

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

EXBURY HOUSE

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Name:	EXBURY HOUSE
County:	Hampshire
District:	New Forest (District Authority)
Parish:	Beaulieu
County:	Hampshire
District:	New Forest (District Authority)
Parish:	Exbury and Lepe
National park:	NEW FOREST
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.799680 Longitude: -1.4029262 National Grid Reference: SU 42174 00183 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000167 Date first listed: 31-May-1984

Details

An early to mid C20 wooded plantsman's garden containing specialist collections of rhododendrons and other species, which was partly laid out within native New Forest woodland by Lionel de Rothschild between 1919 and 1939 and which incorporates features of an informal C19 garden and C19 parkland.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Records of a manor at Exbury date from the C13. Throughout the C15 it was held by the Berkeley family, descending to the Comptons of Compton Wynates in Warwickshire (VCH 1908) who owned it until 1718 and from whom it passed to William Mitford. On the death of his grandson, another William Mitford, in 1827, Exbury passed to Henry Reveley Mitford (ibid). He sold it in the early 1880s to Major John Forster, from whose son the prominent Jewish financier Lionel de Rothschild purchased it in 1919.

He rebuilt the House, extended Exbury village with housing for his staff, and from 1919 until the outbreak of the Second World War, created the present gardens with their specialist collections of rhododendrons and began raising the now world-famous Exbury hybrids. Lionel died in 1942, the same year that Exbury was requisitioned by the Royal Navy as an HQ for use in the D-Day landings. As the 'stone frigate' HMS Mastodon, during the war the House subsequently became a training base. It was renamed HMS Hawk, then HMS King Alfred before being finally derequisitioned and returned to the family in 1955. After the war, restoration and further development of the gardens and the breeding of the Exbury hybrids were continued by Lionel's son, Edmund de Rothschild. The gardens were opened to the public in the early 1950s and since 1988 they have been

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run as Exbury Gardens Ltd, which occupies them on a long lease from the present freehold owner of the whole estate, Mr Edmund de Rothschild's 1966 Charitable Trust. The company has continued the programme of restoration and development, including repair following storm damage in 1987, to the present day. The most recent innovation, completed in August 2001, is the construction of a miniature railway.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Exbury House is situated on the east bank of the Beaulieu River, some 3km south of Beaulieu and on the western edge of the village of Exbury. The c 135ha registered site, which comprises c 103ha of wooded ornamental gardens and nursery grounds, and 32ha of parkland, slopes very gently from the north-east corner westwards and southwards down to the salt marshes which fringe the Beaulieu River and form the site's western boundary. To the north-west, pastureland with trees and the woodland of Steerleys Copse lie between the gardens and the river while to the south and south-east, Exbury's parkland abuts open farmland. Summer Lane runs along the entire eastern boundary, with, on its east side, the village of Exbury and further wooded farmland beyond.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The principal formal approach to Exbury House enters from the east, beside a lodge standing on Summer Lane on the northern edge of Exbury village. From the lodge, which is shown on the OS 1st edition map surveyed in 1868, the drive follows a 350m, gently winding south-westward course to the north-west, entrance front of the House. The public entrance to Exbury Gardens lies some 230m further north along Summer Lane, a drive leading immediately into a car park where ancillary estate buildings now serve as a tea room, and to the site of the station terminus platform for the miniature railway.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Exbury House (listed grade II*) stands almost centrally within the site, on level ground and with extensive views south over its parkland to the Solent and the Isle of Wight. A three-storey building faced in ashlar stone and with a slate roof behind a balustraded parapet, its rectangular plan is cut across the north-west corner to create an oblique entrance front while the garden front has a ground-floor Ionic colonnade with a central bow. A service range (listed grade II), also with an ashlar stone front, runs north-eastwards from that end of the House. The core of Exbury House, and of the service range, date from the C18, the House being recorded by name as the property of 'Mr Mitford Esq' on Milne's county map of 1791. Both were remodelled and enlarged from 1919 to 1922 by Lionel de Rothschild ('Mr Lionel'), the House to the designs of Messrs Romaine-Walker and Jenkins. Although derequisitioned in 1955, it was only refurbished and reoccupied as a family house in 1989 (Smiths Gore 1989).

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The ornamental woodland gardens, which are laid out within a westward-extending arm of New Forest oak wood, lie to the north, west, and south-west of the House and are largely the creation of Lionel de Rothschild between 1919 and 1939. They principally contain collections of species and hybrid rhododendrons, camellias, magnolias, deciduous azaleas, rare trees, and other ericaceous shrubs.

The south, garden front opens onto lawns enclosed from the park by a ha-ha, established by 1868 (OS), while further east, the east front and the south front of the service wing overlook an early C20 formal water garden with two rectangular stone canals. South-west of the House, the Home Path leads south-west to Home Wood, an area of native oak, beech, and pine wood mixed with ornamental tree species which formed the gardens on this side of the House in the late C19 (OS). One of the first areas to be developed by Lionel de Rothschild and completed by 1935, it contains rhododendron species derived from seed sent back by collectors such as Frank Kingdon-Ward, George Forrest, and Joseph Rock, of whom Mr Lionel was a keen sponsor (CL 1942). On the south-east side of the Home Path (350m from the House) is a series of three descending ponds, linked by cascades and pools and with a timber Japanese bridge standing above the Top Pond. These, fed by a stream from the nearby St Mary's spring, are abundantly planted with waterside plants and Japanese maples beneath a tree canopy which includes copper beech. On the north side of Middle Pond, a naturally formed bowl known as the Wynniatt Bowl (after a post-war head gardener, guidebook) is planted with a collection of evergreen azaleas while from the south corner of Top Pond, the Camellia Walk runs south-westwards to the Winter Garden, and a parallel New Camellia Walk was planted in 1999/2000. The main path through this garden, which is planted with early flowering rhododendrons, extends to the east bank of the Beaulieu River

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and commands extensive views over the estuary. A riverside walk runs northwards along the edge of the salt marshes before returning eastwards into the gardens at the Stone Bridge at the south end of Bottom Pond.

On the north side of the Home Path, a broad, straight grassed walk, known as The Glade, extends some 150m west-south-west from the House lawns to a stone memorial to Lionel de Rothschild. Shown as an established feature in 1868 (OS), the walk is lined with mature cedars and other conifers and underplanted with early C20 shrubberies. West beyond The Glade and extending to the river bank, the gardens open out into meadowland dotted with clumps of oak which has been planted since the war with thousands of bulbs to form the Daffodil Meadow. On the north side of The Glade, 200m west of the House, a garden area formerly laid out as the Elizabeth de Rothschild Rose Garden, created in 1981, was taken up and replanted in 2004 with a variety of exotic plants and renamed the 'Sundial Garden'.

To the north and north-west, the House opens onto the Main Lawn, an extensive area of C19 parkland which is laid to open grass dotted with trees and which forms the focus for three drives radiating from the House. The north-westerly Lovers' Lane, which is shown on Greenwood's county map of 1826, runs along the south side of Witchers Wood to the river at Gilbury and is fringed by banks of deciduous Solent azaleas mixed with acers and magnolias. The central Main Drive, intended by Lionel de Rothschild to form the principal approach to the House from a northern entrance (never built), runs due north to Yard Wood, crossing (380m from the House) Gilbury Lane, a minor public road, on Gilbury Bridge. Built in limestone ashlar with a balustrade, the drive and bridge are first recorded on the OS map of 1931. Between these two drives lies Witchers Wood, a more informal area of native pines and oak mixed with ornamental trees and underplanted with rhododendron species and Exbury hybrids.

North of Exbury Bridge, within the area known as Yard Wood which was the last to be developed by Lionel de Rothschild, Main Drive becomes the Azalea Drive (200m north of the bridge). The miniature railway (under construction, 2000) follows a circular, looping route from the car park north-west to Yard Wood through the gardens on the north-east side of the Azalea Drive (between the Drive and the garden boundary). Azalea Drive is flanked by extensive banks of deciduous azaleas interplanted with maples and backed by pine trees. There are views south-west from the Azalea Drive area to Jubilee Pond and its cascaded feeder stream, the pond named to celebrate the jubilee of King George V in 1936. The pond's grassy surrounds are open in character with massed banks of original strains of Knap Hill and Exbury azaleas planted to the south-east of the pond. Further to the north-east, between Azalea Drive and Summer Lane, is the Rock Garden. Extending over nearly 1ha and probably the largest of its kind in Europe (guidebook), the garden is constructed from sandstone imported from Sussex (CL 1942) and incorporates a former gravel pit. It was completed in 1935 but following wartime neglect, it was restored in the 1980s to exhibit its present collection of alpine rhododendrons and other dwarf rock plants. A Water Garden of ponds and streams with waterside planting was constructed in 1981 to the south of the Rock Garden while to its north, the northern end of Yard Wood contains further rhododendron plantings within native oak and yew woods and extensive areas of nursery grounds. North-east of the Rock Garden, new gardens in a natural style with flower meadows, woodland, and wetlands were created in 2001 on former tip land. An area to the north-west of the Rock Garden has been designated the American Garden because of the many American hybrid rhododendrons planted there.

PARK South of the House and the ha-ha, an area of open level parkland extends c 700m to the site boundary. Under mixed arable, its present pattern of occasional tree clumps and small blocks of woodland reflect that shown in 1868 (OS). At that date, only an area of some 7ha closest to the House is shown as parkland, the remainder retaining its field boundaries until 1898 (OS 2nd edition). The north-east corner of the park, which was converted to productive garden use by 1931 (OS), is occupied by Upper Exbury and its surrounding gardens, the house built for Leopold de Rothschild by Law and Dunbar Nasmith of Edinburgh in 1964-5 (Pevsner and Lloyd 1967). The same architectural practice designed a purpose-built engine shed and platform for the miniature railway, situated to the north of the visitor car park.

KITCHEN GARDEN The c 2.5ha kitchen garden enclosures stand to the east of the House. They comprise a partially walled square garden with, on its eastern side, a range of glasshouses, brick-built boiler houses (these built between 1919 and 1931), and estate offices with a water tower. South of this garden is a second square filled with polytunnels and partly enclosed by hedging. A mount stands a few metres south of its south side. Both gardens, the estate office range, and The Mount are shown on the 1st edition OS map of 1868.

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REFERENCES

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Maps Thomas Milne, *Hampshire or the County of Southampton ...*, 1" to 1 mile, 1791 C and J Greenwood, *A Map of the County of Southampton ...*, 1" to 1 mile, 1826

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1868 2nd edition published 1898 3rd edition published 1909 1931 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 3rd edition published 1908 1932 edition

Description written: October 1998 Amended: July 2000, January 2002 Updated: July 2004 Register Inspector: VCH Edited: January 2004

This list entry was subject to a Minor Enhancement on 26/04/2019

Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.