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Report for 1975 - Part 1

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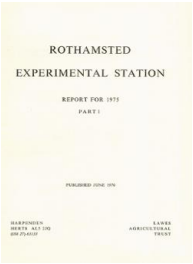
ROTHAMSTED
EXPERIMENTAL STATION

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), F. C. Bawden (1958–72) and L. Fowden (1973–).

For long the Station was financed wholly by Lawes, at first directly and after 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 Goldsmiths' 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.

The experimental fields at first amounted to only about 20 ha, which were worked from the Rothamsted Home Farm, but in 1913 this farm of 100 ha 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 brought 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 in 1965 Scout Farm was bought, bringing the total area to more than 330 ha, of which about half are suitable for field experiments. In 1952 the Manor House was opened as a hostel for visitors and members of staff.

Research work at Crawley Mill Farm, Woburn, was started by the Royal Agricultural Society of England in 1876. Lawes and Gilbert were consulted about the experiments from the start, and some experiments done on the heavy land at Harpenden were duplicated there. After the Royal Agricultural Society withdrew its support from Woburn in 1921 the experiments there were supervised from Rothamsted, and in 1926, with the transfer of the lease to the Lawes Agricultural Trust Committee, Woburn Experimental Station formally became a part of Rothamsted. In addition to providing a valuable contrast of soil type, the land at Woburn allows experiments with crops not easily grown at Harpenden.

There is still need to do experiments at many other places, however, for different as these two farms are, they are far from representing all the major types of soils and climates in Britain. More than any other crop, sugar beet has been studied at other places in south and east England in work financed from the Sugar Beet Research and Education Fund, for which the Lawes Trust Committee has become increasingly responsible. From the 1930s the manuring of sugar beet was studied from Rothamsted, and to this was added in 1947 work on diseases, which was done mainly from the Dunholme Field Station, Lincoln, until 1961, when it was transferred to Broom's Barn Experimental Station, Higham, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, where, with new laboratories and glasshouses, and 73 ha of land, all problems of sugar-beet growing are now studied. In 1964, Rothamsted became responsible for the crop-rotation experiments started in 1899 by the East Suffolk County Council at Saxmundham.

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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 expanded little until the Second World War when most departments increased in size. New ones were created for Bees (1944) which merged with Entomology in 1972, Pedology (1945), Biochemistry (1947), Nematology (1947), Computer (1968) and Molecular Structures (1973). In 1946 Rothamsted also became the headquarters of the Soil Survey of England and Wales. 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. Members of staff and visiting workers with appropriate qualifications can undertake research leading to a higher degree, usually under the provisions of the Public Research Institutes' registration scheme of London University.

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 now has about 75 000 volumes. Its stock includes about 3500 agricultural books published between 1471 and 1840, of which 13 are incunabula; 6000 serial publications—over 2000 of them current; 100 MSS. from the 13th century onwards, in addition to the Lawes and Gilbert papers; about 300 maps; and nearly 1000 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), of livestock prints (1958), and of current serials (1976).

The Library exists for the staff of the Station, but any visitor may apply to the Librarian to use it. It operates a Xerox copy service, and copies of items in the Library can be supplied (at a moderate charge) to other libraries and individuals for the purpose of private study. Applications for copies should be made to the Librarian.

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