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The Gardens and Landscape of Rothamsted Manor - an Historical Report

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Rothamsted Research

Rothamsted Research (2001) *5. Jacob Wittewronge [the Younger] 1693-1728 ;* The Gardens And Landscape Of Rothamsted Manor - An Historical Report, pp 14 - 15

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5. JACOB WITTEWRONGE [The Younger] 1693-1728

On the death of Sir John Wittewronge in 1693, Rothamsted passed to his second son, James (1647-1721). He followed a successful career in the law in London and Hertfordshire, but seems to have had little time or interest to devote to changes on his estate. Nothing is revealed about the gardens from the records of his period at Rothamsted. His son Jacob died at the age of 22 leaving James' grandson, also Jacob (born posthumously), to inherit Rothamsted in 1721. It had probably been little changed since the time of Sir John.

The majority of Jacob Wittewronge [The Younger]'s records were kept in a notebook previously used by Sir John.[21] This contains basic household, estate, cellar and garden accounts, and general memoranda. The events that he chose to record in the memoranda are reminiscent of his great-grandfather; births, deaths, exceptional weather, and the state of the garden. It is clear from the notebook that Jacob Wittewronge had an enthusiasm for gardening, and the changes undertaken by him were characteristic of contemporary fashions in garden design. The extent to which his ambitions could be realised was limited by the size and income of the estate, and by his death after only 7 years as proprietor, at the age of 35.

The accounts show that preparations for gardening works were already underway in 1720, when payments were made for a dunghill, gardening tools, and the first of many deliveries of trees. During 1721 the work was centred on the garden. A new 'Laurel arbour' and yew 'bench' joined the 'old yew arbor,' new garden gates were installed, 'palisades' painted, garden walls repaired, and 4 'lead colour' flower-pots were added. A hedge and ditch were made around the Warren, which was now alternatively called the 'ffurr grove', reflecting Sir John Wittewronge's 17th Century plantings.

In December 1721 attention moved beyond the garden walls, and work began on the 'Wood walks', which is likely to refer to walks through the Warren. This area was described by Sir John as 'the New Orchard and Plantation' in 1667, and in the terms characteristic of the early 18th Century it would also have been considered as a 'wilderness' or 'grove,' with straight and possibly serpentine walks amongst tree planting. The tree-lined walk suggested by the 1623 map may have been retained through the 17th Century, and others added. In this context the 1400 'hornbeam setts' would be typical of planting in the early 18th Century, and would have created lines of clipped hedging along walks or avenues between areas of larger trees.

In the same month an avenue of 40 elms was planted running south across the field in front of the house. This avenue was probably never used as an approach; it existed for show, to enhance the setting of the house. It appears on the 1st edition OS map, and some trees remained until destroyed by Dutch Elm disease in the 1970's.

In March 1721/2 new turf was laid out to the 'Grass walk in ye Garden' and in the 'Court' in front of the house. The latter may be explained by the contemporary fashion to change the approach to

[21] HALS *D/Elw F42*.

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the entrance door from a central 'broadwalk' between flanking lawns to a turning circle for carriages with a central lawn. In the same month there was also an increase in the topiary; in March 100 Standard and 4 Pyramid yews were added to the clipped yews of the arbour and bench, and these were followed in July by phillyreas, hollys and more yews.

In October 1722 labourers were 'laying out ye Orchard', and in November further evergreens and fruit trees were planted. The fruit trees are recorded in a memorandum:

Nov 14th 1722 – I planted the cross walks in the Orchard with young Apple trees for hedges most of them nonparels. I likewise planted at the same time the South West Wall next the Warren or Ffurr Grove wth Peaches, Apricots, Figgs, Pears, 2 plumbs, 2 Gold Pippins, & 2 Quinces. there is ag.t that wall 42 trees.

These new trees were added to the stock he had inherited, which was flourishing in 1723:

July 23th 1723 – I this day gathered a nectarine full ripe & found two ripe peaches fallen off one of my trees w.ch peaches never used to ripen till towds the end of August. Note this is the most plentyfull year of Wall fruit viz. Peaches, Nectarines, & Apricocks, that ever I remember, & they ripen a fortnight or 3 weeks before the usual time, it having been a very drye Summer.

From 1723-1725 the accounts show work continuing in the orchard, where the maintenance of the gravel walks seems to have been particularly labour-intensive.

An undated note in the accounts under 'An Acct. of money layd out abt my House, Gardens and Furniture…' gives an overview of the total expenditure at Rothamsted in this period. £101 – 08 – 06 was paid 'To Harvey, Davis, Kilbey & Bales [?]' out of a total of £960 – 02 – 00, for 'Fruit Trees & Greens, all sorts of Garden Tools, Labourers in digging Gravel, cuting & laying Turf &c. abt. the Garden'.

The accounts and memoranda tail away after 1725, but work was still underway. In 1726, £21 – 09 – 00 was paid to 'Labourers in ye Garden clearing Woods &c.'. This is a substantial sum compared with the earlier work on the 'Wood walks' and implies more than simple maintenance; it may record the clearing of a new avenue through the Warren.

It was characteristic of this period to adopt an increasingly large-scale approach to the design of an estate, with avenues and large areas of woodland or plantations brought into a formal layout. A survey was essential for planning on this scale. The accounts show that a survey of Rothamsted was carried out in 1722, but it is missing from the Wittewronge Collection at HALS. This study found no direct evidence to suggest that it was intended for use in planning alterations but this seems the most likely purpose, as there is no indication that the survey was required for a sale.

The last entry by Jacob Wittewronge concerning the garden appears as a debt of £60, owed 'To my Gardiner John Peters on Note' in October 1727. In June 1727, his wife died after 'a long and lingring illness', and Jacob died in the following year.