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The Gardens of Rothamsted Manor - Management Plan

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Rothamsted Research

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A3 Current Management

Ownership

The estate is owned and administered by the Lawes Agricultural Trust for the use of the research institute, originally called the Rothamsted Experimental Station. The official name of the Institute was changed from IACR Rothamsted (Institute of Arable Crops Research) to Rothamsted Research in June 2002.

Site Management

Responsibilities for different aspects of the site fall to separate managers and teams as follows:

- Field experiments - 'Crop Management' (formerly 'Farm Management').
- Grounds maintenance, gardening, tree work (& greenhouse experiments) - 'Horticultural and Controlled Environmental Services' (HCES).
- Fencing, walls, structures, repairs and small building works - 'Facilities'.
- Until the mid-1990's the gardeners and 'Facilities' were together in an Engineering Maintenance Department.

Gardens management - general

- The management objectives for the gardens were stated by the responsible staff to be 'to maintain the status quo', and to fulfil the garden's functions as 'a setting for the house and for the enjoyment of staff and visitors'.
- The Head Gardener is responsible for grounds maintenance and gardening.
- Basic tree work is carried out by the garden staff. When work requiring specialised licenses (climbing etc.) is required, arboricultural contractors are brought in.
- The Gardens must compete with other needs across the site for time and funds. In the past they have tended to receive most attention prior to special occasions. In 2002 they took a back seat due to landscaping works associated with a new building on the research campus. The maintenance of this new planting will be a new demand to be fitted in with existing work.
- The 'Woodland Advisory Group' (WAG) advises the Head Gardener, Farm Manager and Lawes Agricultural Trust on woodland management. This is principally for Knott Wood and the Manor Wood, but covers tree work elsewhere on the site, such as the lime avenues. WAG is made up of interested staff of the institute.

Garden staff

- The gardening staff are responsible for gardening and grounds maintenance spread across the site: Manor House grounds; research campus; conference centre; cottages and outlying buildings. There is no gardener devoted solely to the Manor Gardens.
- There is a head gardener, 2 full-time staff, and 2 half-time garden staff.
- The garden staff are based on the research campus (offices, mess-room etc).
- Until the summer of 2002 there were 2 volunteers doing useful 'bits and pieces' in the Manor gardens and wood, one of whom was a retired member of staff occupying one of the cottages on the Manor site. For different reasons they have had to stop, and no volunteers remain at the time of writing.
- Until recent years casual / student labour was taken on in the summer months up to an equivalent of 40 weeks total. This was very helpful and cost-effective at the busiest time of the year, but has now ended through lack of funds.
- The Woodland Advisory Group organises working parties of about 10 volunteers working on clearance and basic woodland management in the Manor Wood for two weekends in the spring.

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House management

- The house is owned by the Lawes Agricultural Trust and run for Rothamsted Research by the 'Accommodation, Conference & Property Manager'.
- The primary use of the house is as Halls of Residence, with accommodation for 48 residents in 35 rooms. The residents are usually students working with research scientists, or PhD students. The maximum stay is 3 years, but many stay for less. The ability to house this number on site is of great value in such a high-cost area. The historic fabric is somewhat compromised by this use, and English Heritage have expressed concern.
- Common facilities for residents are on the ground floor (kitchen, dining area and TV room). The principal rooms downstairs (eg. Drawing Room) are used for conferences, meetings, and other functions. There are about 100 such events per year, and also about 50 small concerts.
- The house is very costly to maintain compared with a modern building, especially when major repair (eg. roof or clocktower) or any modifications are required.
- Since 1993, the House has been trying to generate more revenue in order to pay basic running costs. Major repairs must still be paid for from elsewhere.
- English Heritage grants (for conservation of Spanish Leather Room, wall paintings etc) have not yet led to enforced public access. Charity concerts, open days and other occasional events have been judged to satisfy the public access requirements, but the conditions attached to any future grant may be more demanding.
- The implications of full public access even for 1 day a year are considerable given the current level of facilities. Portaloos, special health & safety provisions and other requirements make such events disproportionately expensive to organise.
- In October 2001 'Rothamsted Manor Ltd' was set up to run the staff restaurant and conference centre on the research campus, and to integrate this with the services provided by the Manor House.
- The gardens provide a valuable and pleasant resource for residents and are useful for functions. They add greatly to the attractiveness and quality of the 'product' for potential hirers of the house.

Finance

- No external funds or grants have been sought for work to the gardens.
- Maintenance of the gardens and Manor House is not part of the core activities of the Lawes Agricultural Trust or IACR Rothamsted. It is therefore possible to see their upkeep as a drain on resources, and they must compete with other needs across the site. There is no ring-fenced budget. Funding for the gardens has been gradually reduced over many years.
- There is a Countryside Stewardship grant scheme for the estate that includes support for hedgerow reinstatement, establishment of grass headlands in fields and the establishment of a woodland link between the Manor Wood and Knott Wood to the west.

Use

- The Manor gardens function as a setting for the house and for the enjoyment of staff and visitors.
- The formal gardens act as a spill-over from events in the house but only very rarely act as a venue in their own right, eg. for major garden parties or performances. More typically they have been used for events such as cream teas for limited numbers of staff.
- The southern half of the walled garden is an ad-hoc gardeners' yard, with some greenhouses and storage. The northern half is now uncultivated but was previously used for allotments.

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- The Manor Wood is comparatively little used, although the paths are kept clear for those who wish to walk there. It is somewhat disconnected from the formal areas and cannot easily be used as an integral part of the gardens.
- The cottages are used as staff accommodation, and the barns for storage. The northern and western barns contain the 'soil archive' of samples from the field experiments, including those dating back to the mid-19th Century.
- North of the walled garden is a range of largely derelict and disused lean-to outbuildings. Some are used as garages for the cottages.
- The surrounding fields are mainly used for the field experiments. Occasionally they are visited by quite large scientific parties.
- The field directly in front of the house is out of scientific use and is grazed by sheep.

Access & Parking

- Access to the Manor House and Gardens is for staff, or visitors and guests of the institute. For others it is by appointment only. The gardens are principally used by visitors and residents of the house. The distance from the research campus means that staff must make quite a lengthy trip if they wish to visit. It is over 1½ miles to walk from the campus, around the gardens and back. There are few if any facilities on arrival to encourage such visits.
- The house can be rented for events, or visited for concerts etc. The gardens will sometimes be used on these occasions. Public access is occasionally extended for special 'one-off' events, such as open days, openings under the National Gardens Scheme, or the Golden Jubilee Walk allowed through the estate along paths off the rights of way from 1st-3rd June 2002.
- There is no right of way through the Manor House grounds.
- The site road from the research campus to the farm and principal area of experimental fields runs through the yard immediately to the east of the Manor House and walled garden.
- There is limited car parking in front of the house and in the yard to the east. It is only just sufficient for regular staff and residents. For events, parking extends onto grass verges. Until quite recently only dropping-off was allowed in front of the house. Parking there is still discouraged, but has become more frequent.
- There is very restricted access possible for site vehicles to the formal parterres and within the Manor Wood.
- Public access to the house is a condition of the funding received from English Heritage for conservation work to the building. This condition is currently addressed through public access to events such as concerts, but it is likely that the requirement will rise above this minimum in future.

Security

- The Rothamsted Estate is essentially a farm, and has a very long boundary. It has no more security than a typical farm. Within the estate, the Manor House grounds have rudimentary perimeter security to the east, but little or nothing to the west and north. Only the walled garden can be fully secured.
- There is very limited security provision across most of the site. There is, for example, no access control for vehicles, although there are 'Private' signs.
- Public footpaths (rights of way) pass through the estate to the east and south of the Manor site. The path to the south passes close by and has a clear view of the front of the house.
- In recent years three important garden ornaments have been stolen: the sundial from the front lawn; the sundial that stood at the north end of the herbaceous border outside the library [Fig.18]; and the stone boy from the western parterre [Fig.23].
- There have been incidents of vandalism at the experimental farm, and protests against GM trials.