

For Immediate Release

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**Rare Archive Revealing the Transformation of Rateau's Leeds Castle
Returns Home - and Goes Digital**

Leeds Castle Foundation announces the digitisation of the Rateau Archive - nearly 200 original plans, annotated drawings and photographs documenting the 1920s-1930s reimagining of one of England's most iconic historic properties - making this remarkable collection freely accessible to the public for the first time.

In 1926, French interior designer Armand-Albert Rateau (1882–1938) was commissioned by Olive, Lady Baillie to realise her vision of a luxurious country retreat at Leeds Castle in Kent. The results transformed the medieval fortress - and the story of how that transformation happened is told in meticulous, extraordinary detail in the Rateau Archive.

The archive comprises two photograph albums presented to Lady Baillie by Rateau himself on completion of the works, together with several portfolios of plans and annotated drawings later gifted to Leeds Castle Foundation by Rateau's son, François. Together, they constitute a unique primary record of the design process - from sketches for a concealed staircase connecting the Salon to Lady Baillie's private apartments, to multiple iterations of iron lantern designs, landscaping drawings for the Gloriette courtyard and even bridge designs for the wider estate.

Matthew Abel, Collections Documentation Officer, Leeds Castle Foundation
said: *"The Rateau Archive is an exceptional primary source - not just for Leeds Castle, but for the wider history of early twentieth-century interior design in England. Digitising the collection ensures it is safeguarded for the future and opens it up to researchers, historians and enthusiasts who would never previously have had access to it. We're grateful to the Rochester Bridge Trust for making that possible."*

In 2025, the Heritage team at Leeds Castle received a generous grant from the Rochester Bridge Trust to digitise the archive in its entirety. Working in partnership with specialist digitisation company Genus, the project was led by Collections

Documentation Officer Matthew Abel and involved a full audit of the collection, improved housing for its long-term preservation, and the commissioning of an accredited paper conservator to stabilise and repair damaged items.

Approximately 200 items have now been digitised. The archive has returned to site, and from 24 June 2026 the complete collection will be publicly available to explore via an online platform on the Leeds Castle website - nearly 200 plans, drawings and photographs, free for anyone to access.

The digitised archive will extend well beyond the screen. In 2027, Leeds Castle Foundation has committed to integrating archive materials into pop-up talks and guided tours at the Castle, as well as enriching its multimedia guide - giving visitors a richer, more layered understanding of the Castle's interiors and the bold creative decisions that shaped them a century ago.

Leeds Castle Foundation would like to express its sincere gratitude to the Rochester Bridge Trust, whose generous grant made the archive digitisation project possible. The Trust has supported the restoration of historic buildings and heritage projects across Kent for centuries, and the foundation is proud that the Rateau Archive is now part of that legacy.

Explore the Rateau Archive at <https://www.leeds-castle.com/the-rateau-archive/>

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Images available here: <https://we.tl/t-DGy92n2zEHztCEBP>

For further information, please contact Nicole Moor or Georgina Clarkson at Leeds Castle.

- nicolemoor@leeds-castle.co.uk
- georginaclarkson@leeds-castle.co.uk
- 01622 767 760

About Leeds Castle Foundation

Leeds Castle is considered a national treasure, providing a window onto over nine hundred years of British history. It is a haven of tranquillity and offers a wealth of discovery and enjoyment for all ages.

Situated five miles southeast of Maidstone in Kent, Leeds Castle's rich and riveting history, including serving six of England's medieval queens, to its elaborate transformation into a glamorous 1930s country house retreat for the influential and famous by Anglo-American heiress, Lady Olive Baillie, secures its place as one of the most visited historic attractions in Britain.

The Castle and its estate is preserved and maintained by the Leeds Castle Foundation, a not-for-profit charity.

For more visitor information:

- Please visit www.leeds-castle.com
- Leeds Castle, Broomfield, Maidstone ME17 1PL
- Telephone 01622 765 400 or email enquiries@leeds-castle.co.uk