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Rothamsted Report for 1946

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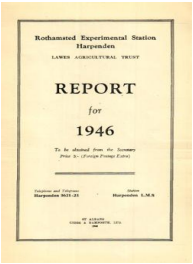

Preface

Rothamsted Research

Rothamsted Research (1947) *Preface ;* Rothamsted Report For 1946, pp 14 - 15 **- DOI: https://doi.org/10.23637/ERADOC-1-88**

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PREFACE

The Rothamsted Experimental Station was founded in 1843 by the late Sir J. B. Lawes, with whom was associated Sir J. H. Gilbert for a period of nearly 60 years. Lawes died in 1900 and Gilbert in 1901; they were succeeded by Sir A. D. Hall from 1902 to 1912, and by Sir E. J. Russell from 1912 to 1943 when the present Director, Dr. W. G. Ogg, was appointed.

For many years the work was maintained entirely at the expense of Sir J. B. Lawes, at first by direct payment, and from 1889 onwards out of the income derived from the endowment fund of £100,000 given by him to the Lawes Agricultural Trust. In 1904 the Society for Extending the Rothamsted Experiments was instituted for the purpose of providing funds for expansion. In 1906, Mr. J. F. Mason built the Bacteriological Laboratory; in 1907, the Goldsmiths' Company generously provided a further endowment of £10,000, the income of which—since augmented by the Company—is devoted to the investigation of the soil. In 1911, the Development Commissioners made their first grant to the Station. Since then, Government grants have been made annually, and at the present time over 90 per cent. of the necessary funds is provided from Government sources—mainly by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Research Council.

The main block of laboratories was opened in 1919; another block was erected in 1924 for plant pathology by a grant provided by the Ministry of Agriculture out of the Development Fund; and Red Gables, the house adjoining the laboratories on the north side, was converted into an Administration Building to hold the Imperial Soil Bureau, Staff Common Room, and Conference Room.

Large glasshouses, including special insect-proof houses for virus studies, were added in 1926, 1928, and 1931 by aid of generous grants from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Empire Marketing Board and the Ministry of Agriculture. A new large range of houses, some of which are insect-proof, was erected in 1935 for plant-pathology investigations.

A large new South Wing was completed in 1940, and the old chemical laboratories were reconstructed. These extensions and reconstructions have provided excellent accommodation for the Chemistry, Biochemistry, Physics and Microbiology Departments; in addition a fine range of pot-culture houses was built. A new laboratory has also been built and equipped for workers from the Imperial College of Science and Technology.

The Rothamsted Home Farm of 250 acres came under the management of Sir John Lawes in 1834, the experimental fields being worked from the farm buildings at the Manor House. In 1913 the first range of farm buildings and cottages was erected on the site of the present buildings. These were considerably enlarged in 1930–32 and equipped for electric light and power. Further additions were made in 1939–41, and the electricity supply has now been extended to these newer buildings.

From 1926 onwards, new and greatly improved methods of field experimentation were adopted on all but the classical plots, which remained essentially unchanged. In 1945 the number of plots reached 1722, the highest in the history of Rothamsted.

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The non-experimental part of the farm was re-organised in 1928 to meet the prevailing economic conditions, much of the land being laid down to permanent grass, and cattle and sheep were introduced. In 1939 this policy was reversed, ley farming was introduced, and the arable acreage was increased to meet war-time conditions.

The Library is steadily growing and now contains over 30,000 volumes dealing with agriculture and related subjects. Extra accommodation has become an urgent problem. New accessions can now be housed in the main library only by removing other books to improvised store rooms which also are rapidly approaching repletion. Miss M. S. Aslin, who had been Librarian since 1919, retired in 1942, and was succeeded in 1945 by Miss I. M. Anderson, M.A. The catalogue of old books on agriculture in the possession of the Library was brought up to date and reprinted in 1940. Further additions to the collection of old books are made whenever opportunity occurs.

The extension of the experiments to various outside centres in Great Britain, begun in 1921, has proved so advantageous that it has been developed. Not only is useful information spread among farmers, but the Station gains considerably by this closer association with the Universities and Advisory Services. As part of this extension, the Station took over in 1926 the Woburn Experimental Farm. We were thus able to make experiments simultaneously on the light land at Woburn and the heavy land at Rothamsted.

In May 1934, the negotiations for the purchase of the farm and some adjoining parts of the Rothamsted Estate were completed. The Rothamsted Trustees now own the site of the laboratories, the experimental and ordinary farm fields, Knott Wood, the Manor House and grounds, the farm manager's house, and eight cottages. The total area is 527 acres. The purchase price was £35,000, all of which was raised by public subscription. Generous contributions were received from Sir Robert McDougall and others, and a highly encouraging feature of the appeal was the number of subscriptions received from farmers, village school teachers, and from overseas sources.

The activities of Rothamsted, however, are not confined to the British Isles, but are gradually spreading out to the Empire and other countries. The Station regularly participates in work for the solution of agricultural problems of great importance to the Empire.

The Station offers research facilities for post-graduate students, but unfortunately the number of additional workers that can be accommodated is at present strictly limited by lack of laboratory space.

The Imperial Bureau of Soil Science, one of the ten Imperial Agricultural Bureaux set up to act as clearing centres of information on agricultural science, has been located at Rothamsted since its establishment in 1929.