

Leydene text July 2013

	
<p>Leydene House</p>	<p>The staircase</p>

"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




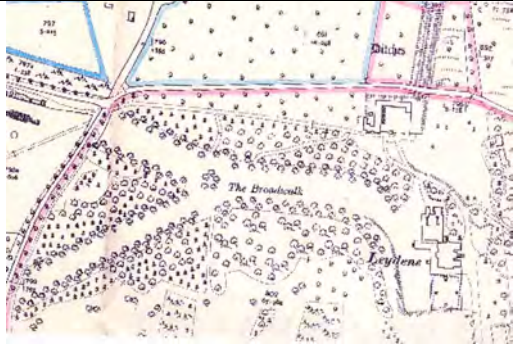
		
<p>William Robert Wellesley Peel</p>	<p>Lord Peel leaving the King David Hotel during his work on the partitioning of Palestine</p>	<p>Lady Peel</p>

Leydene House was built by Viscount Robert and Lady Peel in the years immediately 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 partition of Palestine. He had married, in 1899, the daughter of Lord Ashton, a multi-millionaire who made his money from the manufacture of linoleum. He settled on Eleanor the sum of £800,000 – tens of millions in today's money.

The marriage appears to have been largely 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 - 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. She had a son and daughter but had little liking for children, either her own or other people's.

Leydene House

	
<p>Leydene House</p>	<p>The staircase</p>
	
<p>Showing the garden, laid out in a linoleum pattern</p>	<p>Plan of the grounds</p>


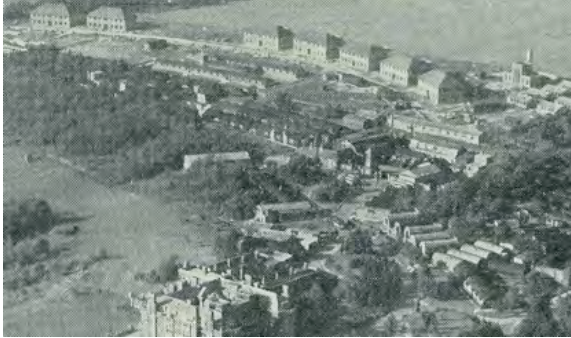

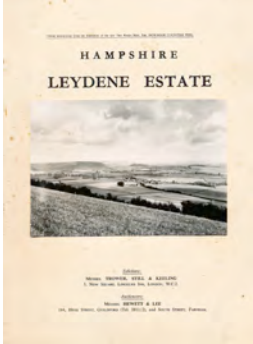
Starting in 1913, the Peels progressively bought over 10,000 acres of land to the south of East Meon and, in the spring of 1914, started work building Leydene House on a site at the top of Hyden Hill. Work began, using local labour, to level the land and lay foundations. Lord and Lady Peel took over a farmhouse at Coombe Cross, to watch and supervise the building. Work ceased with the outbreak in August 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 specially made by the Rowlands Brick Works, and the main staircase by a firm in Gosport.

Lady Peel had engaged Hooydonk Brothers to design Leydene; described as 'Decorative Artists', they had created elaborate interior schemes for homes of the 'moneyed classes'. Their most notable contribution was the double-spiral staircase in the spacious entrance hall. As an acknowledgment of the source of the money which made the construction possible, the rose garden was laid out in the design of Ashton's best-selling linoleum tile.

HMS Mercury

Lord Peel died in 1937, after which Lady Peel spent most of her time at Hendersyde Park, near Kelso in the lowlands of Scotland, where she indulged her passion for salmon fishing. She died in 1947.

	
<p>Gravestone of Lord and Lady Peel in All Saints churchyard</p>	<p>Aerial photo of HMS Mercury in 1950, showing Leydene House in foreground and the buildings of the Signal School.</p>
	
<p>Junior Ratings in the Mess Hall</p>	<p>Catalogue of the sale of the estate in 1953</p>

In 1941, Leydene House and 100 acres had been occupied by the Royal Navy, whose Signal School in Portsmouth had suffered from heavy bombing. A Wardroom annex was constructed to the south of the Main House, known as Siberia Block. A large Nissen hut was completed in July 1943 and was used as a cinema, theatre and assembly hall, followed by other training facilities and accommodation.

The first semi-permanent buildings to be constructed commenced in April 1944 and were the classrooms of North Camp.. The Navy requisitioned the property in 1945 and bought Leydene House in 1949.

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.