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The Gardens and Landscape of Rothamsted Manor - an Historical Report

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Preface

Rothamsted Research

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PREFACE

Rothamsted is internationally known as the site of the Rothamsted Experimental Station, which is probably the oldest agricultural research centre in the world. A series of continuous and ongoing agricultural field experiments were begun in the mid 19th Century by Sir John Bennet Lawes, and findings made on the estate have been of great significance in the development of modern farming. Rothamsted was Sir John Bennet Lawes' ancestral estate and had been owned by his forebears, the Wittewronge family, since 1623. The manor house and gardens lie in the centre of the experimental fields, on a site occupied by the manor since the 13th Century. The history of the family, the house, and the Research Station (now called IACR - Institute of Arable Crop Research) have been researched and published, but the history of the gardens and the development of the surrounding landscape are subjects that have not been specifically addressed. To do so is the aim of this report.

This report has been prepared as an exercise in archival research as part of the Architectural Association's course in Conservation of Landscapes and Gardens. It is based on a study of published material, the Wittewronge papers held at Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (HALS) in Hertford, an analysis of maps held at HALS and the British Library, and information and material supplied by Winston Bothwell, the Head Gardener at the manor house. My study of the Wittewronge papers revealed records relating to the garden and estate principally from 1623-1728 and the report concentrates on this period. Commentary on later developments is based mainly on published and cartographic material rather than primary sources and is covered in less detail.

The report is arranged in two volumes. Volume I contains the text, and begins with a commentary on the sources used. Following a description of the manor and gardens at the time of writing, the development of the gardens is traced in three chapters. These are devoted to the estate in 1623 and the periods of Sir John Wittewronge (1618-1693) and Jacob Wittewronge [The Younger] (1693-1728). The chapter on Sir John Wittewronge forms the centre of the report. He was a substantial figure of particular significance to the development of Rothamsted and kept a unique 'Weather Diary' in the 1680's incorporating meteorological, agricultural and horticultural observations. The final chapter covers the period from 1728 to the time of writing, and was compiled from published and cartographic material. Volume II contains the Appendices and the Maps and Figures. Appendices A to F are: Chronology of Occupancy, Transcripts of References, Species mentioned in the 'Weather Diary' 1683-1689, Chronology from 1623-1693, Suggestions for further research, and Bibliography.

In this report Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies in Hertford is referred to as HALS. Descriptions of directions using the cardinal points are made in relation to the orientation of the house, whose south front actually faces 23° west of south. In addition to the references given in the text, the transcripts of documentary sources in Appendix B may be of particular use when read in conjunction with chapters 4&5. The transcripts are arranged by category and in chronological order.

I would like to thank Anne Rowe of the Hertfordshire Gardens Trust for suggesting that I should choose Rothamsted for the project and providing me with the initial leads, and Winston Bothwell, Head Gardener at the Manor House, for his time and his assistance.