

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

BROCKENHURST PARK

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Name:	BROCKENHURST PARK
County:	Hampshire
District:	New Forest (District Authority)
Parish:	Brockenhurst
National park:	NEW FOREST
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.814107 Longitude: -1.5594468 National Grid Reference: SU 31134 01710 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000499 Date first listed: 01-Oct-1990

Details

A landscape park developed from the existing agricultural landscape from 1770 onwards by the Morant family. A good example of the creation of an 'instant' landscape park by Edward Morant by using the artifice of removing agricultural hedges, enclosing farmland, and retaining the ancient existing hedge trees. William Emes and John Webb were commissioned to prepare a scheme for the park, which was largely unexecuted. The late C19 Italianate garden was cited as an exemplar design during the early 1900s.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Mansion houses existed at Brockenhurst and Watcombe Farm before Edward Morant (1730-91) bought the properties in 1769. Watcombe Farm, described as a 'mansion' in a lease of 1751 (HRO) was sold in 1759 by Captain John Blake (India Service) to John Howard (1726-90), the prison reformer and philanthropist who only lived there for three years before selling it to John Dalrymple. He in turn sold to Edward Morant. This quick succession of owners explains the lack of formal gardens at Watcombe compared to the formal gardens shown around Brockenhurst Farm (Plan, 1740), a large mansion owned by George Baker.

Morant moved to England in 1759 from Jamaica where his family owned extensive sugar plantations which provided the family income during the C18, turning in annual receipts of £20,000. He purchased Brockenhurst for £6400, and a third property, Roydon Manor in 1771 which was also engrossed into the park. Morant's 'instant' landscape park, made by removing the agricultural hedges and leaving the hedgerow trees, all pendunculate oak, was lauded by William Gilpin (1724-1804).

Morant's son, John Morant (1755-94) succeeded to the property in 1791. He commissioned William Emes (1720-1803) and John Webb (c 1754-1828), in partnership in the 1790s, to prepare a series of landscape proposals for the gardens and estate. He also commissioned John Plaw (c 1745-1820) to design some picturesque buildings to ornament the landscape, which were published in Plaw's *Ferme Ornée* (1795). Due to Morant's death in 1794, Emes and Webb's overall design was not implemented although his heir, another John Morant (1787-1857), did execute some of their specific proposals in the park.

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From 1857 onwards, when the third John Morant (1825-99) succeeded, an intensive scheme of improvements and alterations was undertaken, despite a steady decrease in annual income from the West Indian estates which by 1880 had fallen to £10,000. Morant remodelled the house in the French chateau style according to designs by Thomas Henry Wyatt (1807-80), did considerable parkland planting introducing an element of formality into the parkland by laying out three avenues, one terminated by an eyecatcher, and laid out extensive Italianate gardens to the south of the house. These gardens were situated in the walled garden and seem to have been completed sometime in the 1880s when they were photographed in an album series devoted to the construction of the gardens at Rhinefield (qv). The Italianate gardens were renowned, being widely written about between 1901 and 1918 (CL 1901; Jekyll and Elgood 1904; Holme 1907; Jekyll 1918), photographed (CL 1901) and painted (eg George Elgood, in Jekyll 1907) until the First World War. No professional designer/architect has been associated with this work.

The gardens declined dramatically after the Second World War, and by 1958 Brockenhurst Park had passed out of Morant family ownership. The house was demolished in 1958 and in 1960 a new house was built by the owners, Mr and Mrs Berry, to the designs of Harry Graham. The Berrys also restored the gardens during their near thirty-year residence, these having been neglected post-war. The gardens and park remain (1999) in private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Brockenhurst Park, covering 193ha, lies directly to the south-east of Brockenhurst village. The B3055, Beaulieu to Brockenhurst road forms the north-west boundary of the site. To the east the boundary is formed by the Lymington River, and to the west by Church Lane, the old route from Brockenhurst to Christchurch running past St Nicholas' church. The southern boundary of the park is formed by a series of large plantations and older woodlands: Bakers Copse, Highwood Copse, and Connigers Copse (Plan, 1793). There are extensive views towards the north and round to the north-east.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main approach to the park lies along the north drive. North Lodge (listed grade II), built for John Morant by T H Wyatt in the 1860s, is an asymmetrical composition in a French Renaissance style which forms a central carriage arch over the north entrance drive. This ornate and commanding entrance from Brockenhurst also led up to a 'halt' on the main Bournemouth to London railway line which was in use by the family during the early C20. It was laid out with an avenue of horse chestnut between 1840 (Tithe map) and c 1860 (OS). The drive which wound through the park from the south is no longer in use.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The modern country house stands on the highest area within the western part of the park. It lies on the site of the earlier mansion, which was demolished in 1958. The Victorian wing of the house, designed by Wyatt for John Morant in the 1860s, was pulled down in 1936 (Photographs, NMR). Sometime after commissioning Wyatt and after 1867 (OS), John Morant also removed the portico on the north front of Baker's Georgian mansion, re-erecting it as an eyecatcher in the landscape park.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS To the south of the house lie formal gardens set in an enclosing band of pleasure grounds planted with ornamental trees and shrubs. These were laid out after 1867 (OS) by Morant within and on the site of the walled kitchen gardens and pleasure grounds. Beyond a long, narrow, brick- and stone-edged canal, a double set of steps leads up to shallow, rising terraces which carry a series of hedged garden compartments decorated with fountains, pools, and seats. Many of the original garden ornaments, which provided a theme of Ancient Rome, have been dispersed. These were replaced by the Berrys who brought several from their previous home at Dropmore (qv), Bucks.

PARK The south park is roughly level whilst the north park is more undulating, the ground generally falling towards Mill Lane at the northern boundary of the site. One of the principal features of Brockenhurst Park is its field archaeology indicating the previous settlement pattern and relationship of Brockenhurst manor, Watcombe Farm and the former village of Watcombe, a complex of banks and ditches from relict field boundaries, hollow-ways, and settlement sites of isolated cottages, barns, and farmsteads. Some cottages still survive, although in ruinous condition within the park, as at Park Cottage which has a date stone of 1719. The ancient sweet chestnut trees in the park, unusual for the New Forest, indicate a phase of landscaping before Morant's activities.

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Edward Morant's formation of the landscape park from 1770 onwards was considered effective enough to be judged by William Gilpin in 1794 as 'in the highest stile [sic] of picturesque beauty' (Gilpin 1794). He lived nearby at Vicar's Hill, Boldre, knew the area intimately, and described the range of scenic contrasts at Brockenhurst Park between the open forest lawns, clumps, and woodlands and noted 'the oldest and most venerable oaks of the forest' which Morant had kept.

A broad lime avenue runs south-west to north-east across the highest land and divides the well-wooded park. This avenue was seriously damaged by the 1990 storm but most trees were high pollarded and re-erected, with remarkable success. The Northern Avenue of horse chestnut (originally laid out 1840-60) lining the north drive has been replanted (1990s). The avenue to the west of the house acts as a vista, terminating on Church Lane. The portico from the house was re-erected at the end of this vista by Morant (after 1867) but was demolished by the Berrys in 1958; a raised semicircular mound remains on the spot.

Emes and Webb's major proposal (Plan, 1793) to widen the Lymington River on the eastern boundary of the Morant property was unexecuted. Neither was their proposal to form a 'new river supplied from the forest brook' implemented. Overall their proposals were for agricultural improvement with three distinct areas designated as: 'Heath lands cultivated & Planted & to remain as Sheep Pasture'; a series of rectangular fields to be 'Arable land with a grass headland around each Field' and an area of large pasture around the house with a meadow alongside the river. Other picturesque details were a dairy, menagerie, dog kennel, fishing house, and a 'View Tower and Shepherds abode'. There were sufficient agricultural barns, stables, and paddocks to support the various functions.

John Plaw's designs for the picturesque Fishing House, Bathing House, and kennels, published in 1795, may have been partially executed by Morant's heir, John Morant. He did follow some of Emes and Webb's proposals over the period of his tenure, principally the diversion of the public road from its old route directly past the house and through the park, to the current course of the B3055 (Map, 1814). He also built the dairy, dog kennels, and a fisherman's house by the river. A large walled garden was laid out to the south of the house, enclosed by a shrubbery.

During the Second World War, the park on either side of the north avenue was occupied by the army, with the result that there was considerable earth-moving and levelling. There was also an American hospital to the west of the north drive.

KITCHEN GARDEN When the late C18 walled gardens to the south of the house were remodelled by Morant in the 1870s to provide formal ornamental gardens, a new complex of kitchen gardens was laid out west of Church Road, to the south of St Nicholas' church (outside the area here registered).

REFERENCES

P Sandby, Collection of one hundred and fifty select views 1, (1781), pl 20 W Gilpin, Remarks on Forest Scenery and other Woodland Views (1794), pp 62-4 J Plaw, Ferme Ornée (1795) Country Life, 10 (23 November 1901), pp 656-61; (30 November 1901), pp 688-93; 142 (31 August 1967), pp 464-5 G Jekyll, and G S Elgood, Some English Gardens (1904), pp 1-4 C Holme, The Gardens of England in the Southern and Western Counties (1907), p 33, pls 27-30 G Jekyll, Gardens of England in the South West Counties (1907) G Jekyll, Garden Ornament (1918), p 288 A Paterson, The Gardens of Britain 2, (1978), pp 61-2 M Binney and A Hills, Elysian Gardens (1979), p 66 B Pinnell, Country House History around Lymington, Brockenhurst and Milford-on-Sea. (1987), pp 182-95 A Restoration Plan for Brockenhurst Park, (Ecological Planning & Research 1993)

Maps An atlas of estate plans, held in a private collection, contains the following: Boyer & Tree, A plan of Brockenhurst Farm in Parish of Brockenhurst in the County of Southampton belonging to George Baker Esquire, 1740 Plan of the Demesne lands etc at Brockenhurst the seat of John Morant esquire with some alterations by Emes & Webb, 1793 A Survey of the Estate of John Morant esquire at Brockenhurst Hampshire taken 1793 Plan of a house and park on the Lymington Lyndhurst Road, showing details of landscaping required including arrangements for lawn, siting of shrubs, seats, ponds, a ha-ha, chinese fence and kitchen garden, nd Rough Plan of part of the estate of John Morant esquire at Brockenhurst, nd (c 1800) A map showing the alteration of roads at Brockenhurst Park, 1814

Tithe map for Brockenhurst parish, 1840 (Hampshire Record Office)

OS Old Series 1" to 1 mile, published 1820 OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1863, published 1867 2nd edition surveyed 1910

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Illustrations Photographs of Brockenhurst Gardens, c 1890 (private collection) Photographs of Brockenhurst Park, 1935, 1950, 1960s (NMR, Swindon)

Archival items The Morant family papers are held at the Hampshire Record Office, Winchester (6M80M). Lease between Jeremiah Crag and John Blake, 1751 (E/B86), (Hampshire Record Office) [quoted in Ecological Planning & Research 1993]

Description rewritten: September 1999 Register Inspector: KC Edited: January 2004

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.