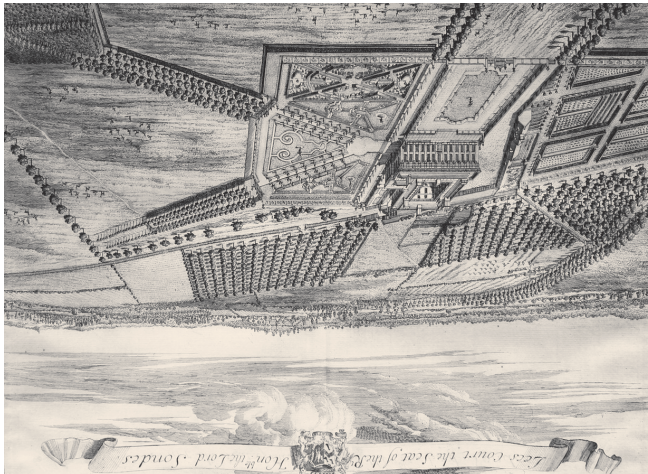


Lees Court was built in 1654 for Sir George Sondes. A grade 1 listed classical building; it has been attributed to Inigo Jones. It was rebuilt following a fire in the early 20th century. The stable block is by Sir John Soanes. House and stables are now private flats.



Lees Court

landscaped character area known as the 'Faversham Fruit Belt'. An enduring feature of the Lees Court Estate are some of the magnificent Lime avenues radiating from the house. There are also traditional orchards and prominent specimen trees.



First recorded in 784, "dwelling place on a low hill". The village lies on the trade route between the market towns of Ashford and Faversham.

The tree trail lies principally in the great Lees Court Estate within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is in the

# Kent Heritage Trees Project Sheldwich Tree Trail



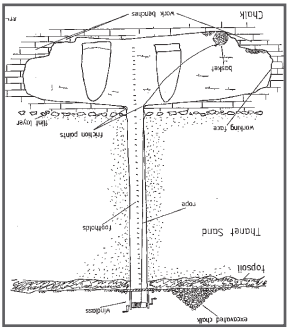
The magnificent lime avenue approaching Lees Court from the north



**Oast houses**

The white cowls of the oast houses can be seen above the trees at New House Orchard. The oasts were used for drying hops for the local brewing industry. Although greatly reduced in number, hop gardens have not disappeared from the landscape. At nearby Selling, there is still a working oast house, supplied in September by local hops.

been used to excavate purer chalk from depth to be spread on fields as a way of improving it for agriculture. Deneholes, almost exclusively found in Kent, are located on and around the North Downs, and mostly at field or woodland edges. On the Lees Court estate a large 17th century Denehole with a 30ft shaft and chambers, was explored in 2013 by the Kent Underground Research Group and Countess Sondes.



Deneholes

**Flint and churches**

The local soil, clay with flint, overlies the chalk bedrock. Many local churches, including St James's Sheldwich, a place of worship since 15th century, are made from this hard wearing silica material found within the chalk. The flint is knapped to provide an attractive flat facing surface.



**Perry Woods**

For further walks, cross Selling Valley on footpaths leading into Perry Woods. The two hills, formed from gravel and sand, are unusual in this chalk area, with valuable wooded heathland habitat and many fine heritage trees. Their high vantage point at the margins of the plain, means that they have been sought after location, archaeological digs revealing discoveries across the centuries from Mesolithic flints, Neolithic pottery to Medieval coins. There is also a large earthwork (exact origin yet to be determined). A post windmill took advantage of one hill slope for hundreds of years up to the 1900s. The height was also used for a Napoleonic shutter telegraph, used to send messages from Deal to Whitehall. Today, a pulpit on the adjacent hill, affords spectacular views of the surrounding countryside, from the Blean wood complex, to the valley, plateau and Lees Court.

Faversham, the important site of a former royal abbey, was for years a member of the Cinque Ports Federation. It later became known for its "bricks, bangs and booze" (brick works, gunpowder works and brewery), owing to the readily available raw materials including; clay for bricks, Alder and Willow for gunpowder and natural springs and hops for the brewing process. All could be conveyed by boat.



Bricks, bangs and booze



Top: a crop of Purple Viper's-Bugloss paints the landscape in vivid colour. A non-food crop, it is grown for its seed oil.

Middle: Selling Valley is being managed to increase species diversity in this valuable chalk grassland.

Bottom: Lime trees are home to clumps of parasitic Mistletoe. Although taking water and nutrients it does not kill its host. The berries are spread by birds.



New House Orchard is a traditional orchard of tall, widely spaced spreading trees, with grazing sheep helping to encourage a rich ground flora.

This leaflet was produced as a legacy of the Kent Heritage Trees Project, a five year project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund celebrating Kent's tree heritage. A significant achievement of the project was the recording of over 10,000 heritage trees – trees that are old, wide, rare or have a story to tell. Visit [tcv.org.uk/kentheritagetrees](http://tcv.org.uk/kentheritagetrees) to view the tree finds and map.

This is one of a series of leaflets created by volunteers to encourage people of all ages to explore the outdoors, learn about nature and heritage trees and enjoy the Kentish countryside.

The Kent Heritage Trees Project was developed and run by The Conservation Volunteers (TCV), a charity that works with thousands of people across the UK, helping them to discover, improve and enjoy their local green spaces and by doing so create happier and healthier communities.

[www.explorekent.org](http://www.explorekent.org)

Find out more about the continuing work of TCV and how you can become involved, visit [www.tcv.org.uk](http://www.tcv.org.uk)

Kent Heritage Trees Project is managed by

**The Conservation Volunteers**  
Singleton Environment Centre  
Wesley School Road, Ashford,  
Kent TN23 5LW  
T: 01233 666519

To follow the trail on your phone, scan this QR code

**TCV** The Community Volunteering Charity

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**The churchyard of St James's, Sheldwich, is the starting point of this trail.**

(Donation please for car park users)

**1. Yew**  
*Taxus baccata*

The churchyard has more than half a dozen large heritage Yew trees, several with graves now sheltered by their protective canopy.

All parts of the Yew are poisonous except for the fleshy red 'berry- like' structures called arils which contain individual seeds. Many birds feed on them, freely distributing the poisonous seed which is passed undigested without harm.

Male and female 'flowers' are borne on separate trees.

The churchyard is part of the Kent God's Acre Project, recognising the importance of these areas for flora and fauna and social history through appropriate and sensitive management.

*Follow the footpath in the graveyard past the Sondes graves and the war memorial cross, to the gate at the far end, furthest from the road. The footpath follows wide grassland margins at the woodlands edge, supporting a diverse flora and fauna. Go past the woodland track, and then take the footpath towards the oast houses with the Blean hill rising beyond. Cross the open plateau past the trees. It is a scene typical of this part of Kent with wide open fields, interspersed with wooded shaws. These fields are often vibrant with non-food crops such as the bright orange Calendulas and purple Viper's-bugloss in the summer.*

**2. New House Orchard**

This is a traditional Cherry orchard boasting widely spaced, tall, spreading trees, harvested by long tapering ladders. Cherry varieties include; Early Rivers, Merton Bigarreau, Bradbourne Black, Amber Heart and Roundel. The trees are not long lived, so New House Orchard, planted in 1946, is a heritage orchard.

It was once part of a much more extensive network of orchards. With changing tastes, lower yields and health and safety considerations, the commercial viability of these orchards have declined. Surviving ones like New House, now a community orchard, (opened for events only) are all the more important.

Below the trees, grass managed by grazing sheep, supports a diverse ground flora, and associated fauna. Old and decaying limbs are also an important habitat for invertebrates including rare species such as the Noble Chaffer beetle. Holes bear witness to woodpeckers.

Next to the orchard, planting of new mixed hedging is part of extensive tree planting and woodland management on the estate.

**3. Hawthorn**  
*Crataegus monogyna*

Heading back towards the Lime avenue, you pass an important Hawthorn. In summer partially obscured by nettles, its extensive size suggests a probable boundary marker. Now riven with cracks and hollows, this thorny tree provides plenty of shelter and nesting places. In spring, the Hawthorn, or May tree, supports a flurry of white blossom, important for bees and other pollinating insects. In autumn the rich red haws are eaten by birds and small mammals.

**4. Common Lime**  
*Tilia x europaea*

The Lime Avenue is the most complete and impressive of a system of avenues that once radiated out from Lees Court into what would have been the surrounding deer park. This 18th century avenue lost many trees in the 1987 storm, but infilling has re-established it as a magnificent sight, with more than 68 pairs of Limes. Some of the largest are by the house.

The UK's tallest broadleaf tree, it is a natural hybrid between the Large-leaved and Small-leaved Limes. The sweet-smelling summer flowers attract a huge number of insects

looking for nectar, especially bees. It produces large winged seeds.

*From the middle of the avenue, a footpath leads towards the woodland. The estates woodland management is focused on conservation, with coppicing, removal of conifers, thinning; and encouraging natural regeneration. Since 2015, three disease resistant elm trials have also been under way.*

*Descending through the tress you emerge into a dry, hidden, steep sided valley, so typical of this chalk country. Selling Valley's 200 acres of chalk downland are managed under Higher Level Stewardship. Appropriate management and low stocking rates by grazing cattle, has encouraged the regeneration of the downland. Where the banks are steepest at the northern end, pyramid orchids can be found.*

*Keeping to the higher path, the route climbs well trodden paths to the top.*

**5. Ash**  
*Fraxinus excelsior*

At the top edge of the valley, this vast, great limbed Ash, its pale gray bark fissured with age, looks over towards the hills of Perry Wood and presides over the valley below.

It has a light and airy canopy, with leaves made up of 5-9 leaflets (pairs and a terminal). The winged fruits, or 'keys', produced in late summer and autumn are beloved of Bullfinches and woodpeckers, whilst owls, Redstarts and Nuthatches use the trees for nesting. Because Ash is so long lived, they are known to support deadwood specialists such as the Lesser Stag Beetle.

*Pass through a kissing gate.*

**6. Beech**  
*Fagus sylvatica*

The shallow rooted Beech is typical of this landscape, growing on the drier, free-draining chalk soils. Young leaves are Lime green with silky hairs, which become darker green and lose their hairs as they mature. In a woodland

setting the tree would produce a dense shading canopy. Here In this estate it is nestling with Elder and lower shrubs around it. It is not at first glance a statuesque tree having lost many limbs. Riven with scars, bore holes and dead wood, it provides an amazing habitat and wonderful openings for bats and owls. There is also evidence of myriad beetle activity.

*Go through the metal cattle gates, passing soaring Lime trees covered in Mistletoe. The footpath bisects an incomplete Lime avenue arriving at the confluence of both Lime and Oak avenues. Lining up directly with the Oak avenue, in the middle of the field, is a Corsican Pine.*

**7. Corsican Pine**  
*Pinus nigra*

Corsican Pine is a plant from the Mediterranean region. It is a large, evergreen tree that can grow to a height of 60 metres. It grows quite fast and is generally quite long lived, some reaching 500 years old. Here with the space and time to grow, it forms an imposing specimen tree, one of many in the estate.

**8. Oak**  
*Quercus robur*

This is a short avenue comprising six pairs of Oaks heading towards what is today the main entrance to Lees Court. Its spreading canopy reaches across forming a tunnel of trees.

The avenue is made up of English Oak, distinguished from Sessile Oak, by having acorns on stalks (or peduncles). Acorn production does not start until trees are at least 40, with most produced between 80-120 years.

The native species of Oak are hosts for more than 30 species of gall wasp. It is the larval stage of these insects that induce the plant to produce abnormal growths, known as galls that enclose the developing larvae. Historically some types of galls have been ground to produce ink. Texts such as Faversham's own 'issue' of the Magna Carta were written using Oak gall ink.

**9. Beech**  
*Fagus sylvatica*

This impressive buttressed Beech stands near the entrance of the footpath by the cricket pitch. It has several bracket fungi on its trunk. Beech is an important habitat for many butterflies, including the Grizzled Skipper, Duke of Burgundy and White Admiral. The nut, known as beechmast, is enclosed in softly spiky cups.

*Pass through the gate onto the road opposite the cricket pitch. There are many heritage trees in the woods near to the cricket pitch, bisected by footpaths and ripe to be explored. The commemorative Oak selected is just beyond the fine metal village sign, depicting as part of it, the Lime avenues that are so important in this parish.*

**10. Oak**  
*Quercus sp.*  
On Sheldwich Lees the impressive trees include many planted to the lasting memory of people and events. Trees form an important part of the social history of a parish. This beautiful spreading Oak was:

*'Planted on 6th May 1935 to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of George V by J.Harris aged 91, E. Christopher aged 51½, D. Hoad aged 5½.'*

*Turning up Hunters Way, take the former carriage track on your left before you get to the field. It passes through mixed woodland, with several fine Beech trees standing, fallen, living and dead.*

**DID YOU KNOW:** The Conservation Volunteers', Kent Heritage Trees Project, planted 24 commemorative Future Heritage Trees in districts all across Kent as part of the project.