

“No larger private house had been built for at least half a century, nor has been built since.” L.H.Tyrode.

Eleanor, Dowager Countess Peel



William Robert Wellesley Peel (left). Lord Peel leaving the King David Hotel, Jerusalem, (right) during negotiations on the partitioning of Palestine.



Leydene House was built by Viscount Robert and Lady Peel in the years following the Great War. Lord Peel was a rising politician, subsequently to become Secretary of State for India under Lloyd George, Lord Privy Seal, and Chairman of the Peel Commission which recommended the partitioning of Palestine. He had married in 1899 the daughter of Lord Ashton, a multi-millionaire who had made his money from the manufacture of linoleum. Ashton settled on Eleanor the sum of £800,00 - tens of millions in today’s money. The marriage appears to have been one of convenience - his career and her money. Although Leydene saw a succession of important house guests, including Winston Churchill (whom Lady Peel didn’t much like), Lord Peel spent most of his time in London whilst Lady Peel divided her time between Leydene and Scotland, where she

fished for salmon. Unless entertaining guests, Lady Peel led a life of Spartan simplicity. She was a fresh air fanatic - her lunch was usually a bowl of soup, served in all weathers on an outdoor terrace. She went out of her way to avoid social contact and dressed ‘like a tramp’ in ankle-length shabby black clothes. She preferred the company of her pedigree Saddleback pigs to that of people, and although she had a son and a daughter, had little liking for children, her own or other people’s.

Construction

Starting in 1913, the Peels bought over 10,000 acres of land to the south of East Meon and, in the spring of 1914, started building Leydene house at the top of Hyden Hill. Work began, using local labour to level the land and lay foundations. Lord and Lady Peel took over a farmhouse at Coombe Cross to supervise the building. Work ceased with the outbreak of the First World War.

After the war, work resumed, with a large body of artisans and workmen, steam tractors and lorries, moving chalk and fetching supplies. Belgian limestone was landed at Littlehampton, brought by train to Havant, and thence by lorry. Bricks were made by the Rowlands Brick Works,

Lady Peel had engaged Hooydonk Brothers to design Leydene; described as ‘Decorative Artists, they had created elaborate interior schemes for the moneyed classes. Their most notable contribution was the double-spiral staircase in the spacious entrance hall (shown, right); this was constructed by a firm in Gosport.

As an acknowledgment of the source of the money which made the project possible, the rose garden (right) was laid in the design of Lord Ashton’s best-selling linoleum.

Lord Peel died in 1937, after which Lady Peel spent most of her time at Hendersdyke Park, near Kelso in the lowlands of Scotland, where she indulged her passion for salmon fishing. She died in 1947; both are buried in East Meon.



The Peel tombstone in the grave yard at All Saints Church



The house and garden today

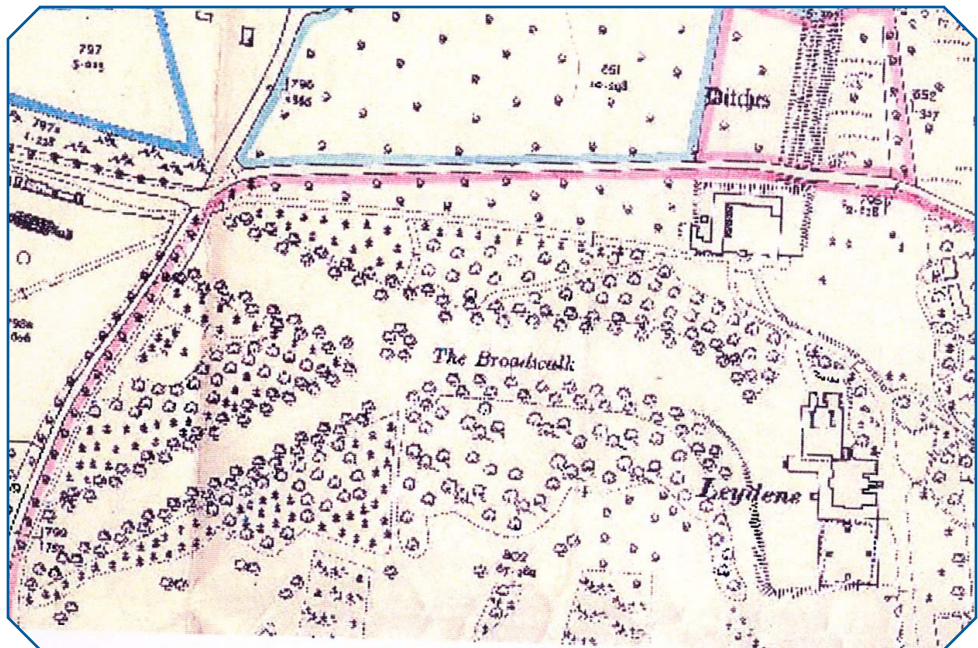
Break-up of the estate

In May 1953, the remainder of the Leydene Estate was sold by auction in 51 lots, many of which were gratefully acquired by sitting tenant farmers. In the 1990s, the house and its mews was divided into ten dwellings; the medical centre and senior rates mess were converted into a Sustainability Centre, and houses were build on the rest of the site south of the road. The land to the north has subsequently been purchased for development and the remaining naval buildings nave been demolished.

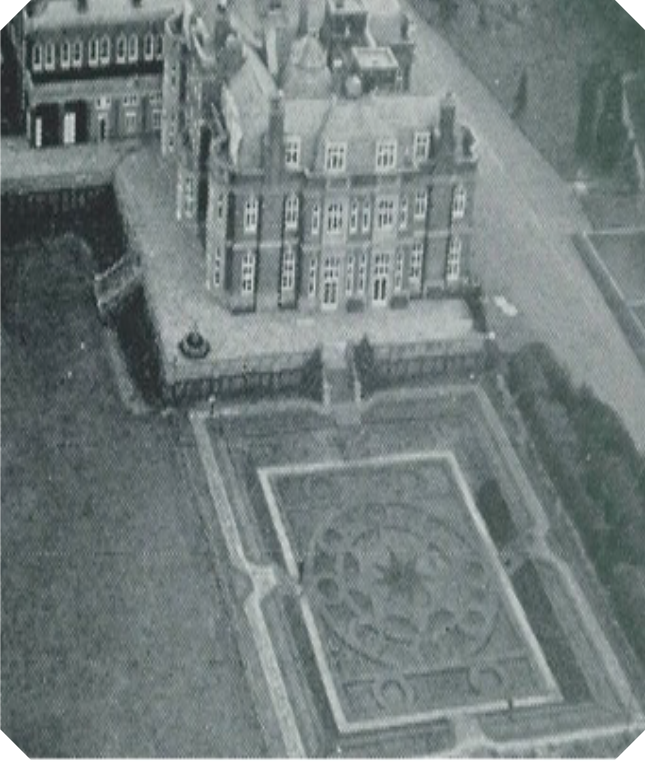
Leydene House



Lady Peel



Design of the grounds



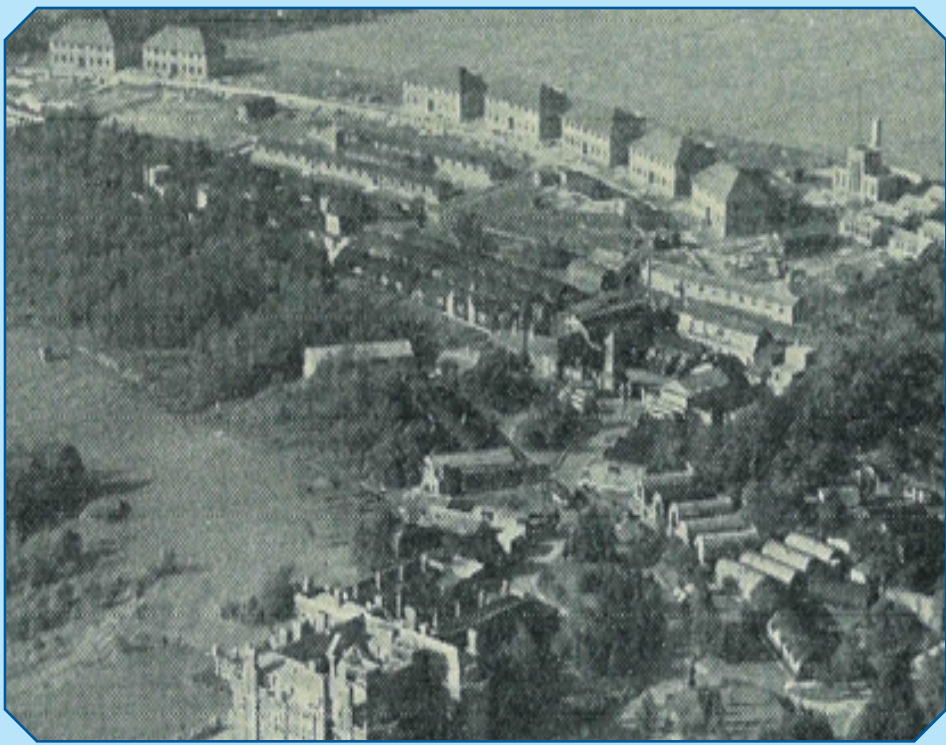
The house, showing the rose garden laid out in a linoleum pattern



The double-spiral staircase designed by Hooydonk Brothers

HMS Mercury

In 1941, Leydene House and 100 acres were occupied by the Royal Navy; its Signal School in Portsmouth had been heavily bombed. A Wardroom annex, ‘Siberia Block’, was built to the south of the main house.



Left, the naval complex with new housing rim; above, dining Mess.

In 1943, a large nissen hut was built as a cinema, theatre and assembly hall,

