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ROTHAMSTED
RESEARCH

The Manor of Rothamsted

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THE MANOR OF
ROTHAMSTED
AND ITS OCCUPANTS



The Manor House

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in strips. However, in less than one-hundred and fifty years after the Norman conquest it had risen to the status of a manor, for it is as such that it is described in 1212, the year of its earliest mention, when Richard de Merston held a knight's fee here of Baldwin Wake.

THE MANOR HOUSE

Much of the house we see today is due to Sir John Wittewronge, the first baronet. Throughout his occupancy he made such considerable alterations and additions that the features of earlier building are largely obscured. Certainly there is nothing to be seen now which can be ascribed to the days of Richard de Merston.

THE TUDOR HOUSE

In 1623, when he was five, Sir John Wittewronge's recently widowed mother, Anne, bought the house for him from Edward Bardolph. His father Jacob had in 1611 obtained a mortgage on the property by providing a loan to support the declining Bardolph fortunes.

The appearance of the house and estate at the time of purchase may be deduced from a particular of the Manor compiled in 1623 for purposes of the sale, from a sketch dated 1624 (adjoining page) and from the Demean map of 1623 (Plate VIII). Typical of a late Tudor house, the ground floor plan is E-shaped: the porch in the centre and the crosswings at either end projected forward from the hall range, each surmounted by a plain pointed gable. The presence of hall and parlour chimney stacks and a chamber over the hall show either that the house had been newly built during the latter half of the sixteenth century or had been modernized by the later Bardolphs. The house, with a frontage of about 96 feet, occupied the north side of a forecourt, whose foundations can sometimes be traced in the front lawn in dry weather. Part of a moat, still visible in 1908, has now disappeared.

The most significant remains of the Bardolph house are the mural paintings in the Dining-room and Hall and the painted frieze in the Tapestry room. Some of the timbers visible in the Hall and on the back-stair may belong to the period, but many are re-used. The Brew-house range (now converted to kitchen and flats) is probably that described in the 1623 inventory.

THE TUDOR HOUSE

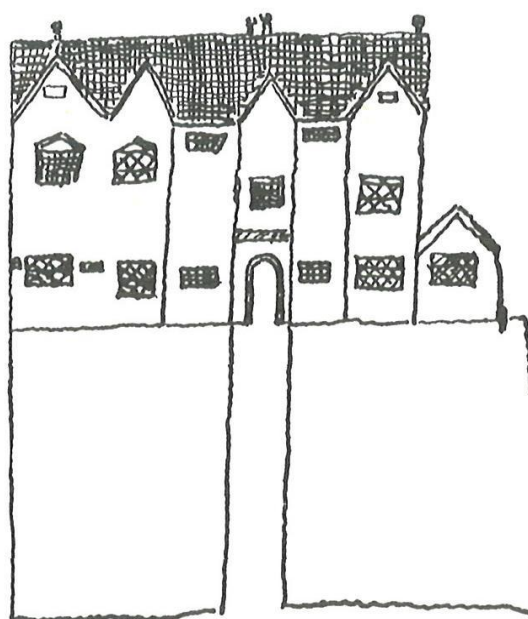
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INVENTORY OF THE ESTATE, 1623

Inpr[imis] one capitall messuage, mansion, or Mannor house, two stories high, an indifferent large Hall; two parlors, whereof one of them is a verie faire and large Roome, both of them being to the face of the house: one lodging chamber belowe staires on the back parte of the house. One reasonable faire Kitchin; a larder, a Bakehouse with two faire ovens, a Brewhouse, one little closet by the parlour. A Butterie between the Hall and the lesser Parlor. A small cellar being verie shallow within the Earth, a little Butterie by the Cellar.

Over the Hall a very faire dineing roome, over the parlour a verie faire lodging chamber, a Chamber over the lower lodging Chamber, a faire chamber over the lesser parlour. A Chamber betweene the chamber over the Parlour and the dining Chamber. Over the Porch a Closset. Over the Kitchin, Brewhouse, and Bakehouse, lodging chambers for servants. A Garrett or Cockloft over the chambers, on the topp of the house, but most part of it is shutt upp and made of no use.

A prettie Courte before the house at the goeing in on the South being 30 yds square, and is paled about. Two little garden plotts lying on each side the Courte, one behind the house, on the North there is a dayrie house, a verie fair Pigeon or dovehouse, and a Well house, that goeth with a Wheele, wherein a dogg is putt, and draweth up the water. There is also a Moate that compasseth the back parte of the house, which Moate hath been verie badlie used and is dried upp and stopped in one or two places. On the North parte of the said Moate there is a prettie orchard, that is planted with young trees, and hath verie pleasant walks about the said orchard if they were well looked unto and ordered. There is a[ls]o a yard on the East parte of the house, whereon standeth two fai[re] Barnes, two Stables, and a Shedd for two Horse. All which [hou]ses, outhouses, Barnes, Stables, Garden plotts, Orchard, Courte and yards, doe by Estimation contayne 03 Acr . . .



ROTHAMSTED MANOR, 1624

THE JACOBEOAN HOUSE

There is no record that Anne Wittewronge made any changes at Rothamsted but the style of the main stair and the Hall fireplace are perfectly acceptable for the period 1623–38. Sir John's account books, on the other hand, show that upon becoming Lord of the Manor he immediately set to work: 'I had an Oake groweing in the warren which I caused to bee felled when I began to repair my house at Rothamsted about Anno 1638 or 1639 . . . At the ground end was cutt 20 foote which was sawed into halfe inch boards for the wainschott in the ould little parlor (next the buttery)'.

His early years at the Manor were too preoccupied with the Civil War to do much building but about 1647 he began a programme of major reconstruction which lasted over ten years. The South front, 133 feet in length, and the adjacent three bays of the West side, with the distinctive 'Dutch' gables, moulded brick cornice, classical porch doorway and mullion and transom windows with ovolo mouldings and other characteristic features, date from this period. The cluster of five moulded chimneys above the Dining room bears the date 1654 inscribed in the base of the stack. Also about this time, the West side of the present courtyard (residents' dining room) and a cellar were added.

Sir John's development of the old Manor is very unusual, if not unique; while retaining the South face ostensibly as the main front and entrance, the gables of the West side are more elaborately treated, especially the centre one with its pilasters. The additional emphasis given by the moulded chimneys and particularly by the construction of a loggia (cf. Hatfield House), imply that the house was intended to be seen and approached from this side.

THE LATER CHANGES

The eighteenth century introduced little change, although John Bennet threatened a total remodelling in the Adam style (p. 21 and Plate I). The South wall of the Brewhouse range was rebuilt, some new lead rainwater heads were fitted and various repairs were effected, for example under 16th September 1721: 'To Cock & Smyth Bricklayers,

THE EARLIEST OWNERS

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for doing the two gable ends & repairing the Garden Walls & building a chimney in the drying room £10.6.0'.

In 1863 Sir John Lawes added to the west wing, faithfully copying its architectural features, the Great Drawing-room surmounted by two storeys. The ceiling was thus rather low for the area of the room. His son Sir Charles, during his alterations in 1900 and 1901, did away with the first-floor rooms above and raised the ceiling by several feet, at the same time enlarging the windows and adding the armorial glass. He also removed the Victorian bay-window his father had added to the Small Drawing-room and made numerous changes within the house, enriching it with fixtures and fittings from other houses. In 1900 the Library and its vestibule were added, from the designs of V. T. Hodgson, part of the wall of a studio put up about 1865 being built in.

CONVERSION INTO A HALL OF RESIDENCE, 1951-2

The alterations involved in the conversion left the south and west fronts unchanged. In the courtyard the nineteenth-century servants' hall and pantry were cleared away; the gatehouse, game larder and part of the brewhouse range were made to house two flats; the rest of the brewhouse was converted into a kitchen, and the old kitchen into a residents' dining-room. Beyond the gatehouse to the north, a further outbuilding was turned into a small house.

Apart from rooms set aside for a warden's flat, most of the remainder were turned into bed-sitting rooms. The principal ground-floor rooms were retained as common-rooms and for social functions.

In April 1952 the conversion was completed: Rothamsted Manor House had entered a new stage in its long history.

THE INHABITANTS OF THE MANOR HOUSE

THE EARLIEST OWNERS

We have seen that in 1212, when the name of Rothamsted first appears, Richard de Merston held a knight's fee here of Baldwin Wake. In 1221 Henry Gubion owned the estate and granted it, apart from the house, the chapel, and 80 acres of land, to the same Richard de Merston for life in return for certain services. The Gubion family were still in