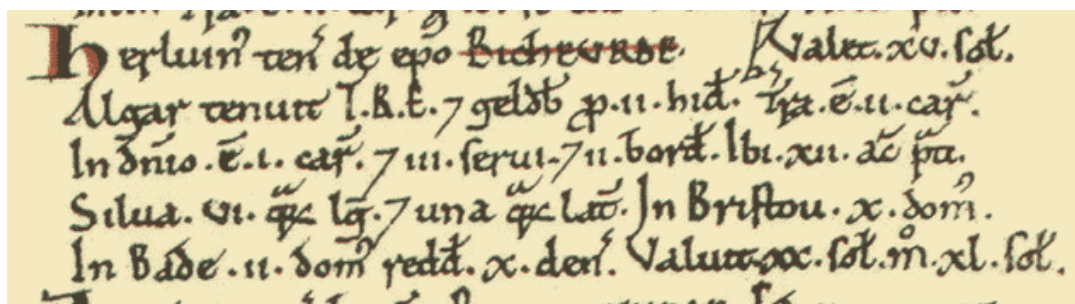


THE MANOR WOODS

Old Manor Wood

Bishopsworth consisted of two manors at the time of the Domesday Book of 1086. A woodland of six furlongs long and a furlong wide was described in one of them. At the time of Domesday, a furlong could be between c170 metres and c340 metres; thus, the woodland described in Domesday was between approximately 1km and 2km long, and 170 to 340 meters wide i.e., it had an area in the region of 17 to 34 hectares.

It has been suggested that (Old) Manor Wood in Manor Woods Valley is one in the same as the woodland referred to in Domesday. The oldest portion of the existing woodland does approximately fit the proportions of the Domesday woodland, but it is a quarter of the linear size of the minimum of the Domesday woodland; however, it was common for cultivation to 'nibble away' at the edges of woodland over time, leaving behind the areas that were impossible or un-profitable to cultivate. It is likely therefore, that the surviving woodland on the steepest southeast bank of the Malago is indeed one in the same as that described in Domesday, meaning that this part of the existing Manor Wood is probably nearly a thousand years old, and is possibly even a remnant of original primeval (but subsequently managed) post-glacial forest.



Domesday entry that described a woodland 6 furlongs long, by 1 furlong wide

Herluin holds of the bishop Bicheurde [Bishopsworth].

Alger held it T.R.E. and paid geld for 2 hides. There is land for 2 ploughs.

In demesne is 1 plough and 3 serfs, and (there are) 2 bordars. There (are) 12 acres of meadow.

Wood(land) 6 furlongs long and 1 furlong broad. In Bristou [Bristol] (are) 10 houses appurtenant.

In Bade [Bath] 2 houses paying (to it) 10 pence. It was worth 20 shillings [tax paid in 1066]; now 40 shillings.

The tithe map of 1840 shows Old Manor Wood and a small copse to the northeast of the Wood and adjacent to the Malago. There was also a small copse, approximately where the southern end of the path from Valley Road now runs. The latter copse was cleared sometime in the proceeding forty years.

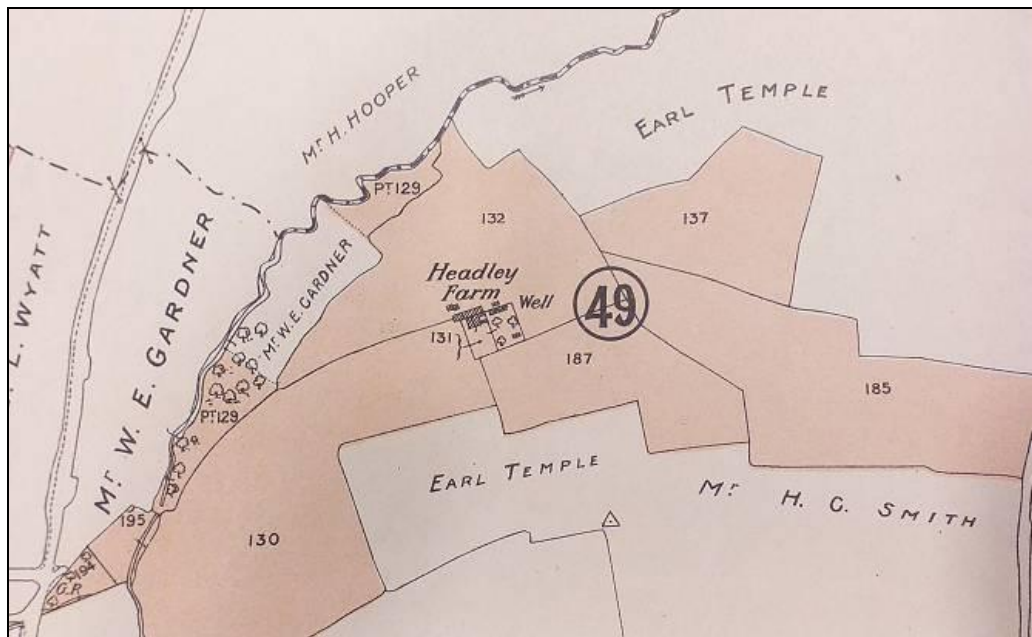


Map of 1840 showing the northeast end of Manor Wood, the small copse beyond it and a small copse to the north of the Malago

At the time of an auction of outlying parts of the Ashton Manor estate in June 1917, the ownership of Old Manor Woods was split between an estate tenant, Mr. F Witcombe, and Mr. W E Gardner. The former occupied Headley Farm, which at that time ran to nearly 31 acres (12.5ha) and was described as 'An Exceedingly Attractive Small Holding' in the sale catalogue. The latter owned other parcels of land nearby including the land immediately to the northwest of the Malago, where the St Peters Rise entrance to Manor Woods Valley is now located. Witcombe and Gardner occupied southwest and northeast portions of Old Manor Wood respectively. Witcombe's part was known as 'The Coppice', which also included the small, detached, copse to the northeast.

The field to the northeast of Old Manor Wood, in which New Manor Wood later developed, was known as 'Wood Ground'. Newspaper reports of the auction show that Gardner consolidated his land holdings by purchasing Headley Farm, for the princely sum of £1900, and a single field on Church Road, to the south of St Peter's Church.

In 1917 Mr. H Hooper owned land to the northwest of the Malago, downstream on Gardner's holding, where Allotment Wood now stands. The area that is now parkland sandwiched between the old course of the Malago and Crantock Avenue, was owned by 'Earl Temple' in 1917; who was presumably Algernon William Stephen Temple-Gore-Langton, 5th Earl Temple of Stowe (1871–1940). Earl Temple's family seat was in Newton St Loe. On his death the Newton St Loe estate was purchased by the Duchy of Cornwall.



Detail from 1917 Ashton Court estate outlying land sale catalogue

That Old Manor Wood was known as The Coppice in 1917, points to the fact that it was being managed for its coppice products, namely Hazel rods. Regular coppicing activities would have produced a varied and dynamic woodland. This all change when the woodland ceased to be managed following the development of St Peters Rise in the 1930's.

By the 1990's Old Manor Wood was described as neglected. Even though the Malago formed a border to the western part of the woodland, public access was nearly unrestricted, as the stream was easily crossable at many points, especially over the weirs. Informal paths crisscrossed the woodland.

English (aka Pendunculate) Oaks are the dominant tree in the ancient woodland. Most of these have been damaged by fires set by vandals in the years before the woodland path was constructed. Other trees include mature Sycamores near the extreme southwest end of the woodland and immatures Ash and Field Maples where sufficient light penetrates the canopy to allow them to grow.

As mentioned above, Hazel stools dominate the shrub layer. but Blackthorns, Hawthorns, Elders, Hollies and Dogwoods also occur. The trees and the shrubs cast a heavy shade during the summer months, resulting in a relatively limited ground flora which is dominated by spring flowering Ramsons (Wild Garlic). When the Ramsons die down in the early summer the Ivy that covers much of the ground is exposed. Other typical woodland species that occur include Lesser, Wood Anemone and Wood Sedge. People tell of how the wood was once 'full of Bluebells', but there are were not thought to be any naturally occurring native Bluebells by the end of the 2010's; however, Spanish Bluebells occur occasionally.

Both Hazel and Oak have special places in British history. Hazel has a reputation as a magical tree. A Hazel rod is supposed to protect against evil spirits, as well as being used as a wand and for water-divining. In some parts of England, Hazel nuts were carried as charms and/or held to ward off rheumatism. In Ireland, Hazel was known as the 'Tree of Knowledge', and in medieval times it was a symbol of fertility. The English (=Pendunculate) Oak has for centuries been a national symbol of strength and survival. It has played an

important part in British culture; couples were wed under ancient oaks in Oliver Cromwell's time, the festive Yule Log was traditionally cut from oak, it features on the 1987 one-pound coin and is the inspiration for the emblem of many environmentally focused organisations, including the National Trust and the Woodland Trust. The expression 'Hearts of Oak' refers to wooden Royal Navy ships and the men who sailed in them.

Many woods last coppiced between 1920 and 1950 have been grubbed out or converted to conifer plantations. Others have simply been neglected. Various terms can be used to distinguish these relic woods from actively coppiced woods where there is a continuing programme of cutting - derelict, neglected, abandoned, overstood, or stored coppice. This is the current state of Old Manor Wood. Left alone, these woods will eventually return to some form of high forest dominated by mature trees. The total area of active coppice in the UK remains a small fraction of that a century ago; however, since about 1970 there has been something of a coppice revival centre on, but by no means confined to, derelict coppice in nature reserves.

Many woodland plants, especially spring-flowering ones, benefit from coppicing. Alternating periods of light and dark ensure that they are able to flower periodically without becoming overwhelmed by more competitive species. Many woods have become much poorer in their ground vegetation and in hence insect species since the decline in coppicing. Some butterflies, in particular, require the open conditions of newly cleared woodland which was once provided by coppicing. Rich communities of birds can be found in coppiced woods with many stages of growth.

Small mammals are strongly influenced by the cycle of coppicing. Freshly cut coppice tends to be is used only by Wood Mice (and probably Yellow-necked Mice in this location), which are often the commonest small mammals in a wood, occurring at all stages of growth. In the second year, Common Shrews and Bank Voles appear, and their numbers dramatically increase in the third year, which supports double the density of small mammals as at any other stage of coppice growth. Numbers then decrease but remain fairly stable until the next felling, when the cycle is repeated. Harvest Mice (perhaps not present in Manor Woods Valley), Short-tailed Voles, Water and Pygmy shrews are associated with young coppice. Coppiced woodland in south and west England is one of the most important habitats of the Hazel Dormouse. Due to the relatively small size of Old Manor Wood, its isolation from other woods and the decline in the quality of Hazel within it, it is unlikely that Hazel Dormice occurred in it in recent times. If they had, they would have expanded in to New Manor Wood and Allotment Wood as they formed. There are no known reports of Hazel Dormice in Manor Woods Valley.

Many people find that coppicing creates an aesthetically attractive woodland. Not everyone agrees, of course, but few can fail to appreciate the magnificent carpets of spring flowers that often appear in recently felled areas.

Coppicing of Hazel stools in Old Manor Wood, from the Bishopsworth Entrance to Pond Wood, re-commenced in the late winter of 2006-7. Today coppicing involves the use of pruning and bow saws to cut the Hazel to ground level, ensuring the cuts were angled to allow the rain to run away from the centre of the stool in order to prevent rot. If the stools are too large to cut by hand, they are cut higher-up, with the resulting stumps being trimmed-up by chainsaw.

In 2008 the Malago Valley Conservation Group (MVCG) published two emails from members of the public who supported and appreciated the works that had taken place in Manor Woods. One message observed that "It now seems to be more popular than ever, and I hope its new status will help keep it for more people to enjoy. The interpretive signage is a good idea." The other said "I visited Manor Woods for the first time in years last weekend and thought how lovely it now is since the clean-up and improvements. Years ago ... I remember the stream being dirty with dumped rubbish, and I wouldn't have even ventured into the woods. But the signposted Woodland Walk encouraged me to explore further ...".

Areas of scrub which used to be very thick had grown upwards and thinned by 2011. For years there had been very little management in Old Manor Wood and it had many young Ash saplings. As a result, MVCG organised two working parties where they removed self-seeded Ash and Horse Chestnut saplings along the main path, and in the autumn Woodland and Wildlife Officer, Justin Smith, and his team removed the bigger saplings in areas within New Manor Wood. The latter group also undertook some Hazel coppicing and created several clearings to encourage a better variety of plants.

Joe McSorley from the Wildlife Trust visited the woods in 2015, he advised doing a little coppicing every year, thus creating glades among the trees to get more sunny areas, and removing some invasive saplings which would renew the woodland floor vegetation and revive the trees. In February 2015, some fallen trees were removed from the woodland, some coppicing was undertaken and ParkWorks, a new initiative by Bristol Parks, that used some volunteer labour and provided training opportunities, repaired parts of the woodland path. The coppicing arisings were used to create a 'dead hedge', the first of many in Manor Woods Valley.

Dead hedges are piles of branches and twigs arranged to form a barrier which are increasingly used as a way to dispose of the material that arises from thinning or clearing operations in woodlands. Using arisings in this way is good for wildlife - especially for small mammals and birds - because it gives them somewhere to shelter that is protected from predators and from the wind and rain. It's also good for insects: dead hedges in effect create a linear eco-pile. The idea is that the material in the dead hedge will rot away in ways that are good for ecosystems, but this takes quite a few years as the branches are largely off the ground. It is becoming quite common to keep a dead hedge maintained by regularly putting more arisings on top, as happens in Manor Woods Valley. Dead hedges can be useful in guiding the public, or protecting delicate or interesting ecological features from the public and dogs.



An example of a dead hedge in Manor Woods Valley

Dead hedging is a very useful activity for volunteer groups in woodlands because the actions involved are fairly safe - hand cutting of small diameter branches and arranging these into piles. Such projects have a clear purpose but also a very visible result so volunteers can see that they have achieved something useful. Often dead hedges become a lattice work which will be colonised by Brambles, producing the effect of traditional living hedge.

In the winter of 2016/7 BCC funded the Forest of Avon Trust to provide two days of coppicing training for MVCG volunteers, and the Avon Wildlife Trust supported the volunteers in three further days of coppicing. In exchange for firewood logs, Campus Pool Skatepark funded a licensed chainsaw user to coppice some mature trees in the Woodland Path that were too big for hand tools.

New Manor Wood

New Manor Wood was formed as 2.21ha of farmland, formally owned by Earl Temple, at the northeast end of the Old Manor Wood was finally completed isolated by the final phase of the housing development along St Peter's Rise, after the War, and the development of Crantock Avenue in the early 1960's. The highway in the latter was adopted by Bristol City Council in 1962. This isolated area was then subject to natural vegetation succession resulting in today's woodland.

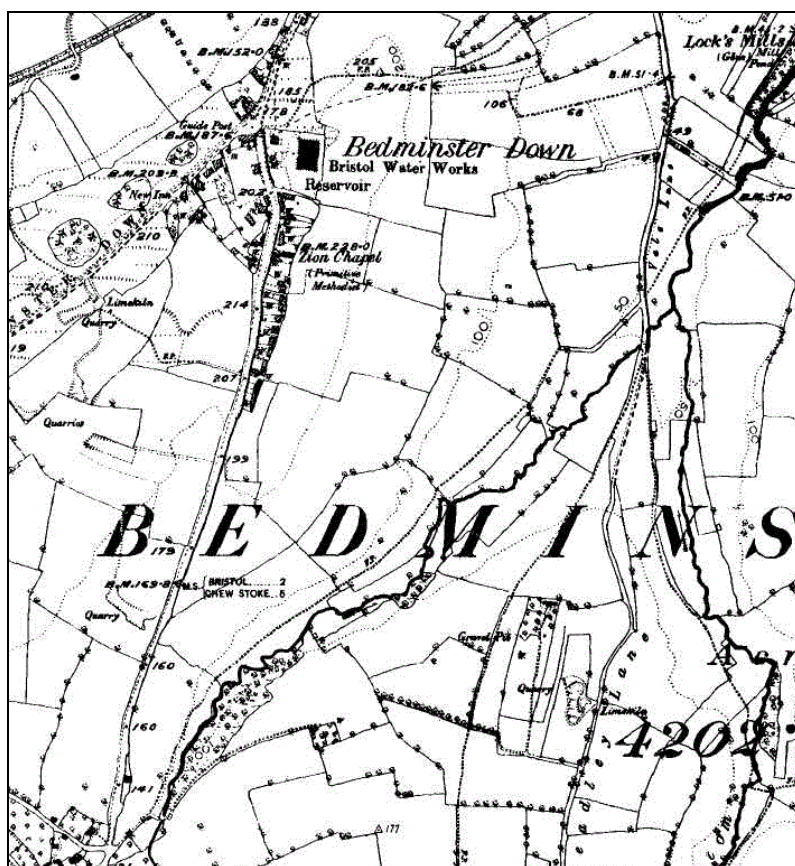
New Manor Wood was still mapped as rough grassland in 1977; however anecdotal and documentary evidence demonstrates that it went through the usual successional phases of rough grassland, to Bramble scrub, to thorn scrub, to the current relatively young semi-natural woodland that typify the development of woodlands on abandoned or neglected sites. As well as Hazel, there are occasional, immature, Hollies and Yews in the shrub-layer. There are no apparent 'mother trees' within Manor Woods Valley for these, meaning that their seeds were probably brought in by birds during the scrub stage.

Patches of Currants, Gooseberries and Raspberries occur rarely, whilst Brambles are still frequent. The former three species are likely to be 'escapes' from nearby gardens. Ramsons are also notable, having spread, no doubt, from the adjacent ancient woodland.

A University of the West of England (UWE) MSc student conducted NVC (National Vegetation Classification) surveys in Old and New Manor Woods during the summer of 2018. The final report was entitled 'NVC Assessment and analysis of a possible Ancient Woodland Area of Manor Valley Woods, to support and inform the management plan being written for this site.' The study area consisted of four plots within Old and New Manor Woods. The report concluded that Manor Woods Valley is an important area of ecological interest due to its variety of species rich habitats and is positioning in a very developed area. The report provided ecological support for the assessment of a possible Ancient Woodland area, as well as an analysis of Maple-Ash type woodland. It made recommendations for management of the woodland in order to maximise its cultural and ecological value.

'Ghost' Hedgerows

The earliest detailed map of the Manor Woods Valley area is the tithe map of 1840. The map is relatively accurate; however, the ordnance Survey map of 1884 shows more detail, such as scattered notable trees in hedgerows and within fields. The trees within fields denote lost hedgerows.

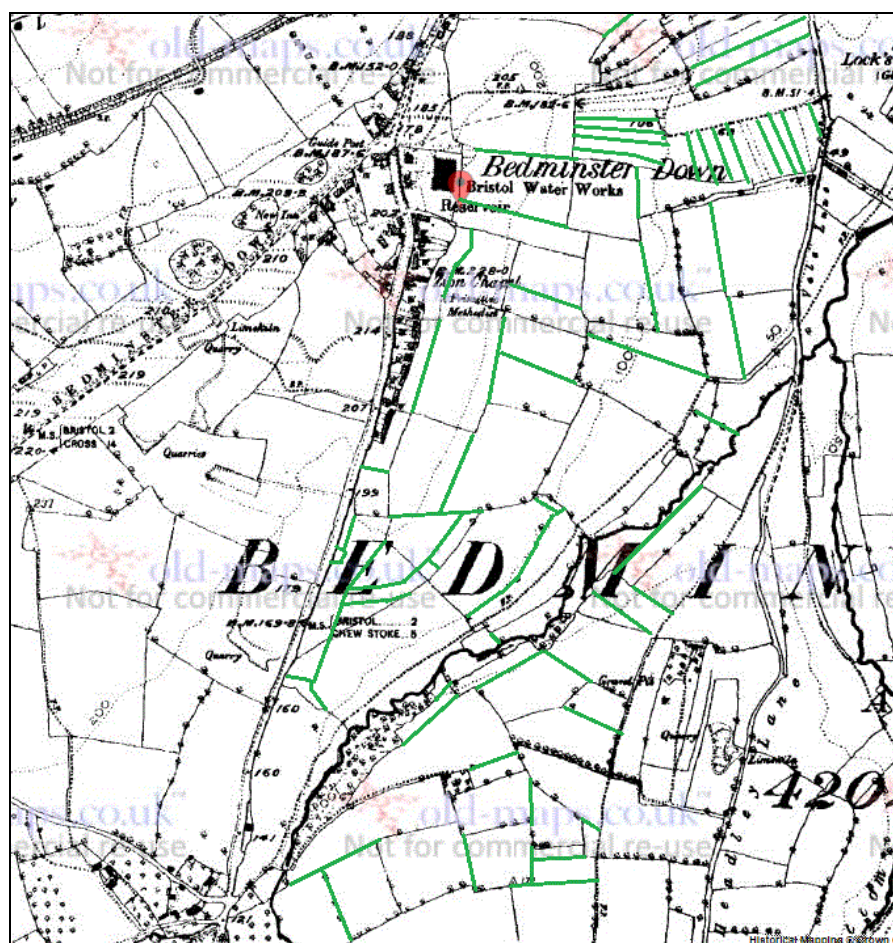


Manor Woods Valley in 1884 showing hedgerows and notable trees

The enclosure (or more correctly, inclosure) acts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries enabled land reform which transformed a traditional method of agriculture under systems of co-operation and communality in communally administered holdings, usually in large fields which were devoid of physical territorial boundaries, into a system of agricultural holding in severalty, by separating with physical boundaries one person's land from that of his neighbours'. This was, then, the disintegration and reformation of the open fields into individual ownership.

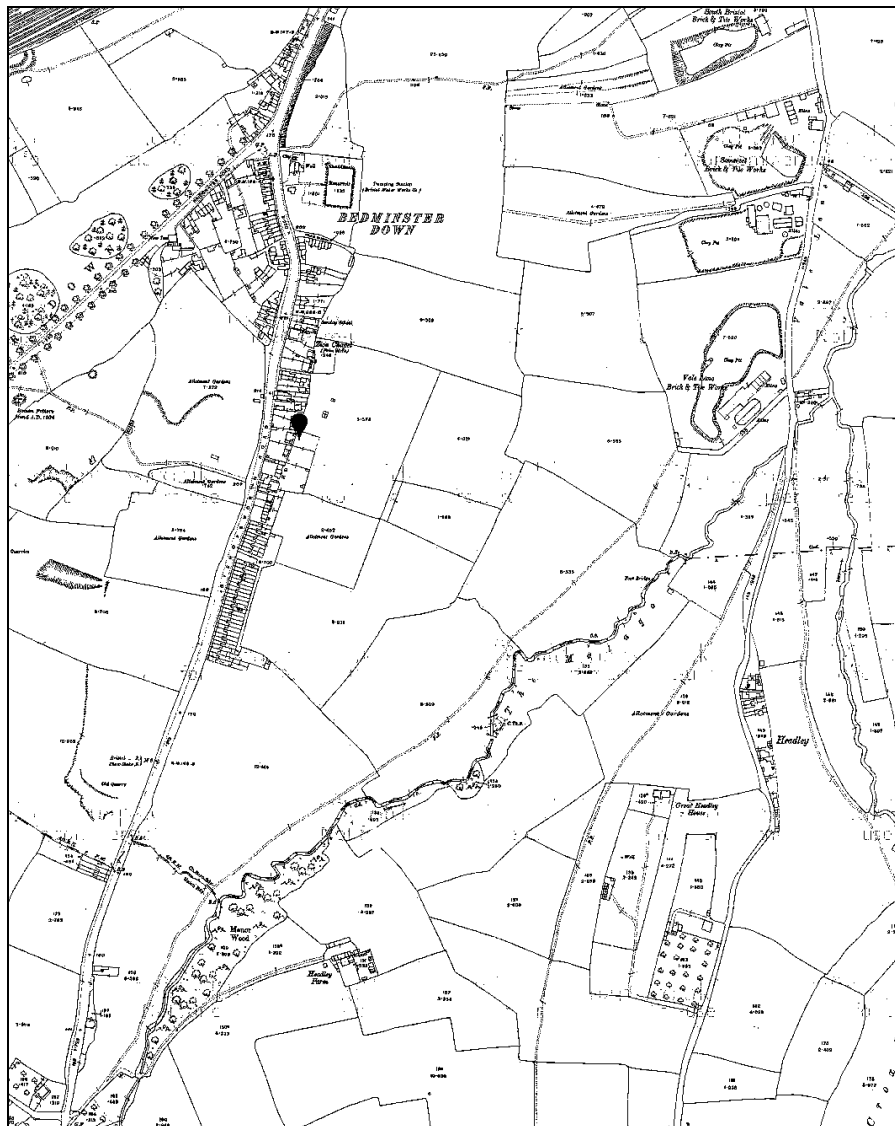
The slightly sinuous hedgerows mapped during the nineteenth century in a few places in Manor Woods Valley, probably reflect very ancient field boundaries associated with the wide turning-circle of medieval ploughs pulled by ox-teams. Many field boundaries were re-aligned and defined with newly planted hedgerows during the enclose process, usually in a much straighter squared-off manner. Some of these angular fields are particularly evident in the middle section of Manor Woods Valley, but even some of these boundaries were lost by the late nineteenth century. By following-through disrupted hedge-lines and 'joining-the dots' of in-field trees, one can make an educated guess at part of this earlier, but probably post-enclosure, field pattern.

There were still remnant strips of the open-field system of landholding at the extreme northern end of Manor Woods Valley, north of Cockleshell Lane, in the late nineteenth century. Some of these were transposed into allotment plot boundaries and long narrow paddocks that survived to the present day.



Probable pre-1840 field pattern based on extrapolation (in green)

There were very few field boundary changes between 1840 and the 1880's; with one or two field boundaries being lost and one or two gained. Some of the 1880's field boundaries had been removed by 1903, with the incremental loss of hedgerows further evident in 1916.



Map of 1916

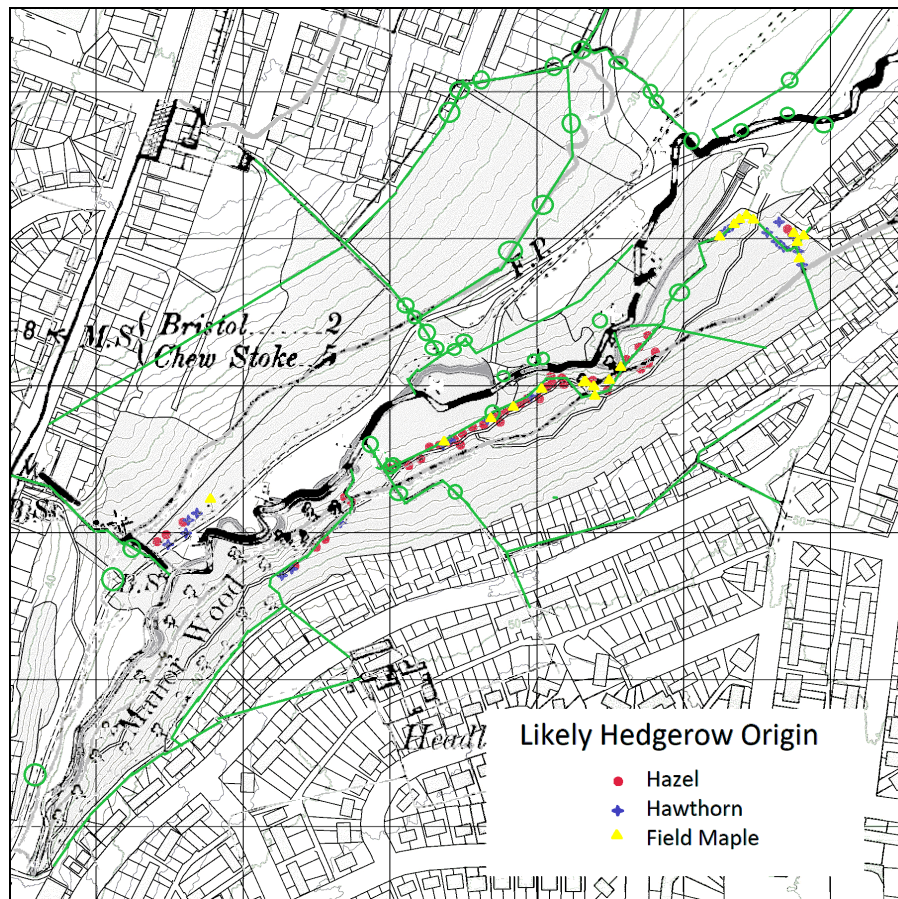
Much farmland immediately to the southeast of Old Manor Wood was lost to the developments associated with St Peter's Rise, which commenced in 1935. An aerial photograph of about 1949 shows that hedgerows were still present at the northeastern end of Manor Woods Valley, but were probably in a neglected state by then.



c1949 – Manor Woods Valley is along the left-hand side of the photo

In about 1950 the hedgerows in the Wildflower Meadow, Lower Park and other open spaces, were removed, thus turning Manor Woods Valley in to the public open space that we know today. LIDAR data (see 'Allotment Wood' chapter), shows that the hedge-banks of removed hedgerows are usually preserved as, at least slight, variations in ground levels. That there are no such relict hedge-banks visible in the Wildflower Meadow and Lower Park demonstrates how completely these areas were re-profiled post-removal of the hedgerows.

During the autumn of 2018 a project plotting the positions of the larger Hazels, Field Maples and Hawthorns within New Manor Wood and Allotment Wood began. This work revealed that these are the outgrown remnants of hedgerows, and in some cases farm tracks, preserved as 'ghost' hedgerows within the woodlands. Banks and changes in ground levels associated with these hedgerows are evident on the ground, especially along the northwestern side of The Low Road portion of the woodland path. Work to ascertain if more of the hedgerows are preserved as remnants within the woodlands is on-going.



Trees and shrubs associated with remnant hedgerows

The Woodland Path

The South Bristol Rivers Initiative was officially launched in November 1998. Dawn Primarolo M.P. helped to get the project under way and cut the ceremonial ribbon to the new path which was at that time being constructed through the Manor Woods from near the Interceptor towards Bishopsworth Entrance. Work on the woodland path, which would in due course make the wood more accessible for everybody to enjoy, had been started the previous year. Also present at the opening were representatives of the project sponsors, Allied Domec, and the three groups involved in managing the Initiative - the Wildlife Trust, the Forest of Avon and the Western Partnership for Sustainable Development. The local organisations on the Community Working Group were also there - namely MVCG, Highridge Forum, Dundry Hill Group and HHEAG.



Local MP (1987-2015), Dawn Primarolo, cuts the ribbon
on the first phase of the Woodland Path

In 2000, BCC said that they had no objection to an MVCG proposal for a pedestrian bridge over the stream below The Dam, in order to form a link between the River Path with the Woodland Path which is only a few metres away at that point. This would have introduced the potential for more varied walks through valley. Applying for grants from the New Opportunities Fund was initially proposed, and from Yansec at a later date. The project, however, ground to a halt in 2009 as MVCG were faced with an enormous amount of red tape and overstretched Council employees.

With help from the BCC Local Nature Reserves Officer, in spring 2006 MVCG applied for a grant from Yansec. £12,650, was awarded in the autumn; the large majority was to be spent on completing the path through the Manor Woods, erecting wooden finger posts pointing the way to the path and for coppicing some of the streamside trees. Where the path had been installed from The Interceptor end of New Manor Wood some years previously, it remained usable, but on leaving the end of the made path, users had had to endure the very slippery conditions of the wet clay banks in Old Manor Wood.



The Woodland Path in 2018

The work to complete the safe and firm path, with a footing of gravel over a strong membrane, through the southwest end of Old Manor Wood was conducted during the spring of 2007. Later in the year the finger-posts were installed at each end of the path. All of the aforementioned work was managed by BCC Parks Department.

The Ordnance Survey failed to map the woodland path, so when Bristol University approached MVCG to identify potential projects for Physical Geography under-graduates the opportunity was taken to have them map the path. Thus, in February 2018 a group of students mapped the woodland path on to pre-existing maps and with contour data derived from LiDAR using GIS software (ArcMap).

As the path became weathered and the edge timbers rotted, ad-hoc repairs were carried out, with a particularly major repair program commencing during the winter on 2019-20. This ongoing work is being carried out by groups of volunteers working under the supervision and guidance of the Manor Woods Valley Group (MWVG).



The Woodland Path being repaired