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The Gardens and Landscape of Rothamsted Manor - an Historical Report

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Rothamsted Research

Rothamsted Research (2001) *1. The Sources ;* The Gardens And Landscape Of Rothamsted Manor - An Historical Report, pp 2 - 3

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1. THE SOURCES

This report has been prepared primarily on the basis of a study of the published and archival material available at Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (HALS) in Hertford. A small amount of additional material was found at the British Library (BL) and in the library of IACR Rothamsted. The Head Gardener, Winston Bothwell, was kind enough to allow access to the gardens, and shared some of his own knowledge of the site. He also gave me a copy of the guide produced for an open day in 1997.

Of published works, by far the most useful is the history of the manor house and its occupants written by D. H. Boalch[1], a former librarian of the Rothamsted Research Station, and first published in 1953. The bulk of the historical background and biographical information in this report is owed to Boalch. Sir John Wittewronge's 'Weather Diary' was published in 1999 with useful commentary[2]. The Victoria County History and articles in Country Life (1906) and the Gardeners' Chronicle (1875) were also helpful.

The archival record at HALS is contained in the Wittewronge Collection, which comprises family and estate papers dating back to the Wittewronges' purchase of the estate in 1623. The material in the collection is extensive for the 17th Century and early 18th Century, but thereafter it thins out, and there is little from the 19th and 20th Centuries. In addition to the original documents at HALS, the IACR Rothamsted library contains two volumes of typescript transcripts taken from the Wittewronge archive by B.P. Scattergood in the 1930's before it was transferred to HALS, and this contains some items that were not easily traceable in the HALS catalogue. Sources for the 19th and 20th Centuries are harder to come by, and this study of the Wittewronge Papers did not reveal any record pertaining to the garden or the design of the estate later than the first half of the 18th Century. Commentary on the development of the gardens from the early 18th Century to the present is therefore based on the published material and interpretation of maps.

The Wittewronge Collection includes the 1623 map of the estate, which is well surveyed and provides an invaluable record. The cartographic record for the two centuries following the 1623 map is limited, with nothing coming to hand for this study from earlier than 1766. A payment was made for a survey of the estate in 1722, but this does not appear in the Wittewronge catalogue at HALS. Rothamsted appears in Dury & Andrews 1766 map of Hertfordshire which contains useful information concerning the kinds of garden features present and their relative layout, but the map is small-scale and the plan distorted, and much of the detail appears generic. It appears that Rothamsted was only visually surveyed for this map, and it must therefore be interpreted with care. Volume II of Thomas Baskerfield's 'Hertfordshire Illustrated' c. 1790 contains a quickly executed watercolour sketch map of Harpenden with a rough indication of the features of Rothamsted and its gardens at that time. The 1822 Bryant map of Hertfordshire contains less detail than Dury & Andrews, and suffers from comparable cartographic distortions.

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[1] D.H.Boalch, *The Manor of Rothamsted*, 1953.

[2] Sir John Wittewronge, *'Observations of Weather' 1684-1689*, ed. M.Harcourt Williams & J.Stevenson, 1999.

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The 1838 Tithe Map of Harpenden is the only detailed and reliably surveyed map found by this study that dates from between 1623 and the 1st edition OS map. Unfortunately, its purpose was not to show the details of gardens and landscaping, and these areas lack differentiation. It is possible to distinguish between wooded and open areas, and scattered trees seem to indicate parkland. Many features that are known to have existed are not shown, such as the elm avenue to the south, the forecourt or turning circle, and the western approach. This makes it difficult to be confident about what existed at this time, but the map is useful as a survey of garden walls and boundaries prior to the changes in the mid 19th Century.

The 1st edition OS map was surveyed in considerable detail in 1878 and published in 1884 at 6" and 25" scales. It shows the gardens after the changes of the mid 19th Century, and also planting that survived from earlier periods. The surveying included the location of individual trees in un-wooded areas and an indication of broadleaf and coniferous planting. No other maps before or since have the same level of detail, making this map is a particularly useful record. The 2nd edition OS map was published in 1898; little had changed since 1884, and the detail shown on the earlier map is greatly diluted. The 3rd edition OS map was published in 1924 and shows the changes undertaken in the 1st decade of the 20th Century. Although several features shown on the 1924 map have since disappeared or lost their definition, it remains a useful document for the current gardens; the 1975 1:2500 map carries less information than any of its OS predecessors.

Illustrations were found in the books, articles, and collection of county views held at HALS, and a few more were found at the BL. The author took the photos. Views of Rothamsted from before the 20th Century show only the front of the house, which for the purposes of this study left the physical appearance of the rest of the gardens and landscape as a matter of deduction. HALS possesses aerial photographs taken in 1973, 1980, and 1990. One feature of these is the record of the toll taken by Dutch Elm disease and the 1987 storms.

It is possible that HALS and the Wittewronge Collection may contain useful material on the gardens undiscovered by this research. In particular, the 17th Century records are extensive and exhausting to read, and a considerable quantity of information may have been missed. It is also possible that further material concerning the gardens before the mid-19th Century may exist outside HALS, in archives of other branches of the family, or as letters, accounts or legal papers kept by others. The library at IACR Rothamsted informed the author that all their archival sources had been sent to HALS, but there may still be some relevant records, if only photographs, or papers relating to the Trust's administration of the estate in the 20th Century. The lack of primary material relating to the gardens in the 19th and early 20th Centuries suggests that there are other sources, possibly remaining with the family, from which more could be learned. Appendix E sets out suggestions for further research in more detail.

A full list of references is given at the end of the report, and transcripts of relevant entries from the primary sources are collected in Appendix B.