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Report for 1939-45

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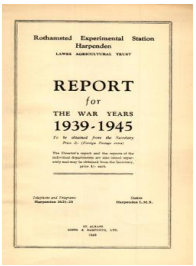
Rothamsted Experimental Station
Harpenden
LAWES AGRICULTURAL TRUST

REPORT
for
THE WAR YEARS
1939-1945

Improvements to Laboratories and Farm Buildings

Rothamsted Research

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Viscount and Viscountess Bledisloe, and Sir Henry Dale, President of the Royal Society.

In the morning the guests were taken in small parties round the laboratories and had an opportunity of inspecting the new south block, the remodelled sections of the main block, and the new pot-culture houses.

After a luncheon in the Public Hall, addresses were given by the Earl of Radnor, Chairman of the Lawes Trust Committee, Mr. R. S. Hudson and Sir John Russell.

Many messages of congratulation were received from overseas and from well-wishers in this country.

In the afternoon the guests were taken round the farm and inspected some of the more important experiments including the 100th successive wheat crop on the Broadbalk field.

Parallel meetings to commemorate the Centenary of Rothamsted were held in Moscow by the agricultural scientists of the U.S.S.R., in Cincinnati by the Soil Science Society of America, and commendations of Rothamsted's work were made at meetings in Spain and Portugal.

Retirement of Sir John Russell

On 30th September, 1943, Sir John Russell retired from the directorship of Rothamsted. Dr. W. G. Ogg, formerly director of the Macaulay Institute for Soil Research, Aberdeen, was invited to succeed him.

Sir John joined the Rothamsted staff in 1907 and was appointed director when Sir Daniel Hall left in 1912. During his long tenure of office, Sir John completely reorganised and greatly expanded the Station, and, what was still more important, gathered round him a first-class staff. He built up what is now one of the finest agricultural libraries in the world, and raised large sums of money for the rebuilding of the laboratories, pot-culture houses and farm buildings and for the purchase of Rothamsted farm and Manor House. In this summary it is impossible to deal adequately with Sir John's great services to Rothamsted and to the agriculture of the Empire. He travelled widely and did much to make the work of the Station known in other countries. Besides serving on numerous committees set up by the Ministry of Agriculture, the Agricultural Research Council and the Colonial Office, he took an active part in the work of the Allied Post-War Requirements Bureau and UNRRA. During the war he also served part-time with the Soviet Relations Division of the Ministry of Information which entailed making extensive lecture tours in many parts of the country.

When he retired the staff and former workers presented him with his portrait painted by Francis E. Hodge.

Improvements to Laboratories and Farm Buildings

In 1938 a Centenary Fund was inaugurated for the purpose of reconstructing some of the old laboratories and erecting new ones: also for setting up pot-culture houses and extending and improving the farm buildings. There was a ready and generous response from many friends and supporters of Rothamsted and, had it not been

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for the war, it seems certain that the target of £125,000 would have been reached. With the coming of the war, however, the appeal was discontinued, and the Rothamsted Centenary Fund was closed in 1939 when nearly £67,000 had been received or promised. With this sum, which included £15,000 from the Ministry of Agriculture for the South Wing and for spectrographic equipment, excellent accommodation has been provided for the departments of Chemistry, Biochemistry, Physics and Microbiology, pot-culture houses have been built and farm buildings reconstructed. The latter are now ideal for their purpose, having modern electrical equipment and spacious barns in which the experimental crops can be stored and threshed during the winter months. Unfortunately the projects for improving the accommodation of other scientific departments, re-housing our unique agricultural library, and providing administrative offices and an Assembly Hall, have had to be postponed. Lack of accommodation is hindering the development of the Station's work and has led to the necessity of refusing to accept some of the voluntary workers from other countries. It is, in fact, proving difficult to find room for workers training for our own and the Colonial agricultural research services.

There is also an urgent need for providing more farm cottages, improving the lay-out at the back and front of the laboratories, and re-making the road to the farm.

The Work of the Station in War-time

As was to be expected the war had a marked effect on the work of Rothamsted. The field work of the classical and the more important of the other experiments, particularly the long-term ones, was continued. Much of the laboratory work had to be allowed to fall into arrears and many investigations had to be postponed in order that *ad hoc* problems, immediately connected with increased food production, might be undertaken.

Most members of the staff were engaged in various forms of war work and consequently were reserved, nevertheless 14 entered H.M. Forces and we regret to record that two—Jack Olver (Fleet Air Arm), assistant in the Chemistry Department, and John Williams (R.A.F.), assistant in the Insecticides Department—were reported missing. A few members were seconded for scientific work elsewhere, but most of the staff carried on their war duties at Rothamsted.

Between 1938 and 1945 the total number of workers, including voluntary workers, assistant staff, farm workers and the Woburn staff, increased from 143 to 219.

Among those who left us were Dr. J. Henderson Smith, who resigned in 1940 after 21 years at Rothamsted, the last eight as head of the Plant Pathology Department, and Miss Mary S. Aslin, who resigned in 1942 after 23 years' service as librarian.

It is with regret that we record the death during the early war years of two heads of departments—Mr. E. H. Richards, head of the Fermentation Department, who died in 1939, and Mr. D. Ward Cutler, head of the General Microbiology Department, who died in 1941. Both of these workers had been on the staff since 1919.

In 1940 an Agricultural Research Council Unit dealing with