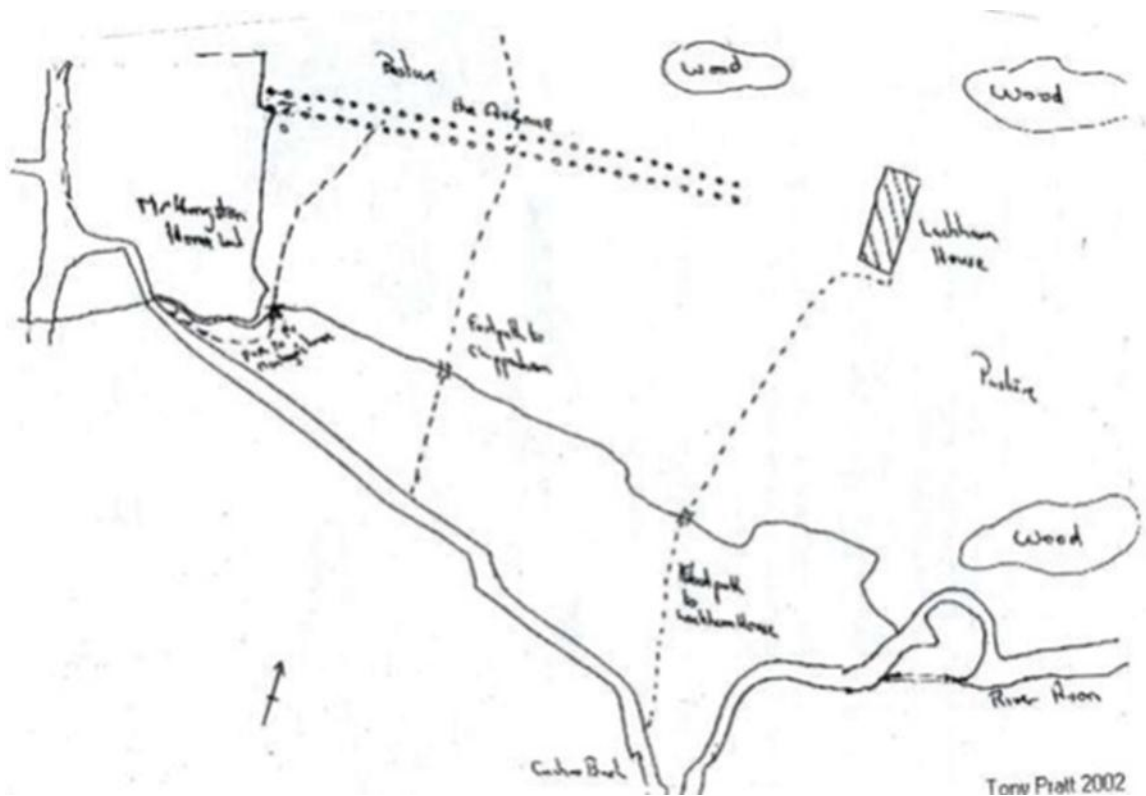


## An investigation of some historical aspects of the woodland at Lackham

There have been woods on the Lackham estate since the Middle Ages, as evidenced by medieval boundary ditches along the sides of the two "roadways" that run west to east through the estate.

These medieval tracks are important; the most northerly ran, roughly, along the line of the current Front Drive. The other, much more important, drive originally ran parallel to the current Front Drive across what are now fields between the Front Drive and Home Farm. The eastern part of this drive is the roadway alongside the Museum and continues down through the woods as Engineer's Drive. The line of this drive extended west across the Playing Fields ran to the back of Old Lackham House, which lies under the paddock between the Back Drive and the Playing Fields. The western part of this drive formed the impressive entranceway to Lackham, driving straight up the fields to the crest of the hill.

This layout is clearly seen on the earliest map showing any details of the estate known, one drawn up to show the estate of Mr Talbot of Lacock Abbey in 1764. Unfortunately it shows very few details of the Lackham estate and the only woods shown are indicative and not accurately shown



Extract from the map made for Mr. Talbot, 1764 <sup>1</sup>  
Luckily a much better map, from Lackham's point of view, was made only 9 years later by Andrews and Drury.

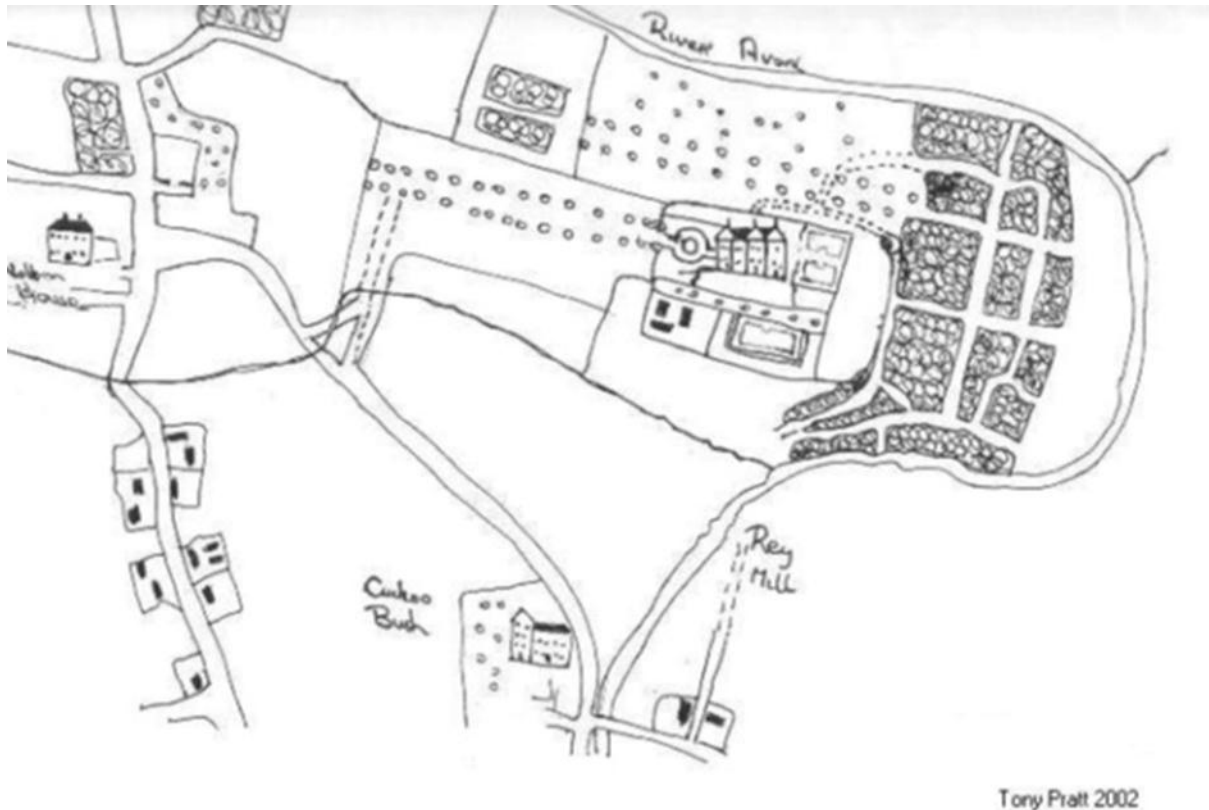


Fig.9 Excerpt from Andrews and Drury's map 1773

This map clearly shows the same layout of woodland as we see today (albeit today's woods have been encroached on at the western edge by the complex that makes up the Walled Garden, Stable Yard and Engineering areas). The winding pathways that meander through the woods can still be seen today and are a feature of the 18<sup>th</sup> century fashion of "The Picturesque", any landscape avenues made earlier than this would have been the rigidly straight lines of the grand Formal Gardens, such as those seen at Versailles, Vaux and Hampton Court. It *may* be that the straight rectilinear grid of drives was developed in the Formal Garden period (roughly from the middle of early 17<sup>th</sup> to early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries) and that the winding paths were put in during the later 18<sup>th</sup> century but this is speculative as the map based evidence does not exist to prove it one way or the other.

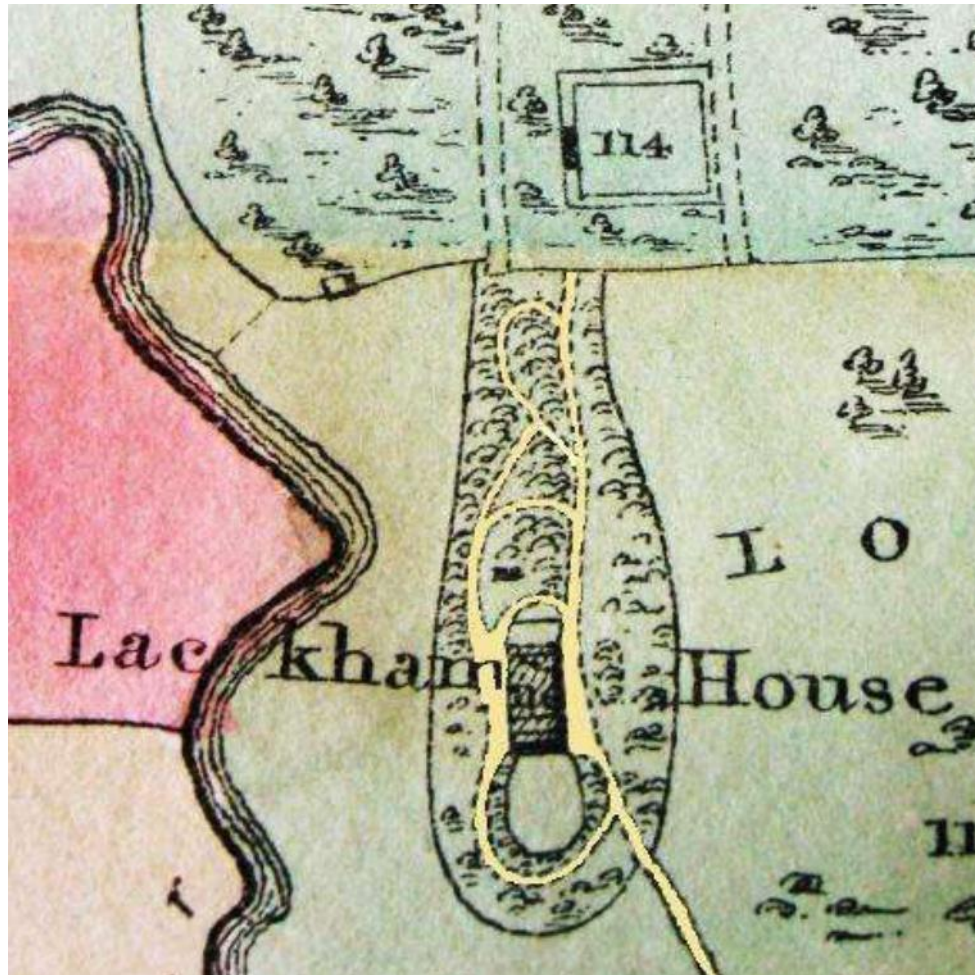
Within the woodland there are medieval? (probably) marker ditches that separate out different woodland compartments. These have not yet been

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<sup>1</sup> Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Chippenham (henceforth W&SHC) 244

mapped <sup>2</sup> but it is likely they would show a fairly regular layout, although not rigidly rectilinear.

A map used for the tithe survey in the 1830's but probably dated to about 1816 shows very clearly how close together the two medieval trackways are, and that, at this period, the continuity across the front of the house was not in place

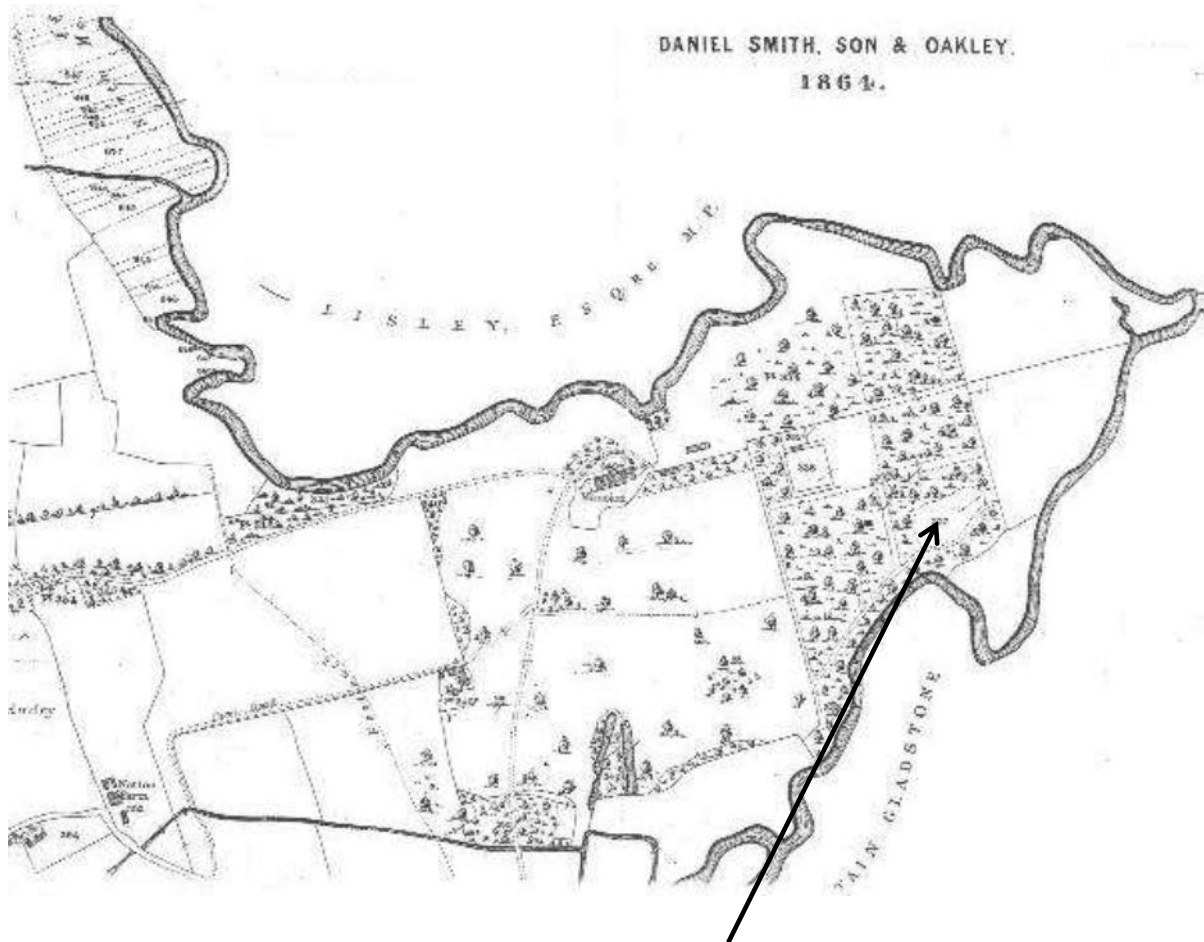


Excerpt from c1816 map

The layout of the woods in the mid nineteenth century is clearly shown on a sale map dated 1864

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<sup>2</sup> Could be an interesting project.....



Features shown on this map include the large clearing in the centre of the southern woods. This may be a decorative feature, a sunny glade that could be reached by following the ornamental Lime Tree Walk alongside the river and the Pollarded Hornbeam Walk in the north east corner of South Wood. Both of these Walks are ornamental features that are indications that the woodland was being used, at least in part, as a recreational resource.

The basic layout of the woods has not changed drastically since then although much of the western half of South Wood has been lost to buildings and the Museum area since 1960

#### Overview of historical features of Lackham Woods

- The medieval (or at latest 16<sup>th</sup> century) boundary ditches down either side of both the main drives - the continuation of the Main drive past the House and Engineer's Ride.
- Within the woodland, for example in North Wood and the central bit, there are lesser ditches which are certainly compartment boundaries for

coppicing etc. These are more troublesome to date but I see no reason why they shouldn't be relict medieval boundaries for the "vill" at Lackham

- The coppice itself, although I don't see any direct evidence for it being ancient, is probably replants of the medieval and Tudor system
- The winding paths evident on the maps are certainly at least 18<sup>th</sup> century and are part of the start of the change in use of the woods from entirely functional productive units to being also part of the "aesthetic" attraction of the estate, walking through nature as opposed to working with nature you might say. Obviously the woods were, and indeed continue to be, both but the balance swings backwards and forwards. In the 17-18<sup>th</sup> centuries it was mostly functional with some leisure, in the nineteenth much more to do with leisure and today back more towards production. I think it is not unreasonable to claim that the shooting interests are leisure in the 19<sup>th</sup> early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (it certainly was for the lord of the manor and his / her chums) whereas today the shooting is productive as the shoot is run in part as a commercial enterprise.( what do you think?)
- The "Hornbeam Walk" is late 18<sup>th</sup> to mid nineteenth century in date and is definitely in the area of "aesthetic".
- The Lime Walk and the broad "ride" that runs from the river north west to the south edge of the Playing Field are both of about the same date (?) and again leisure features.
- The "Glade" area in the South Wood, first clearly evident on maps from about the mid 1850's is probably also aesthetic in use.
- The World War II hardened defence structure (Pill box) in the NE corner of North Wood is one of the more recent historical features of the woodland.
- Obviously the flora of the woods, with indicator species in both extant woodland and former woodland areas, such as the Spring Garden area west of the Walled Garden, indicate an ancient woodland being in place over all of the existing woodland area, and even wider

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