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Report for 1960

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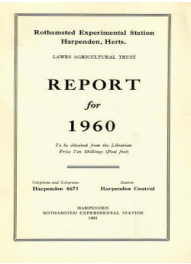
Rothamsted Experimental Station
Harpenden, Herts.

LAWES AGRICULTURAL TRUST

REPORT
for
1960

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1961

Introduction

Rothamsted Research

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INTRODUCTION

Sir John Bennet Lawes was experimenting before 1843, but the Rothamsted Experimental Station dates its foundation from this year because he then started his long and fruitful collaboration with J. H. Gilbert and laid down the classical wheat experiment on Broadbalk field. Lawes died in 1900 and Gilbert in 1901: they were succeeded as directors by A. D. Hall (1902–12), E. J. Russell (1912–43), W. G. Ogg (1943–58) and F. C. Bawden (1958–).

Until 1904, when the Society for Extending the Rothamsted Experiments was instituted, the work was paid for wholly by Lawes, at first directly and from 1889 from the fund of £100,000 with which he endowed the Lawes Agricultural Trust. In 1906 Mr. J. F. Mason paid for a bacteriological laboratory to be built, and in 1907 the Goldsmith's Company provided an endowment of £10,000. The first public money came in 1911 from the Development Commission, and since then government grants have been made annually; now the work is largely financed by annual grants from the Agricultural Research Council.

For long the experimental fields amounted to only about 50 acres, which were worked from the Rothamsted Home Farm, but in 1913 this farm of 250 acres was rented by the Station and the first farm buildings were put up on the site of the present range. In 1934 the Manor House, Home Farm, the site of the laboratories and various other parts of the estate, were bought by the Lawes Agricultural Trust for £35,000, raised entirely from voluntary subscriptions. Since then some additional land and other houses have been acquired, and the total area now owned is 580 acres, of which about 300 are suitable for field experiments. In 1952 the Manor House was opened as a hostel for members of staff and visitors.

The need to do field experiments on a range of soil types was early recognised, and since 1921 experiments have been done at many places away from Rothamsted. The taking over in 1926 of the Woburn Experimental Farm, which had been run by the Royal Agricultural Society of England, allowed experiments to be made simultaneously on heavy land at Rothamsted and light land at Woburn. In 1947 work on diseases of sugar beet became a part of the station's activities, and this has now developed into the Dunholme Field Station, Lincoln, at which the pests and manuring of sugar beet are also studied.

Although a range of problems was studied before 1900, the work was mostly chemical, and only few workers were engaged. With increasing numbers of staff in the early 1900s, the activities also widened and Departments of Botany, Soil Microbiology and Physics separated from the original Chemistry Department before 1914, and soon after the end of the First World War new Departments of Entomology, Plant Pathology, Insecticides and Fungicides, and Statistics were started. Except for additional posts for work on bees and on viruses and virus diseases, the Station's activities then

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expanded little until the Second World War, when most Departments increased in size and others were added for Pedology (1945), Biochemistry (1947) and Nematology (1947). In 1946 Rothamsted also became the headquarters of the Soil Survey for England and Wales. From a total of 28 in 1912, the staff increased to 140 in 1943 and 471 in 1958. The Commonwealth Bureau of Soils, one of the ten bureaux that act as clearing centres for information on agricultural science, has been housed here since its establishment in 1929. The Station also accommodates visiting workers, many of whom use the special relationship with London University to register as internal students of the university for research degrees.

The building of laboratories, glasshouses and other ancillaries has roughly paralleled the growth of staff, but has always lagged behind, so that at least some of the departments are always overcrowded and the number of visiting workers that can be accepted is always much smaller than the number of applicants. Of the existing laboratories, the main block is the oldest and was opened in 1919; the North Building dates from 1924, the South Wing from 1940, the Nematology Building from 1947 and the West Building from 1955.

The Library

Until 1913, when Sir Henry Gilbert's books were given to the Station by his widow, the Library consisted almost entirely of Sir John Lawes's collection. It then grew rapidly in size and scope, until in 1917 it contained 10,000 volumes and in 1958 about 60,000 volumes. Its stock includes about 3,500 agricultural books published between 1471 and 1840, of which 13 are incunabula; 5,000 serial publications—1,700 of them current; 100 MSS. from the 13th century onwards, in addition to the Lawes and Gilbert papers; about 300 maps; and nearly 1,000 prints of livestock, mainly of the 18th and 19th centuries.

The following catalogues have been published: of serial publications (1954), of early agricultural books (1926, second edition 1940, supplement 1949) and of livestock prints (1958). The *Quarterly bulletin of the International Association of Agricultural Librarians and Documentalists* (1956–) is edited and published in the Library.

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