remained at this stage. Other photographs show earth-moving and very young planting.

Llanbadarn campus

The Llanbadarn campus is entirely separate from the Penglais campus, about 1 km to the south-east, laid out on a hillside sloping down to the south-west. The campus was developed from the 1970s onwards and was originally the Welsh College of Agriculture, Coleg Ceredigion and the Department of Library Studies. In 1994 it was absorbed by the university. The landscaping and planting was the responsibility of Mrs Alina Rogers, of the Welsh College of Agriculture. The campus was adventurously landscaped in much the same way as the Penglais campus, with every available space being planted with trees and mounds of shrubs, most of them evergreen. Joy Harris, the present Grounds Supervisor, worked with Mrs Rogers, became Head Gardener of the Llanbadarn campus and in 1994 Grounds Supervisor for all the university grounds.

The main entrance is off a minor road running along the north-west side of the site. The road is bordered by pines and the entrance is flanked by banks of heather, hebe, *Griselinia littoralis* and *Viburnum tinus*, with eucalyptus trees on the upper side and birch on the lower.

On the south-west side of the Coleg Ceredigion building, in the middle of the site, is a lawn with a circular bed of *Trachycarpus fortunei* in its north corner. A path runs the length of the south-west front of the building, next to which are three large concrete planters with oleanders in them. The path down the north-west side of the lawn is densely planted with mixed shrubs. A low residential building to the south has a densely planted long border against it, planted with mixed shrubs including fatsia, lonicera, ligustrum, choisya, berberis, cotoneaster, hebe and escallonia. Further down the slope is a lawn sparsely planted with birch trees. Steep slopes are treated in the same way as on the main campus, with cascading planting of *Cotoneaster microphyllus*.

National Library of Wales

The National Library of Wales is situated below the south end of the Penglais campus, on the same hillside overlooking the town. Its situation and proportions have led to comparisons with the Parthenon in Athens. From its main, west front there are spectacular views over the town and Cardigan Bay.

The imposing and massive main building, faced in Portland stone and Cornish granite, is Art Deco/Greek classical in style. It is three-storey, with rusticated ground floor and projecting cornice. The central entrance on the west front is flanked by Ionic columns and approached by a series of flights of Cornish granite steps. Originally there were four open courts in the centre, around a central hall. The two northern courts were built over in the 1970s and 80s.

The movement to establish a national library, begun in the eighteenth century, gathered serious momentum in the 1890s, with the establishment of a 'Welsh Library Committee' in 1873. By the time that the government began deliberations on the location of a national library in 1904 the present site had already been purchased for one by Lord Rendel. Eventually Cardiff was rejected in favour of Aberystwyth and in 1907 a royal charter was granted for the establishment of a National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth.

A competition was held for the design of the building and the designs of Sidney K. Greenslade (resigned as the library's architect 1927, died 1955), a member of the Arts and Crafts movement, were chosen. Greenslade was assisted by Reginald Blomfield and the work was carried out in stages from 1911 under the firm of Adams, Holden and Pearson. Greenslade kept the external appearance 'purposely flat and severe' and until the 1960s his designs were faithfully followed, except for the central hall and stairs. Occupation began in 1916; the central block of the west front, including the main entrance, was opened in 1937. The layout of the steps and terraces below the west front was also completed by this time and is presumably also the work of Greenslade. An aerial photograph of the early 1960s shows that the present scheme of planting had been established by that time, although it appears younger and more sparse at that time. There was at that time no car park to the south of the building.

The central hall was opened in 1955. Although Greenslade had included a central hall in his design that built was not by him but by Adams, Holden and Pearson. Three ranges of bookstacks were built at the back (east side) of the main building in 1963 – 96.

The approach drive and the grounds below the main west front of the library have been landscaped in a similar way to the university campus, with shrub borders on the steep slopes. The main access is by a drive off the A487. The entrance is flanked by short stone walls about 3.5 m high. The walls are of roughly cut blocks, with dressed stone plinths and coping. The drive then gently climbs the slope below

the library, curving round eastwards to a car park on its south side. A short distance from the entrance is a former lodge on a platform cut into the rock face on the east side of the drive. This is a small, two-storey building of rendered and painted brick, with a slate roof and mullioned and transomed windows.

The immediate setting of the main front of the library is architectural and formal, with symmetrical flights of Cornish granite steps, Portland stone walling and terracing. Below the central steps of the west front of the library is an upper terrace running the width of the building. A tarmac path runs along it, flanked at intervals by clipped euonymus bushes. A central flight of steps leads down to a lower terrace, used for car parking. Below is a sloping lawn and a wide, central flight of steps leading down to the drive.

The slope above the drive is planted with mixed evergreen shrubs. Below it is a grass verge planted with clipped euonymus shrubs at intervals. Below that is a steep drop down to a beech hedge on the site boundary. Further down the drive, to the north, the border above it is gently terraced, using natural stones. Plants include heather, hebe, variegated eleagnus, euonymus, holly, dwarf conifers and rock plants. The north end of the bed extends all the way up the bank, the steep slope terraced with stone walling. Narrow paths wind up through the planting. Further north, behind mixed viburnum, mahonia and berberis shrubs, is a cliff face.

Sources

Primary

Watercolour bird's-eye view of plan for a new university campus, by T.A. Lodge (1931): Old College, University of Wales, Aberystwyth.

Watercolour bird's-eye view of plan of proposals by Percy Thomas, by J. Harvey (1942): Old College, University of Wales, Aberystwyth.

Photographs of the campus, 1960s onwards: university collection.

Landscape Proposals by Brenda Colvin, January 1963: Colvin and Moggridge.

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