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The Gardens and Landscape of Rothamsted Manor - an Historical Report

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Rothamsted Research

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3. THE ESTATE AND MANOR HOUSE IN 1623

No documentary record of the physical form of Rothamsted has come to light from before the 17th Century. The earliest indication of the layout of the manor and estate is provided by the map of the estate and inventory of the manor produced at the time of the sale to Anne Wittewronge in 1623.

The 1623 map [Maps 3,4,15] shows the Rothamsted estate at a scale of 16 perches to an inch, and is quite accurately surveyed. It is probable that there was some later touching-up of the lines and annotations for the sake of clarity, but it is unlikely that the content was significantly contaminated as a result. There are pencil lines in the area around the house added by a later hand which seem to have been made when planning alterations to the layout. There are also some very faded red lines that follow the lines of routes that are likely to have existed through the estate [Map 4]. The principal lines are clear in the original and are shown green suggesting hedges, but the paper has darkened and the colours have faded, and the map as a whole would not copy well for publication. A tracing has therefore been used for modern reproductions and is faithful to the original, although some detail and distinction between colours and line-weights are lost. Map 15 is the author's attempt to adjust this map to the OS survey and to match the orientation and scale accordingly.

The map is principally a survey of fields and other enclosures, which are named, and their areas given. Wooded areas are indicated, together with a record of their position in the felling cycle. Trees are shown diagrammatically along some field boundaries, and form what appear to be avenues amongst more scattered arrangements in the vicinity of the house. Probably because of the scale of the map and the existence of a separate description, the house and its immediate surroundings are left blank although the forecourt, moat and orchard are shown. The position of the house in relation to the map is clear from the description in the inventory, and from the 1624 sketch of the house [Fig.1, Map 15].

The map shows the manor house set in an irregular network of fields, pastures and woods whose boundaries had probably changed little since the earliest enclosures. The fields immediately surrounding the house (The Couygre, Passage Close, The Green, The Parke, Upper Shepcote Feilde and Dredgfeild) fall within an inner boundary that may reflect the extent of the early manor.

Lanes run between Harpenden and Redbourne along the northern and southern edges of the estate. The only lanes shown approaching the manor house are from Harpenden and Hatching Green to the east; the connection with the Parish of Harpenden explains the emphasis on access from this direction. These lanes arrive at The Parke from which point no further roads are explicitly shown, but it may be assumed that the double row of trees leading south through the middle of The Parke denotes a tree-lined route. This leads to The Green (a name often associated with the entrance sequence of an estate), and from here a red line runs towards the court in front of the house and arrives on the axis of the central door, while another line gives access to the yard, stables and barns to the east of the house.

The central axis of the house extends out from the front court along a feature shown as a field boundary, but there is no evidence that this provided an actual route as suggested by the name of the

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field beyond; Passage Close. The view from the house to the south is unrestricted by trees as far as the edge of the estate.

The double rows of trees along the eastern edge and across the north of The Parke may represent alternatives to the principal approach. The northern route joins with a red line through the trees to the south of Upper Shepcote Feilde, leading to the house and yard from the north. The continuation of this route beyond the house goes through a double row of trees along the southern edge of Dredgfeild, possibly suggesting a formal approach from the west. An approach from the lane to the south-west is shown by a red line which follows field boundaries and leads to the front court.

The house and its immediate environs are described in the inventory[7]. This begins with the house, listing all its rooms including Hall, parlours, chambers, kitchen, brew-house and bake-house. An indication of the appearance of the house at this time is given in a sketch dated 1624, which shows a two-storey house with garret, triangular pediments, and recessed bays to either side of a central entrance. Having dealt with the house, the inventory continues:

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 faire 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 badly used and is dryed 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[lso] a yard on the East parte of the house whereon standeth two faire Barnes, two Stables, and a Shedd for two Horse.

The front court appears on both the 1623 map and the 1624 sketch. The original map indicates a widening at the southern end of the central path, and shows the 'little garden plotts' in a light green colour. The perimeter of the court can still be traced in the front lawn during dry summers, which suggests that the paling was later replaced with walls. There is no indication of the use of the small plots shown to either side of the front court. Behind the house, the current location of the well and the pattern of later development indicate that the dairy, dove-house and well-house were situated to the north-east. The third garden plot would therefore have been located to the north-west of the house. It may also have extended across to the eastern edge of the moated area.

To the north of the moat, the orchard is indicated by a regular grid of trees and is coloured green to match the 'little garden plotts'. It is inscribed 'Kent'. A thin finger of land in the same colour extends south from the south-west corner of the orchard along the side of the moat, connecting the orchard to the area in front of the house with what may have been a planted walk. An orchard would typically have had perimeter and cross-walks, and it appears that the line of the east-west cross walk continued west along a tree-lined walk in The Couygre (subsequently called The Warren). The Couygre is scattered with trees in a similar way to the other areas around the house, none of which are shown fully forested.

[7] HALS *D/Elw E17*, transcript from Boalch, *op. cit.*