

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

LEES COURT

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

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LEES COURT

Name: LEES COURT

County: Kent

District: Swale (District Authority)

Parish: Badlesmere

County: Kent

District: Swale (District Authority)

Parish: Selling

County: Kent

District: Swale (District Authority)

Parish: Sheldwich

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.257671
Longitude: 0.89844522
National Grid Reference: TR 02338 54936
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1000388
Date first listed: 01-Mar-1989

Details

Formal gardens laid out in 1908 by Thomas H Mawson, round a country house set in parkland which retains traces of an extensive early C18 formal layout.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Lees Court was built in 1652 on the site of an earlier house, by Sir George Sondes whose family had bought the estate in 1600. The front of the house is said by Newman (1983) to have been after a design by Inigo Jones. Sir George was made Earl of Feversham shortly before his death in 1677, and was succeeded in the estate and title by his son-in-law, Louis, Lord Duras of Holdenby. By the early C18 the house had been surrounded by an extensive arrangement of formal gardens, presumably at the direction of Duras, and these are recorded in engravings by Kip and by Badeslade (both in Harris 1719). When Duras died in 1709, the Lees Court estate passed to his late wife's sister, Sir George Sondes' younger daughter. She was married to Lewis Watson, Lord Rockingham, who was created Earl of Rockingham in 1714. On his grandson Thomas Watson, 3rd Earl of Rockingham's death in 1746 Lees Court was inherited by a cousin, Lewis Monson, who took the additional name of Watson and was later raised to the peerage as Baron Sondes. Towards the end of the C18 Sir John Soane was commissioned to build new

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stables, estate offices, and a dairy at a time when changes were underway in the park. In the first decade of the C20 the C17 house was badly damaged by a fire and the Sondes family employed the architects Edward Hoare and Montagu Wheeler to rebuild it. In 1908 Mrs Gerald Leigh, who had leased the estate from Lord Sondes, commissioned Thomas H Mawson (1861-1933), assisted by Robert Atkinson to lay out formal gardens beneath the south-east front. Although leased at times throughout its history, Lees Court remained in the ownership of the Sondes family until the mid 1970s when it was sold to a developer and divided into flats. The site remains (2000) in divided ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Lees Court occupies a rural location on the east side of the A251, Faversham to Ashford road, c 5km to the south of Faversham. The village of Sheldwich Lees lies beyond the north-west boundary of the park, while the south-west boundary is formed by Lees Court Road. Farmland lies along the northern boundary, with Winding Hill and the village of Hogben's Hill beyond the north-east corner of the site. To the east lies farmland and woodland and to the south the boundary is formed by Fisher Street Road. The house stands slightly west of centre within the 160ha site on the eastern edge of a level plateau, the land falling to the east and forming a deep, narrow valley which runs north to south through the site.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Lees Court is approached from Lees Court Road beside the Gate House located c 450m to the south-west of the house. The entrance is marked by a pair of early C19 wrought-iron gates and railings (listed grade II), probably brought to the site as part of the early C20 improvements. The drive runs east through the park and then turns north-east to run between the house and the stable yard before arriving at the entrance court below the north-east front. A second entrance, beside the small, late C18 rustic lodge (possibly designed by Sir John Soane, listed grade II) stands at Hogben's Hill, c 1.3km to the north-east of the house. The drive from this lodge is no longer in use (2000). Probably laid out in the late C18 at the time the lodge was built, it entered the park at its north-east tip and led through Winding Hill Wood to join with the west drive south of the house.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Lees Court (listed grade I) is a large country house of rendered brick, with pilaster bases and capitals, under a slate roof. It is constructed of two storeys, following a pre C17 plan around a courtyard and has thirteen bays separated by giant Ionic pilasters. The house was completed in c 1652 for Sir George Sondes and the entrance front, at that time on the south-west, was thought to be after a design by Inigo Jones (Newman 1983). Following a fire in the first decade of the C20, the house was reconstructed by Edward Hoare and Montagu Wheeler, at which time the entrance front was moved to the north-east. In the 1970s Lees Court was converted into a number of private residences.

Just beyond the north-west front of the house stands the Dairy Court (listed grade II) comprising a dairy building and estate offices, now (2001) flats. The red-brick and slate-roofed courtyard is entered via an elliptical arch with large pediment above it, situated on the north-east side. The high walls to the north-west are connected to the Stable Yard (listed grade II) which is also converted into flats. These buildings were added by Sir John Soane (1753-1837) for the Sondes family, the Stable Yard dating from 1786 and the Dairy Court from 1790.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens lie principally below the south-east front. A flagstone terrace beside the house leads onto a sunken rose garden focused on a stone fountain surrounded by seats sheltered by blocks of yew. Beyond is a yew-hedged tennis court and to the south-west is a smaller sunken garden and lily pond. These formal gardens were laid out in 1908 by Thomas Mawson, assisted by Robert Atkinson. In the early C18 there had been a walled entrance court beyond the south-west front of the house and an extensive formal layout of gardens to the east, but this had been replaced by an informal arrangement of lawns and shrubs by the end of the C19.

To the west of the house, between the stables and the boundary with Sheldwich Lees are the remains of a wooded pleasure ground.

PARK To the north, south-west, and south the house is surrounded by level parkland, the majority of which remains under grass, apart from the north-west corner which is under arable. The park is crossed by what remains of the system of early C18 avenues which once radiated out from the gardens into the surrounding deer park and which are shown in the Badeslade engraving (Harris 1719).

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The park also extends the length of the valley east of the house, from Hogben's Hill in the north to Fisher Street Road along the southern boundary.

KITCHEN GARDEN The former kitchen garden, now (2001) developed for private housing, is situated c 450m to the west-north-west of the house, outside the area here registered. It lies on the edge of the village of Sheldwich Lees and had been used as a nursery before the housing was built. The OS map of 1872 shows it linked to the stables by a band of pleasure grounds.

REFERENCES

J Harris, *The History of Kent* (1719), p 280 T Badeslade, *Thirty six different views of noblemen and gentlemen's seats in the county of Kent* (1750s), pl 23 J P Neale, *Views of the seats*, 2nd series 4, (1828) T H Mawson, *The Art and Craft of Garden Making* (1912) *Country Life*, 52 (12 August 1922), pp 178-83; (19 August 1922), pp 210-16 G Jekyll, *Garden Ornament* (1927) T H Mawson, *The life and work of an English landscape architect* (1927) J Newman, *The Buildings of England: North East and East Kent* (1983), pp 370-1

Maps T H Mawson, *Plan of gardens at Lees Court*, 1908 (reproduced in Mawson 1912, p 101)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1872

Description written: April 2001 Amended: May 2001 Register Inspector: EMP Edited: November 2003

This list entry was subject to a Minor Amendment on 21/08/2018

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.