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The Gardens of Rothamsted Manor - Management Plan

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Rothamsted Research

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PART B ASSESSMENT

B1 Site Values

The value and significance of the site as a whole is in part derived from the combination and interaction of many particular and specific values. Values may be categorised as, for example: cultural; personal and subjective; 'absolute' or 'objective'; emotional or associative. This section identifies values of the site under different categories, in no particular order of priority. The following section (B2 - Key Values) attempts to synthesise these and to draw out general qualities and values of the site.

This analysis of value derives from discussions with interested parties, careful consideration over a long period, and experience of garden and landscape evaluation. It is nevertheless a personal list, and has not been tested by wider consultation and discussion. This process would be a vital part of the preparation of a formal Management Plan.

Landscape Character and Scenic Value

- The gardens, house and woodland form a strong, simple and integrated composition.
- The gardens, Manor Wood, yard and outbuildings play an essential role as the setting for the house.
- The garden layout has evolved gradually over several centuries, and continues to exhibit many of the historic design intentions.
- The 'Dirce' avenue in the Manor Wood is a unique and impressive piece of garden design, centred on a notable sculpture.
- The statuary, garden ornaments and other features (gates, ha-ha wall, summerhouse, etc) are integrated in the overall design and make a major contribution to the experience of the gardens.
- The formal gardens are well maintained and enhance the setting of the house.
- The Manor Wood and gardens contain a good number of mature and impressive trees.
- The surviving historic landscape features including the tree-lined avenues and field boundaries give some residual structure and variety to the surrounding 'scientific' landscape.
- Inappropriate post-war tree-planting (eg. Lawson's Cypresses) has in places compromised the garden design. This is especially true along the Dirce avenue and where ill-assorted trees form the backdrop to the northern end of the parterre axis.
- The shrubbery, pond, and much of the Manor Wood are only little maintained. The value of these areas as designed landscape or garden is therefore greatly reduced, but could be restored.
- The value of the Manor Wood as an integral part of the gardens is being lost. Its historic character as ornamental woodland is being 'managed out' by an emphasis on management as 'natural' woodland, and as a result of a period of reduced maintenance. The existing path network is minimally maintained, and the Wood has become disconnected from the formal gardens.
- The experimental fields have directly or indirectly had a major influence on the development of British (and international) landscapes. Modern 'conventional' farming owes much to Lawes and Gilbert and their work, and it would be possible to make a case that 'scientific agriculture' in the form that now dominates much of the world began with the Rothamsted classical experiments. Rothamsted should be seen not only as a source of science, but also as a site that has contributed to the history of the landscape in as profound a way as the development of the metal plough, the Acts of Enclosure or the 18th Century Agricultural Revolution. Of all the fields, Broadbalk [Fig.43] embodies this history and significance most powerfully, and has an extraordinary but visually understated character as a scientific landscape.

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Amenity Value

- The Manor Gardens are an attractive and valued resource for visitors, residents and institute staff.
- Their use is limited by their distance from the research campus where most of the staff are located.
- There are occasional openings and events when the gardens can be enjoyed and appreciated in their own right, but these are limited in frequency and scope.
- It is rare for the gardens to be visited without other business at the house.
- There are very few opportunities for public access to enjoy the gardens.

Scientific value

- The surrounding experimental fields have great scientific value. This is not only because experiments are carried out there today, but also because of the continuity of the work, and the detailed records and samples that have been kept over 150 years. The fields must be some of the most carefully analysed land in the world.
- The classical Garden Clover experiment continues on the rose lawn.

Historic and Archaeological Value

- The gardens and landscape of Rothamsted are not, according to the current criteria, of sufficient historic or artistic significance to qualify for inclusion on the national English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens. They are however of considerable historic interest and significance at a local level, and this value is considerably enhanced by their association with Sir John Bennet Lawes and the Rothamsted experiments.
- The overall garden layout retains in essence several features from the 17th Century 'Commonwealth' garden and earlier, with significant overlays from each of the following three centuries.
- The existence of the 1623 estate map and particulars, and the details of the gardens and estate recorded in Sir John Wittewronge's unique 'Diary of Weather' add greatly to the historic interest and value of the site.
- The historic value of the site as a whole is bound up with the history of the Grade I listed Manor House, a locally significant and largely intact Jacobean house with Victorian additions, of interest for its design, interiors, contents, and by association with its historic inhabitants. The house and gardens have evolved in parallel throughout their history.
- The association of the gardens with Sir John Bennet Lawes is perhaps of the greatest historic significance. It was in the house and walled gardens that his experiments began and (probably) the world's first artificial fertiliser was developed. The 'Classical' red clover experimental bed is still maintained on the rose lawn today. However, little evidence has come to light that Sir John was particularly interested in the gardens in their own right, and it may well have been Lady Caroline who took the lead in the changes of the 1860's.
- The layout as it exists today is little altered from the Edwardian garden of Sir Charles Lawes-Wittewronge. This degree of continuity is of historic interest in itself.
- There is a wide variety of surviving historic fabric and features, including garden walls dating in parts from the 17th Century or earlier, the ruined icehouse, the summerhouse, the statuary and other garden stonework, the wrought iron gates, the ornamental ha-ha wall, and the mature trees.
- The 'Soil Archive' held in the barns to the east of the walled garden is of unique scientific and historic significance nationally and internationally.
- The Roman Temple to the north of the Manor site is of considerable historic value in itself, and also reinforces and deepens the historic and cultural significance of the estate as a whole.

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Ecological, Wildlife and Horticultural Value

- The Manor Wood and the pond are of value as wildlife habitats in the context of the surrounding fields. In particular, it is the age and maturity of the wood that gives it wildlife value.
- The formal and walled gardens are of little ecological or wildlife value in themselves, but may contribute in a small way to local biodiversity by offering habitats and resources that would not otherwise exist (eg. lawns, herbaceous border, walls).
- The surrounding experimental fields are generally highly controlled environments, but there are certain plots where specialised ecological communities are established.
- The rhododendron and daffodil populations in the Manor Wood are reputed to include unique varieties bred on site from 1946-1974.

Associative Value

- The gardens offer a sense of stability and continuity for many associated with the institute.
- For many staff of long-service and former residents of the Manor House, the gardens are part of their memories and affections.