

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

ROUS LENCH COURT

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

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**ROUS LENCH COURT**

Name:	ROUS LENCH COURT
County:	Worcestershire
District:	Wychavon (District Authority)
Parish:	Rous Lench
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.181899 Longitude: -1.9740969 National Grid Reference: SP0186853739 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000893 Date first listed: 28-Feb-1986

## Details

Terraced topiary gardens developed in the late C19 from possibly C17 origins, and a C19 landscape park, associated with a timber-framed manor house.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

John Rous purchased the manor of Lench in 1381-2, and it descended in that family for 350 years. Sir Thomas Rous (cr bt 1641), who inherited in 1645, was a friend of the puritan divine Richard Baxter whose visit to Rous Lench has long been commemorated by a tree. Cromwell is said to have spent the night here on the eve of the Battle of Worcester in 1651. In 1729 the manor passed to Thomas Philipps, a distant kinsman, subsequently passing through various collateral branches (variously named Rouse, Boughton-Rouse and Rouse-Boughton) until sold in 1876 by Sir Charles Henry Rouse-Boughton to the Rev Dr William Kyle Westwood Chafy of Sherborne. Chafy (d 1916) was the principal influence in the area during his lifetime, rebuilding the house, remodelling the gardens, and enlarging the Rouse-Boughton's estate village of Rous Lench.

Chafy's son H E Chafy had the property in 1926. In 1928 Rous Lench was sold to the Burn family, owners of a chain of tailor's shops, and given, along with a Rolls-Royce, as a twenty-first birthday present to Thomas Burn (d c 1985). In 1993 Rous Lench Court and most of the park was acquired by Mr Peter White, an architect, under whom the house and gardens were restored.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** The village of Rous Lench lies c 10km north of, and equidistant from, Pershore and Evesham. Rous Lench Court lies c 500m south-east of the village, on a minor road from Rous Lench to Church Lench which bounds the historic park along its western side. Otherwise the park boundary follows field edges and, to the east, the outer edge of Slade Wood. The house lies on rising ground from which there are extensive views north across Rous Lench and the relatively level countryside beyond.

The area here registered is c 112ha.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** Rous Lench Court is approached off the Rous Lench to Church Lench road through tall iron gates bearing the initials of Thomas Burn. Those hang on ashlar gate piers of C17 type; an ashlar stone wall runs east to bound the gardens. From the gates the gravelled drive runs on a straight line along the edge of the pleasure grounds before

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
*ROUS LENCH COURT*

turning a right-angle east to run along the north side of the main gardens before taking another right-angle turn south into the house's courtyard. This drive was contrived after the early 1880s, at which time the courtyard was still entered directly from the public road via the archway under the house's south range.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Rous Lench Court (listed grade II\*) is an imposing L-plan timber-framed building, the south range of the early C16 and the east of c 1840. Some time before 1812 a north hall and parlour range was demolished along with a further court north of that. North-west of the house, and at a lower level, are gardener's accommodation and stables, converted in the 1990s to residential use.

A square moated site (scheduled ancient monument) 500m north-west of the house, on the east edge of Rous Lench churchyard, is believed to mark the site of the medieval manor house.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** Rous Lench Court lies on ground which slopes markedly upwards from west to east, and that slope has been exploited to form a series of terraces, subdivided by walls and especially clipped yew hedges into numerous separate compartments.

West of the house stone steps from the courtyard descend to the Lavender Terrace which is quartered, with lavender beds and a central circular basin containing a statue of Mercury. Pierced later C19 stone balustrading (listed grade II) runs along the west side of the terrace. The axial path then descends west via a further flight of stone steps (also listed grade II) to a grassed lower court. This is bounded to the north by the Gardener's Cottage, to the south by the main boundary wall, and to the west by the drive which enters the grounds at the south-west corner of the lower court. West of the drive, and flanked by a late C20 herbaceous border, is the low brick wall constructed in the 1870s which separates the pleasure grounds from the park. An elaborate ?C19 iron gate near the main gates gives access between the two.

The house's forecourt is bounded to the north by a 3-4m tall yew hedge clipped into towers and buttresses and pierced with clairvoies. A gap in the hedge leads through to the Italian Garden, a lawn quartered by paths of small yellow bricks laid (post 1899) herringbone-fashion. In the centre is a circular basin with a Mercury fountain.

The east/west path across the centre of the Italian Garden is continued east as the main axial path up the centre of the terraced gardens east and north-east of the house. From the Italian Garden two flights of stone steps rise to the 110m long Lower Yew Avenue, a straight gravel walk bounded to either side by mature yew trees, which runs northwards from the east side of the house. From this a third flight of steps carries the axial path east to the Lower Pleasance, which is enclosed to the north, south and east by tall, elaborately clipped yew hedges which rise off ?C17 brick terrace walls, and to the west by a gravel walk laid in the 1990s. A circular yew arbour or cabinet de verdure lies in the centre of the Lower Pleasance, which is grassed. The main axial path leaves the centre of the east side of the compartment via a flight of stone steps which rise to the north/south Middle Terrace gravel walk, east of which a grass ramp rises up to a grassed compartment which is effectively (although not so called) the Upper Pleasance. A yew known as Baxter's tree lies in its north-west corner. The compartment is bisected east/west by the main axial path, which is here enclosed within a yew tunnel, the west end of which is enlarged into a clipped yew cottage. The path terminates in a trellised arbour with seat, constructed in the mid 1990s to block off the former entrance to the kitchen garden which in the C19 and later comprised the easternmost of the garden compartments.

Broad walks run east/west down the north and south sides of the main compartments, parallel with and 25m either side of the central axial path. These too are largely bounded by tall clipped yew hedges, gaps through which lead into the compartments up the centre. To the south is the Long Green Walk, which runs 150m east from the rear of the house to the outer south-east corner of the kitchen garden, at which point the walk dog-legs 20m to the south to a gate onto the Rous Lench road. The shorter gravel Rose Walk leads down the north side of the Upper and Lower Pleasances, from outside the north-west corner of the kitchen garden. This walk is bounded to the north by a brick wall, probably C17. A gate at the end of the Middle Terrace walk leads through that wall to the Cloister Garden with pool and crenellated brick potting shed (all 1990s). Immediately to the west of the Cloister Garden is the Secret Garden, a rock garden with pools, a rill, monoliths and curving flagged paths. From this further steps lead west to the Lower Yew Avenue and thence to the north end of the Italian Garden.

The rising ground north of the Cloister and Secret Gardens is occupied by a pinetum with many mature trees, which provides the skyline to the north of Rous Lench Court when the house is viewed from the west. Below (west of) the pinetum, and north

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**ROUS LENCH COURT**

of the Italian Garden and stables complex, is the Lower Lawn, on which stand a mature *Wellingtonia* and cedars. On the east side of the lawn is an early C20 (but post 1921) pergola/temple, and on its north a vertical sundial. To the west the lawn is bounded by the park wall and herbaceous border. North of the lawn, and via another elaborate C20 iron gate, is an orchard.

The brick walls which in part define the gardens suggest that the main elements of the terraced garden's design were established by the C17. The yew arbour and other elements of the yew planting have also traditionally been seen as of early modern date. In 1782 Nash mentioned a summerhouse at the top of the garden (probably within the yew arbour, as a summerhouse within was mentioned in late C19 and early C20 descriptions of the garden) 'whence you have a pleasant prospect' (cited in Lockett 1997, 222). A sketch plan of 1812 (Soc Antiqs) indicates the main divisions of the garden and the three main east/west axial paths with steps. Unfortunately precisely what the Rev Chafy did to remodel the terraced gardens in the later C19 is uncertain. Certainly he added the Italian Garden, and it may be suspected the Secret Garden, and (looking at illustrations in the 1875 sale catalogue when the garden was described as 'Italian') developed the tradition of elaborate topiary.

PARK Rous Lench Court lies at the south corner of what in the C19 and C20 was deemed its park. Extending north-west from the house towards Rous Lench church is permanent grassland with parkland trees; ridge and furrow and other earthworks survive in good condition. The north-eastern part of the park is occupied by Slade Wood.

In the later 1990s a pool was excavated in the park against the wall separating it from the house's gardens.

Among the earthworks is a hollow-way running east towards the site of a house which until the late C19 or early C20 (still present 1885) stood immediately west of the lower court west of Rous Lench Court.

The park was already in existence by 1875.

KITCHEN GARDEN The brick-walled kitchen garden measures c 65m east/west by 55m north/south. Rising from its north-east corner is Chafy's Tower (listed grade II), a three-storey brick tower of c 1880 said by Pevsner (1968, 256) to remind one 'of an Italian Palazzo Pubblico' That was converted in the later 1990s to residential use, at the same time as two new houses were built against and inside the north (Mulberry House) and east (Tower Lodge) garden walls.

The kitchen garden was built as part of the Rev Chafy's improvements after he bought the property in 1876. It formed the easternmost compartment of the garden terraces, and until the enabling development of the later 1990s the main east/west axial path continued through it. The garden was quartered by a north/south path across the centre.

REFERENCES Country Life, 6 (16 September 1899), pp 336-42 The Victoria History of the County of Worcester 3, (1913), pp 497-9 N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Worcestershire* (1968), p 256 P Reid, *Burke's and Savills Guide to Country Houses: Volume II, Herefordshire* (1980), pp 225-6 E Clarke and G Wright, *English Topiary Gardens* (1988), pp 61-5 R Lockett, *A Survey of Historic Parks and Gardens in Worcestershire*, (Hereford & Worcester Gardens Trust 1997)

Maps Plan of Rous Lench Court, 1812 (Society of Antiquaries of London)

OS 6" to 1 mile: Worcestershire sheet 35 NW, 1st edition published 1884-5 Worcestershire sheet 35 NE, 1st edition published 1884-5 Worcestershire sheet 35 SW, 1st edition published 1884-5 Worcestershire sheet 35 SE, 1st edition published 1884-5

OS 25" to 1 mile: Worcestershire sheet 35.11, 1st edition published 1885

Archival items Sale catalogue, 1875 [including plan] (b 705:300 (BA 1775)), (Worcestershire Record Office)

Description written: 1997 Register Inspector: PAS Edited: September 1999

## 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.