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LACKHAM HOUSE – ESTATE OF CAPT. H. P. HOLT, M.C., M.P.

By ADELE M GIANELLI

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This article is the only account we have of the Lackham estate “between the Wars” or by someone not associated with the estate. As such it allows an interesting glimpse into the estate in the second quarter of the twentieth century. The original article had illustrations spread throughout it, but these have been moved to the end of the text. This article was written only two years after Capt. Holt had purchased Lackham.

In the text some words are coloured blue and are hyper-links to take you to additional information (not in the original, article) that may be helpful. At the end of each section there is a link to return you to the text where you left it.

For the history of the estate in the nineteenth and twentieth century please see the fourth volume of the estate history at <http://www.wiltshire.ac.uk/about-us/Lackham-house/a-further-history>

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My thanks for Collen McDuling for her invaluable editing assistance

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LACKHAM HOUSE – ESTATE OF CAPT. H. P. HOLT, M.C., M.P.

*In the series of Anglo-Canadian gardens there is none more interesting
than this with its romantic background dating from 1800*

By ADELE M GIANELLI

Gardens and goddesses! Have they not something in common? Around both may be woven fantastic myths germinating from a tiny seed of imagination. And when a garden is first seen shrouded mysteriously in the black gauze of luminous night, how tremulously expectant does one await the revealing morn. Captain H.P. Holt's Wiltshire estate had been intriguingly veiled in darkness as one drove up the mile long avenue to *Lackham House*. That is an admirable introduction to a beautiful garden! For, when morning dawns there are discovered all the charms about which one had pondered. The garden, overnight, becoming a new, mysterious friend by morning is doubly precious because one's thoughts have dwelt upon it. Just as one gets out of life what one puts into it – so it is with a garden.

Wakening to morning light, what fun to see the "veiled lady" smiling in the sun. Then treading the stairs in stately measure - as befitted the Georgian period – to walk quietly out into the terrace and gaze deeply upon beauty.

Below the long loggia of the entire southern façade of the mansion, an intimate terrace extends. In the centre it forms a wide bay with a circular pool and dolphin fountain, but narrows at either end to long strips of lawn with scroll flower-beds. Stone balustrades draped with Ivy follow the curves of the terrace, swinging out again to enclose promontories of lawn between which descend wide steps leading into the lower terrace. From the steps a walk, outlined by [chains of Roses](#), leads to the far side where a promenade crosses the whole front of the lower terrace. Its elegance is completed by a most decorative stone parapet rich with Roses. Curving in and out in long, irregular sweeps, it marks the boundary between the formal terraces and the parkland beyond. A vantage point, because of its higher level, there is obtained here a magnificent view of the natural landscape of the estate, as well as of the cultivated gardens back towards the house.

One of the most charming features in the design of the Late Georgian mansion, [dating from 1800](#), is the old stone wall winging from its sides, softening its rather uncompromising lines and blending it to its site. In reality it is actually useful, too, for it joins two one-story wings to the house proper – but more of them anon. This old wall is particularly lovely on the western side where it develops into the architecture of what was formerly the stables, now converted into a squash-rackets court. On it, there grows a giant Magnolia, with trunk like a large tree and so old, it would date this wall as very early - quite the original part of the mansion. It appealed to me as one of the most enchanting corners of the estate. For at this end, terminating the upper terrace, is an angle of age-worn [Yew hedge](#), bits of crumbling balustrade overgrown with Ivy and a magnificent [Cedar of Lebanon](#) – at least 300 years old, completes this bit of Old England which forms a perfect picture in its varying shades of foliage and weathered stone.

The other extreme end of the house provides a contrast in color. Along the terrace, past crimson ivied walls and vivid flower-urns decorating the balustrade, one walks into a triangular Rose garden. Just an after-thought this; the overflow of passionate flower-love tucked into a handy corner. "A garden is a lovesome thing, God wot" and here is a nook made to be loved. Love-in-the-Mist, Lavender and Roses enriched by the flaming crimsons and purples of old-fashioned blooms. The sundial and stone seats are exceptionally graceful and claim a leisure moment to pause and gaze into the meadow, sweet with Cowslips, beyond. That is England!

There is a serenity enfolding the grounds of *Lackham House* that shows they have absorbed the atmosphere of centuries. Whereas some gardens may present a series of pictures appealing to a variety of tastes, or others frequently suggest a "world tour" in their Japanese, Italian or Spanish style – this estate is honestly English. All this district around Bath is steeped in the tradition of early history. Nearby – a lovely vista in the distance – is Lacock Abbey built in the 12th century; the tiny gem of a village, Lacock, not far off, is a well-preserved relic of the Tudor period – its homes still contain carvings done by the Abbey monks; the Gothic Abbey church, with remnants of Norman walls at Bath; the Cathedral at Wells; and the loveliness that once was Glastonbury's – have sprung from the surrounding land and rear their memorials in the famous stone dug from home-quarries.

So it is not surprising that these gardens of *Lackham House* seem to have trod, in pensive pace, the measure of the years – an evolution of pure English history. The long walks at *Lackham* would emphasize this impression. I have seen garden walks scurrying along to an exciting *dénouement*, others coyly winding in provocative fashion, with jolly little surprises left and right, but at *Lackham*, the walks are open, generous things; leisurely introspective and retrospective; where with a freedom of gait, unhurriedly, one walks with the sheer joy of living in beautiful surroundings and, like those complacent, contented monks, murmuring a Pater Noster of "God's in His Heaven – all's right with the world!"

A long parterre of several hundred yards extending eastwards from the terraces, is such a walk. Two narrow strips of turf preserve an orthodox air, with unfaltering Rose-bushes keeping pace with the well-ordered old Yew hedge behind them as a boundary from the adjoining meadows. Peeping "over the top," like visitors from the open fields, topiary work designed in peacocks, foxes, silhouette clearly against the sky-line. But the left hand border lavishness of Nature. It is deep with the bloom of flowers and shrubs, intermingled with ornamented trees: glimpses of an old stone wall are seen between the branches of such luscious things as the Liquid Amber – isn't the very name descriptive of the cloying richness of summer's sweetness?

Midway the parterre spreads into a Rose arbor of iron trellises and behind it, the quaintest of rustic summer-houses – the prettiest of its kind I've seen. Cunningly contrived, its rustic work is patterned into the gables of a Tudor roof, and it drips Roses everywhere, one-hundred-year-old Roses, heavy with years. At either end the old stone wall emerges clearly and gateways give it further interest.

Then the parterre continues on its way and one follows the tradition of the ages from Georgian backward into the dim past. For it leads towards the woods where doubtless the monks communed with Nature as they trod the paths towards Lacock Abbey. But first one passes the Rock Gardens, then a clearance for a prettily conceived Maypole of Roses and through deep bays of Rhododendrons gorgeously contrasted with plantings of the red Japanese Maple – one enters on a long walk skirting the woods on the open side of the parkland. From here, Lacock Abbey is faintly discernible and might well have been a view to inspire Gainsborough for the landscapes he so dearly loved to paint despite the greater money-value of his portraits.

Entering the woods, occasional thatched garden retreats are picturesque, almost hidden amongst the screens of Bamboos and Pampas-grass. Then a marvelous avenue of Limes makes a gorgeous walk between a veritable hedge of trees as the twigs have been permitted to branch out from the trunk and merge into a thick wall. The Limes follow the course of the little river Avon and lead to the Boathouse from where one looks across to the rising plateaus of the other bank. Deep in the heart of the woods “Monk’s Walk”, mentioned in [Domesday Book](#), is plainly marked by a double row of trees, gnarled with age and black with mystery. Overwhelming in solemnity, the eeriness almost smothered one with its pressure of implacable Time, so it was pleasantly illuminating, and drastically contrasting, to listen to Captain Holt’s up-to-date plans for developing the farm lands on his recently acquired domain of several hundred acres into a most scientifically modern agricultural estate. Though its ornamental qualities have been stressed, much may have been said of the home-farm, its pasturelands and cattle as the meadows of Wiltshire are very fertile and Captain Holt believes in “a thing worth doing, is worth doing well”. It was absolutely inspiring to hear his plans, laid out with Canadian efficiency, to give new life to this old land.

Then we came out on the broad road leading to the fine stables which form three sides of a vast courtyard enclosed by handsome gates. Elizabethan in design, the half-timbered buildings are delightful and equally so are the charming gardeners’ cottages at the entrance to the kitchen gardens. As fascinating as a scene from “[Pomander Walk](#)” these look! The walled garden behind is of great extent – perfection in its arrangement of fruit, flowers and vegetables. In fact there are twelve glasshouses for forcing, so it is easier to imagine than describe the delicacies therein – perhaps the English Violets appealed most to me.

Though walled gardens are one of the delectable features of this land of gardens, this one has an outstanding and unique characteristic. In addition to the high brick wall surrounding it, on both sides of which are trained fruit trees - there is an outer walk around it which is again bordered by a low dry-stone wall, exquisite with rock plants. It is very old - of the famous Bath stone and forms one of the loveliest bits of artistry.

Returning to the house by the service quarters meant exploring behind that other fascinating garden wall first mentioned connecting the two side wings of the residence. Behind one section of it was discovered a tiny, quaint courtyard open to the sky – leading off the billiard-room to the squash rackets court. In the eastern wing it formed a cloister-like corridor beginning from a room marvelously panelled in black oak, originally an old chapel, and leading to the servants’ quarters where the extraordinarily fine kitchen and sculleries formed a great contrast in their airy, modern, [blue and white tiling](#). A blending of the Old and the New! How interesting it will be to watch the new blood coursing through the veins of this rarely lovely old estate, helping it pace with firmer tread the measure of the years

The Illustrations follow



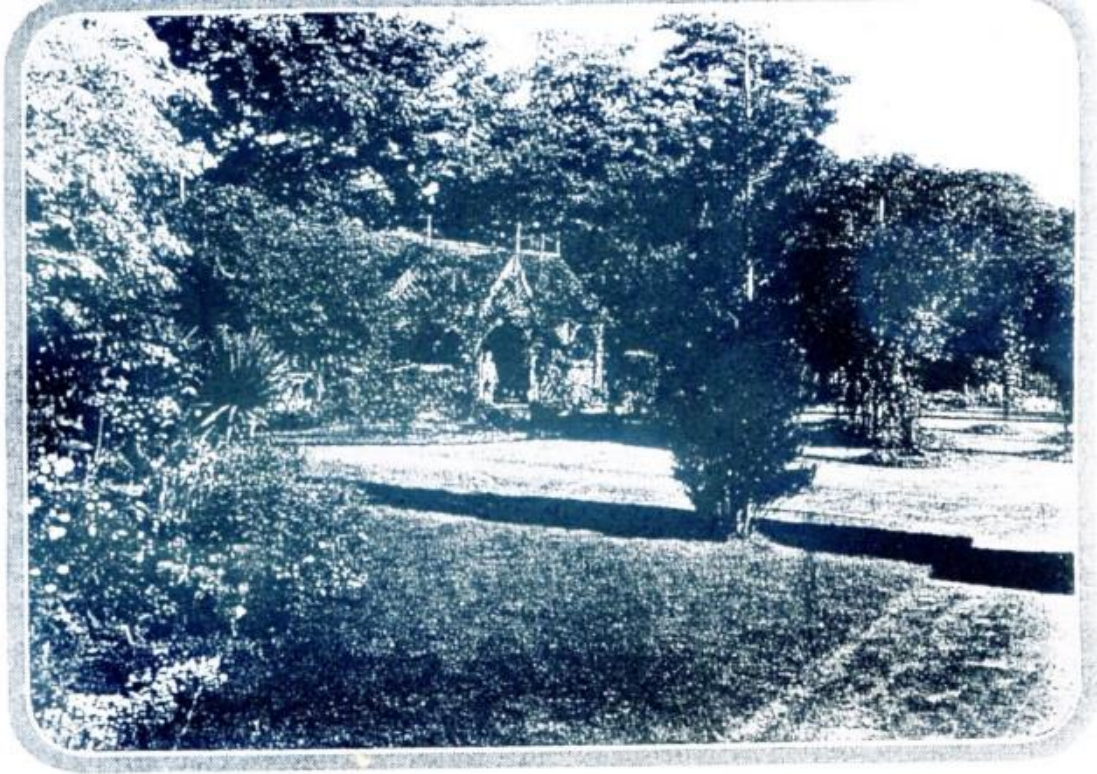
The vista of Lackham House through the trees is enchanting. Lackham House is the English estate of Capt. H. P. Holt, M.C., M.P., who is a son of Sir Herbert S. and Lady Holt of Montreal. This is regarded as a particularly beautiful photograph reminiscent with its variety of foliage of the landscapes painted by Gainsborough in this district, of which he was so fond



The stables of Lackham House compose three sides of a large quadrangle. The clock as is customary is a feature of the coach-house at the end of the courtyard which is centred by handsome gates



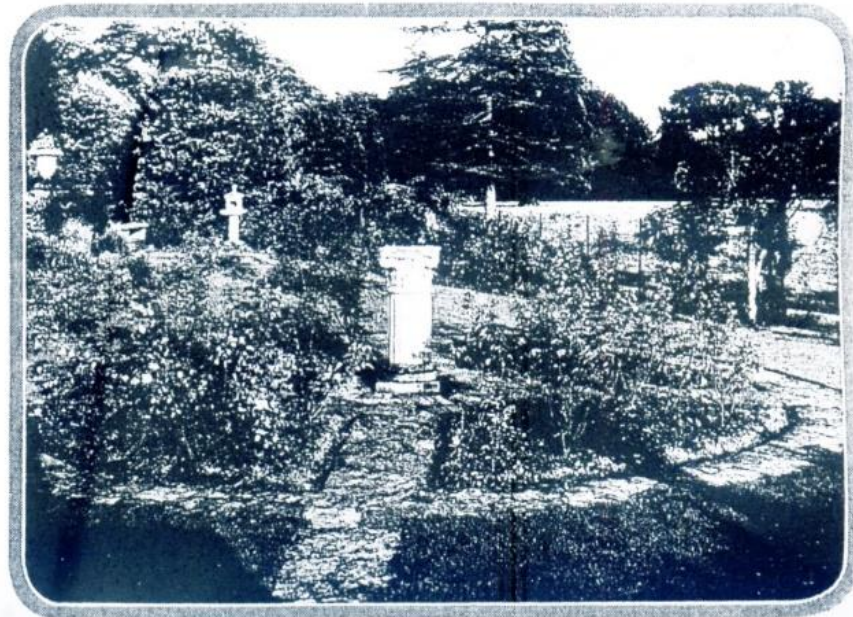
The main perennial border is very fine. A gorgeous mingling of flowers and shrubs backed by rare specimens of small trees flanks a long walk, leading from the main garden to the woodlands. The other side of the parterre is edged by a Yew hedge, bordered with Roses and broken at intervals by tall Cedars



Halfway down the perennial border, the parterre breaks into a bay of bloom. Iron trellises form a design to support climbing Roses, and in the background nestles a rustic summer house. Cunningly contrived, its rustic work is patterned into the gables of a Tudor roof and it drips Roses everywhere, one-hundred-year-old Roses, heavy with years. At either end, the old house wall emerges clearly and gateways give it a further interest. Then the parterre continues on its way and one follows the transition of the ages from Georgian backward into the dim past



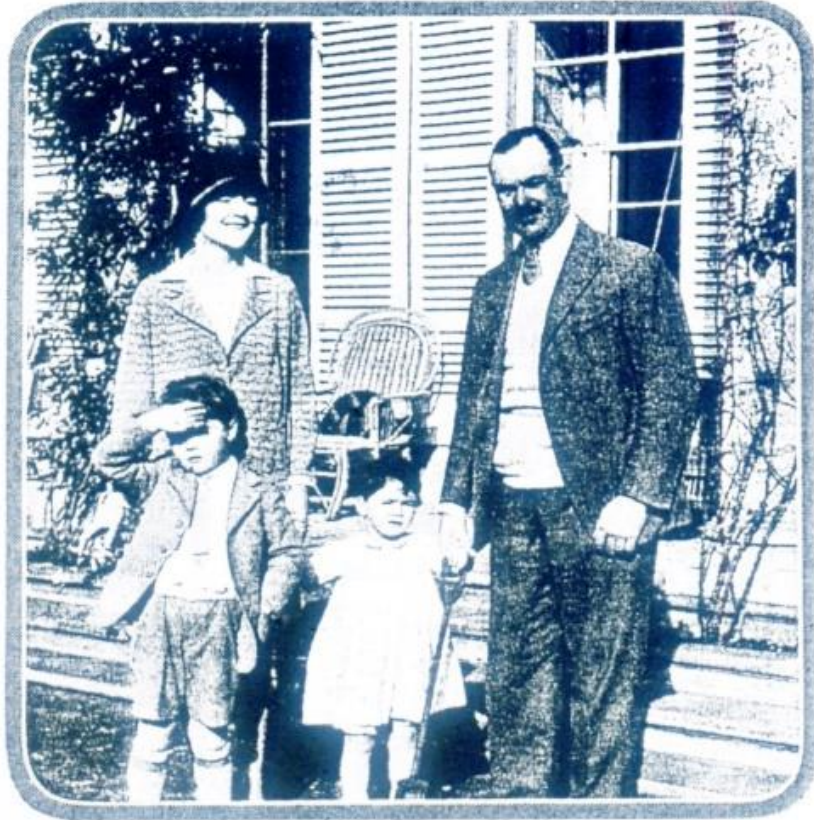
Lackham House, the Georgian mansion which is now the English home of Capt. H. P. Holt, M.C., M.P., former Montrealer, son of Sir Herbert S. Holt and Lady Holt, has the serenity of an open façade on its garden side. Benignly it looks out upon formal terraces and meadowlands beyond. A Magnolia more than one hundred years old thickly drapes the far corner of the house



This Rose garden is a whiff of beauty tucked into a corner. A step beyond is the sweetness of meadowland. The sun-dial and stone seats are exceptionally graceful and claim a leisure moment to pause and gaze through the quaint little garden gate into the meadow sweet with Cowslips, beyond. This is England!



This quaint stone Lodge with thatched roof is typically England. Bath stone weathers effectively and contributes a large share to the picturesque beauty of the country around Bath. There is a serenity enfolding the grounds of Lackham House that shows they have absorbed the atmosphere of the centuries. Whereas some gardens may present a series of pictures appealing to a variety of tastes or others frequently suggest a "world tour," in their Japanese, Italian or Spanish style—this estate is honestly English



Capt. H. P. Holt, M.C., M.P., and Mrs. Holt, with their children, photographed in front of the gallery of their home, Lackham House, Wiltshire, England. Captain Holt is a son of Sir Herbert and Lady Holt, of Montreal

Notes:

The "chains of roses", roses grown on swags of rope between high support posts, can be clearly seen in this 1910 hand coloured postcard



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Dating from 1800

The house is slightly older than this, a map for the proposed Wilts and Berks Canal of 1796 clearly shows this Georgian building. As another of 1793 had the original medieval building it seems that the current Lackham House was constructed between these dates.. [return to text](#)

Yew hedge

This hedge closed off the view to the west from the Top terrace and bordered the western part of the Beech Walk. Until this paper it was unclear what it was made of. Its junction with the old wall can be seen in a 1904 hand coloured post card (below). The small green-roofed porch, in the middle of the picture, leads into the Billiard Room.



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Cedar of Lebanon

This date is not quite possible; the Cedar of Lebanon was not introduced into the UK until 1638.¹ Its branches can just be seen on the far right hand (southern) edge of the postcard above. [return to text](#)

Crimson ivied walls

Probably actually Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus spp*), the walls were still covered with this in the late 1980's. It must have been a fairly recent establishment, postcards of 1904 (see above) do not show it. Remains of this can be seen on the northern side of the Western Service Block, the Old Stables/Squash Courts

¹ Source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/gardening/article-1243198/HISTORY-IN-YOUR-GARDEN-Cedar-Lebanon-Cedrus-libani.html>
accessed 11 March 2016



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Domesday Book

The entry for Lackham in the Domesday Book reads "*Ralph [Bluet] holds Lackham from William [d'Eu] before 1066 it paid tax for 7½ hides. Land for 10 ploughs of which 1½ hides are in lordship; 2 ploughs there; 2 slaves*

10 villagers, 2 smallholders, and 24 Cottagers with 8 ploughs. 2 mills which pay 30s; meadow, 15 acres; woodland, 1 league long and as wide" ²

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Pomander walk

This was the location of a romantic comedy written by Louis N Parker in the first decade of the twentieth century. Pomander Walk is described in the play as "a retired crescent of five very small, old-fashioned houses near Chiswick, on the river-bank. ... They are exactly alike: miniature copies of Queen Anne mansions" ³ .

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² John Morris (ed) *Domesday Book* [Chichester, Phillimore, 1979] Vol 5 *Wiltshire*, 32,12

³ Parker, Louis N. (1915). *Pomander Walk*. Samuel French. p. 13.

Blue and white tiling

These were rediscovered in 2012 –

“Well preserved tiles were discovered in Lackham House after members of the estates and services team at Lackham College uncovered them.

The tiles which are reported to be part of the old Dairy on the estate were found in good condition after the carpet was removed to be converted into an office for the Lackham House Site Manager Steve Stanford.

Tony Pratt, a gardener and a historian for the Lackham Estate said: "It really is exciting that these tiles have been discovered and really lovely to come and see."

The tiles are blue and grey and patterned with a square and diamond shape with rectangular bordered edging around the room.

"This room was originally the Dairy and I expect that the floor was tiled because it would have to be kept clean."

Bath Chronicle 21 December 2012 <http://www.bathchronicle.co.uk/Historic-tiles-Lackham-House-near-Melksham/story-17648915-detail/story.html>

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