

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

BROCKHURST

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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**BROCKHURST**

Name:	BROCKHURST
County:	West Sussex
District:	Mid Sussex (District Authority)
Parish:	East Grinstead
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.117819 Longitude: 0.0084153245 National Grid Reference: TQ 40667 37310 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000348 Date first listed: 01-Dec-1988

## Details

Rock garden, gardens and pleasure grounds, laid out by Frederick J Hanbury between 1908-1935 and set within a park of 10ha surrounding a country house,

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

By 1875 (OS) Ashurst Lodge was situated within substantial pleasure grounds which extended to the south-west of the house along the south-west facing slopes. By 1899 (OS) the name of the house had been changed Brockhurst.

In 1908 the estate was bought by Frederick J Hanbury (1851-1935), and in the following two decades he laid out the gardens for which the site was famous. The Hanburys were well known as a family of gardeners, Frederick Hanbury's cousin being Sir Thomas Hanbury (1832-1907) who laid out the gardens at La Mortola, near Ventimiglia in Liguria, northern Italy and in 1903 bought and presented the 60acre (c 24ha) estate at Wisley, Surrey (qv) to the Royal Horticultural Society. Frederick Hanbury received a number of semi-hardy plants from La Mortola which he attempted to grow at Brockhurst with varying success (JRHS 1917). A renowned botanist in his own right he was active for many years in botanical collecting.

Hanbury carried out an extensive scheme of planting and landscaping during his ownership of the Brockhurst estate. In 1910 he had already embarked on the construction of a rock garden using stone brought in from a local source. When digging planting holes for a belt of rhododendron, he accidentally discovered the outcrop of Tunbridge Wells sandstone which lay close below the surface which he described as 'a fine mass of solid rock, some 30ft [c 9m] thick' (The Garden 1924). This he uncovered, quarried, and built up with the help of the head gardener, Thomas Matthews, to form a great ravine and rockery. The feature was then planted with a wide range of species, both exotics and natives. The water from a number of springs was harnessed to feed a variety of waterworks. A moraine, based on a succession of cement tanks with a complex underground watering system, was made with advice from E A Bowles (1865-1954) and Reginald Farrer (1880-1920). Farrer was responsible for the construction of the famous rockery at St John's College, Oxford (qv) and author of the encyclopaedia, *The English Rock garden*, published in 1919.

The estate was split up in 1954. A number of new houses have been built in the grounds, destroying parts of Hanbury's layout such as the heath garden which had occupied land to the south of the house. The rock garden for which Hanbury's scheme was

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renowned, survives however within the gardens to Barton Pines, a house built in the 1950s. After moving to Barton Pines in 1954, Mr and Mrs Eric Crundall rediscovered, replanted and maintained Hanbury's rock garden over the next forty years. The site is in private divided ownership (1999).

#### SITE DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Brockhurst lies c 1.5 km south-east of East Grinstead on the south side of the Lewes Road, the A22 which links East Grinstead with Forest Row. The topography is gently undulating with a downward slope towards the south and south-west, and the site is protected to the east and north-east by rising ground. From the higher points of the estate there are distant views to the Ashdown Forest. The site of the rock garden is a rounded hill with a steep escarpment towards the north-west. Brockhurst house stands close to the Lewes Road which forms the north-east boundary of the site, and is screened from the road by a large, shrub-planted mound. On all other boundaries the site adjoins farmland.

The underlying geology of the site which was exploited by Hanbury, is the Lower Tunbridge Wells sandstone, a solid rock found at a shallow depth beneath the soils.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The main drive which enters at the lodge on the Lewes Road 130m south-east of Brickhurst, was probably modified by Hanbury c1910 (OS). Cut into the slope and lined by a stone faced retaining wall, it curves round from Lewes Road to the south-west and turns north-west before finally turning north-east to approach the west of the house. This approach gives fine views out to the south and west while the house remains hidden from view. Hanbury's improvements seem to have been based on the route of an earlier carriage drive along which areas of heather planting were established in c1877. By Hanbury's time it formed a dense bank, noted as colourful in autumn (JRHS 1917).

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Brockhurst House is Arts and Crafts in style and would appear to have been refurbished by Hanbury after he purchased the property. The original property was L-shaped, with the entrance in the south-east angle. Although a major portion of the house was demolished in the 1950s, the garden front of the house is relatively intact and retains a strong relationship to the gardens.

A number of other properties have been built within the grounds since the estate was divided in 1954.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** On the west side of the house are a series of terraces, constructed in 1911. From the terraces a flight of steps leads onto a lawn and rock garden, and then down to the highest of the string of four spring-fed ponds set in pleasure grounds, planted with species of rhododendron. Hanbury planted the banks of the ponds with water plants.

To the north-west of the house is a pinetum, which was severely damaged in the 1987 storm but occasional unusual trees survive (Inspector's Report 1998). Beyond the pinetum is the rock garden for which the gardens were particularly famous; this is now part of the grounds of Barton Pines. The rock garden covers 1.6 ha of what was originally a sloping meadow called 'Banky Meadow'. Its construction and planting are fully described in numerous articles from the 1910s and 1920s. A natural spring was channelled to feed a series of miniature waterfalls and pools within the rock garden, issuing eventually into the head of the upper pond. A central winding path, some 180m long leads through the rock garden to a great chasm. This is flanked on either side by steps at intervals leading to paths which run at a higher level along the tops of the banks. Half way along the central path is an open, boggy area for marsh plants, providing a contrast with the rock faces. In the main chasm is a cave, long and winding with a number of branches, which was formed from the extraction of additional stone for the garden. Another feature of this chasm is a deep, still pool with a dripping well at one end with long flights of steps leading up to a walk along the highest point of the garden. Following the break-up of the estate in the 1950s, Barton Pines was built on a site immediately to the south of the Lewes Road, overlooking the rock garden, but placed so as to relate directly to it.

To the north-west of the rock garden is a further area of pinetum, planted with redwoods and pines which led out into the Wilderness, an area of pleasure grounds laid out along a large stream with woodland plants and moisture-loving plants. Hanbury used the stream to feed a pumping house and reservoir a quarter of a mile away for use in the house, gardens and laundry. The Wilderness and pumping house have not survived.

There was also an Observatory: a well-equipped astronomical and meteorological station situated on the highest point of the property. This was surrounded by a heath garden. Neither of these two features remain.

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**BROCKHURST**

**PARK** The gardens sit in the remnants of a park developed between 1875 and 1899 (OS), incorporating the easternmost of the string of four ponds which lay directly to the west of the house in a line from north-east to south-west. By 1899 (OS) the park had reached its greatest extent, lying north-west of the house and extending almost to the outskirts of East Grinstead. By the 1930s a number of large residences in parkland settings had been built on the outskirts of East Grinstead; Brockhurst is among these, but in contrast to the others the garden grounds and woodland gardens were a major feature at Brockhurst.

**REFERENCES** J Roy Hortic Soc XLII, parts II and III (1917), pp 271-81 Country Life, 54 (4 August 1923), pp148-54 The Garden, (16 February 1924), pp 82-6 'The Brockhurst Gardens, A paradise of dainty devices' The Times, 2 June 1925 The Studio, (1926-7) Lady Rockley, Historic Gardens of England (1938), pp254-5 Inspector's Report: Brockhurst, English Heritage 1988) Maps OS 6" to 1 mile:1 1st edition surveyed 1875 2nd edition published 1899 3rd edition published 1910

Description written : May 1992 Register Inspector : HJ Amended: November 1999 (KC); December (CAA) Edited: December 2003

## 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.