

**GLA 54: Sundridge Park Manor Pulhamite Grotto, Potential LIGS**

London Borough of Bromley, TQ 4183 7063

Ownership: Sundridge Park Manor. Permission to visit must be sought from golf course staff ([www.sundridgepark.com](http://www.sundridgepark.com)).

**Artificial rock gardens designed by the Pulham family**

In the mid and late 18<sup>th</sup> century wealthy landowners were most enthusiastic about having spectacular natural features in their gardens. Massive rock gardens and large grottos were among the most popular features built in the grounds of their mansions. Humphry Repton and other garden designers of the period promoted the idea of picturesque, rugged and natural formations. This demand was supported by landscape contractors and the most famous of them was James Pulham & Son (operating for four generations). More than 177 Pulham-designed gardens are currently known including one at Buckingham Palace and another in Battersea Park. Smaller features are the Pulhamite waterfall in Bromley Civic Centre (GLA 52) and the small 'rock exposure' on the edge of the Knighton Wood lake (GLA 50), both with open access. The Pulhams tried to imitate natural rock outcrops, often using materials found locally draped over brick and other core structures for support (see <http://pulham.org.uk/>).

**Pulhamite Grotto at Sundridge Park Manor**

Sundridge Park Manor is situated in the middle of extensive grounds that are now Sundridge Park Golf Course. At the back of the mansion there is a spectacular grotto designed and built by James Pulham and Son in 1873-4 and kept in good repair by South London RIGS. The feature might better be described as a ravine stretching up the slope and bending into the woods for about 100 m. It is designed to invite you up. The Pulhamite here is made to closely resemble sandstone from the Weald of Sussex and Kent as found in the Tunbridge Wells area. There are even large lumps of the original sandstone incorporated into the fabric adding to the feeling of reality. The artificial material utilised sediments from the local Blackheath Beds. Elmstead Wood Pit close by is clearly marked on old maps although with encroaching vegetation it is now difficult to locate within the woods. There is an exposure close by in a former pit that is now a private garden (GLA 33, SSSI). The 55 million year old Blackheath Beds are characterised by the pebbles that cover Blackheath and that are well displayed in Gilbert's Pit Charlton, and cemented in blocks at Dog Rocks, Plumstead (GLA 14 and 8). At Elmstead Wood the lithology is different with layers of black pebbles alternating with layers of massed oyster shells which have been cemented together. Other layers are sandy. Little pieces of the hard conglomerate can be found throughout the grotto but there is also one considerably larger lump incorporated into the fabric. An ornamental arch of cemented fossils and pebbles can also be seen within the grounds of the mansion (see GA Guide 68, pp. 111-115).

**Access**

Sundridge Park Manor is currently a conference centre and hotel situated at the end of a driveway from Plaistow Road and running through the middle of Sundridge Park Golf Course. Access is with permission of the staff<sup>3</sup>.

**The Pulhamite Grotto at Sundridge Park Manor**

Source: London's foundations, page 234 (Steve Tracey)



**Site Map**

Source: London's foundations, page 232

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