



Figure 1c.
Roman Villa, c.1900

Following the accidental discovery of the Roman villa in 1864, the site was excavated under the direction of James Farrer, a keen antiquarian and uncle of the young Lord Eldon. The considerable volume of spoil dug out to expose the ruins was placed to the east of the visible ruins, to form a terrace. After the villa had been revealed, Lord Eldon built a hunting lodge on the spoil terrace and positioned more-or-less centrally on the site. The intention seems to have been to adopt the Roman ruins as a kind of pleasure ground to the lodge.

A sizeable collection of old photographs of the Chedworth Roman villa site was compiled by Norman Irvine who, between 1912 and 1977, grew up at and then became caretaker of the villa. This collection has provided the basis for the plan in Figure 1c. The plan indicates the likely layout of the villa site in about 1900, drawn from information contained in photographs. Photographs pre-dating 1900 are few but sufficient to suggest that the basic layout of 1900 had probably been established in the early 1870s. Certainly the 1884 Ordnance Survey map shows an oval front drive to the hunting lodge and a central path across the villa courtyard.

Photographs of around 1900 tended to concentrate on the Roman ruins and so there is little information on how the grounds downhill (east) of the hunting lodge looked. However, later photographs do not suggest that there were ever elaborate gardens in this area; it appears to have kept as a grassy space, partially occupied by modest kitchen gardens at the north-west corner, presumably tended by the caretaker.

The main (east) front of the lodge was approached by a gravel drive leading from the lane to the south. To the immediate east of the house the drive was oval. This survived until the early 1950s, when it appears to have become dilapidated and grassy. To the east of the oval drive lay a small, stone-edged octagonal ornamental bed within a gravel path. The octagonal stone edging was eventually moved (during or after the 1960s) down to the lower kitchen garden area. A small sinuous path led from the oval drive to a flight of steps leading down to the lower kitchen garden. Steps exist in the same place today. A photograph of about 1912 shows diamond- and lozenge-shaped ornamental beds on the slope down to the kitchen garden area. It is not known how long these existed.

Within the area of the Roman villa, very little 'gardening' took place. The walkway immediately in front of the west range of buildings was gravelled and a gravel path was created running across the courtyard from west to east. It then turned northward. Smaller informal (worn?) paths also radiated across the grass of the courtyard for a time.

Most formal tree planting appears to have been concentrated around the borders of the site, where a number of conifers, such as Norway Spruce, were introduced among the native broadleaved trees. (The large Western Red Cedars that exist around the edges of the site today appear to have been planted much later, in the 1930s.) Four specimen trees were planted in a loosely symmetrical arrangement around the hunting lodge. Of these, two were Weeping Ash and two were Sweet Buckeye (an unusual form of chestnut). Three of the original trees appear to survive today. The fourth - a Weeping Ash to the immediate south of the house - appears (from photographs) to have been replaced in the mid-20th century.