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The Gardens of Rothamsted Manor - Management Plan

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Rothamsted Research

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D2 Management Objectives by Area

The 'Proposed Masterplan' [Map12] indicates many of the objectives outlined below.

Area 1 - Approach & Front Lawn

- Entrance gates and screen - conservation and repair of wrought iron gates and screen (Grade II), followed up with regular maintenance. In particular, many vertical bars are seriously corroded at the base and will need replacement [Fig.9].
- Flowering cherry avenue - this will need replacement in the next 20 years, if not before. This feature is not successful in design terms and is out of character with its setting and the rest of the gardens. Its removal should be considered in the shorter term, to be replaced by an avenue of a different tree, or simply by grass verge backed with shrubbery and trees.
- Trees at entrance - the Scots Pine adjacent to the gate will not last another 20 years. Consideration should be given to replacement trees to be planted now to eventually take its place in the important location at the entrance to the gardens.
- Trees to north of drive - the small wood of sycamores and yews that screens the yard from the drive is mostly made up of mature trees. Additional new marginal and/or interspersed planting should be considered for the future.
- Traffic & Parking - introduce stricter access and parking restrictions (see also D1 'Traffic & Parking' above) to the area around the front lawn to protect the grass and enhance the setting of the house.
- Ha-ha wall - rebuild the ha-ha wall where it collapsed and was not replaced. This will revive the historic design intention, provide a foreground to the important prospect from the front lawn, and allow for the unsightly wire fence on the opposite side of the ditch to be removed [Figs.10,12]. This feature was critical to the setting of the House, and its replacement should be a priority. It may be possible to salvage sections of wall from the 'orchard' (see Area 5 below) for rebuilding in this location.
- Bedding - consider grassing over the flower beds adjacent to the ha-ha. They are comparatively small, and lack the impact and appropriateness of the bedding displays on the 19th Century formal parterres.
- Hedging - renew clipped hedging to the east of the front lawn [Fig.11]. This may include restorative pruning, feeding, decompaction, removal of failing stock and inappropriate species, replanting - as required.

Area 2 - Shrubbery and Pond

- Paths - restore and/or recreate a path to the end of the pond to encourage access, attention and appreciation. Keep open a path though the shrubbery and memorial trees to the east of the pond.
- Terraces - clear terraces between the pond and front lawn, and restore and replant if possible.
- Views - cut back encroaching trees as necessary and remove self-seeded sycamores etc to re-open the views between the house and the pond [Figs.13,14].
- Pond - aim to enhance water quality and ecological population (see also D1 'Wildlife'). Consider new ornamental marginal planting. Undertake ongoing maintenance of water and banks.
- Bench - install a bench looking back to the house from the end of the pond.
- Coppice and/or remove overgrown laurels to the east of the pond to re-open access and space for the memorial tree area.
- Add new shrub planting.
- Manage wooded edge to pond and shrubbery area. Consider: low marginal planting as a buffer to the fields beyond; selective felling of low quality trees; new tree planting; extending shrubbery planting to a wider area; levelling of uneven land (former dumping ground) south of the pond.

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Area 3 - Formal Gardens

- Statuary/Urns/Garden Ornaments - Secure against theft and insure. Undertake a condition survey, and establish costs and priorities for conservation and repair. Consider an appeal fund to replace stolen statuary and/or sundial, or to commission new work.
- Ha-ha wall - Conservation and repair. This is likely to be expensive, but should be made a priority, especially in the worst-affected areas. If the decay of the coping is allowed to continue, weathering damage will accelerate and the cost of repair will increase accordingly [Fig.26]. There is a danger that this absolutely essential feature could eventually be lost.
- Red clover bed [Frontispiece] - Install a discrete notice to explain its significance to visitors.
- Access and use - encourage greater use - for functions and for pleasure. The upper lawn is especially suitable for functions. See sections on Access and Use in Part D1 above for further suggestions. Consider installation of features to encourage this, such as additional benches, and power points for lighting evening events.

Area 4 - Walled Garden

- Access - Aim to bring the walled garden back into use, and to make it accessible to visitors.
- Walls & Gate - Establish costs and priorities for conservation and repair through a condition survey.
- Apple arch and other surviving fruit trees - Attempt to identify varieties, and propagate if they are found to be of significance. The existing trees in the apple arch appear to be beyond rescue.
- Gardeners' yard - Analyse current and potential needs, and space and resources in the southern half of the walled garden. Consider the options of either rationalising and improving the existing area, or relocating to a compound around the disused outbuildings to the north.
- Maintain garden use - Do not introduce radically different uses - a walled garden is a great asset and should be used as such unless there is an overwhelming reason to do otherwise, such as an acute lack of space - which does not apply at Rothamsted. Do not use for parking or new buildings, except where they are an essential part of a garden use (eg greenhouses).
- Develop proposals - Undertake a process to establish a future use for the walled garden. This must allow for imagination and 'blue-skies' thinking, and should be an integral part of developing a strategy for the Manor site as a whole. It should draw on a wide range of views and ideas, and should not be unnecessarily rushed. Consider the following:
    - The use should be relevant to the future of the Manor site and the work of the Institute.
    - If public access is to be increased and encouraged, the walled garden offers a unique opportunity to create a new, enticing and informative resource. It could, for example, illustrate aspects of plant life, or the story of the Rothamsted experiments, in a controlled and attractive environment.
    - The walled garden could play a central role in any future educational programme on the site.
    - The history of the walled garden offers rich material for recreation and reinterpretation, including the details of 17th Century fruit and vegetable planting in Sir John Wittewronge's Weather Diary, Sir John Bennet Lawes' experiments in pots, the 1942 inventory (see Appendix C), and the possible recreation of a central apple arch.
    - The proposal (see A5 above) to create a garden of herbs, medicinal plants, dye-plants, and other chemically useful or interesting plants is worthy of further development. It would not only provide a rich variety of cheap 'raw materials' for the experiments on site, but could also be integrated with public access and educational use. It could make a very attractive and innovative 'showcase' for Rothamsted and its work. These kinds of synergistic benefits should be sought in any proposal.
    - Walled garden restorations are known to be particularly popular with volunteers.

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Area 5 - Orchard

- Design - Respect and revive Sir Charles Lawes-Wittewronge's design intentions for this area, dating from the most mature phase of the gardens' design development. The 'orchard' was an elongated rectangle, extending like a finger from the end of the formal gardens into the Manor Wood. Its northern edge followed the historic boundary between the gardens and Dredge Field, and its southern edge followed the former kitchen garden wall. Its grid of fruit trees in a grass sward was an ideal transition between the 'natural' wood and 'formal' parterres during a circuit of the gardens: it was both a 'domesticated' and regularised 'wood', *and* a 'wooded' formal grass parterre.
- The eastern half of the orchard has been replanted with specimen trees in recent years. Although not an orchard, the spaced-out 'special' trees set in grass managed for wildflowers is an appropriate alternative. This character should be maintained.
- The western half of the orchard extending into the wood has been planted with native trees, intended to revert to natural woodland. This policy should be seriously reconsidered in favour of extending the 'orchard' character of the eastern half. The new native plantings are still small, partly because they are in urgent need of thinning, and could easily be removed [Fig.37]. This approach would have several advantages, including:
    - Extending a successful area of special character within the gardens which is new but rooted in the history of the site.
    - The extension would greatly enhance the eastern section, which is too small and truncated at present;
    - Forming a valuable part of a revived network of paths around the gardens and wood;
    - Increasing opportunities for specimen tree planting;
    - Extending the area managed as a special habitat for wildflowers etc;
- Shrub edges - Coppice and control laurels as necessary to define the edge of the orchard area.
- Wall - A section of ornamental ha-ha wall (without a ditch) runs along the south-western edge of the orchard, but is broken up and decrepit. Re-use as much as possible for repairs in more visible locations elsewhere. Form the edge of the orchard area by other means - a perimeter path may suffice.
- Prune lower branches of the trees to maintain a 'browse line' above eye height - to show the trunks and to give a sense of the openness of the area compared to the surrounding wood.
- Consider creating a path across the orchard on the central axis of the formal parterres, linking through to the yew circle to the north (see Area 6c below).

Area 6 - Manor Wood

General objectives:

- Manage and think of the Wood as part of the gardens, as it has always been. It has been through several transformations over four centuries: 'Warren' (early C17); 'Plantation and Orchard' (late C17); 'Ffurr Grove' with 'Wood Walks' lined with hedging (early C18); ornamental woodland with path network (C19); extended to enclose formal clearings and statuary (early C19); daffodil and rhododendron breeding collection (mid-late C20). At every stage it has been considered part of the gardens, connected by its design and by its use for the pleasure of the House.
- Adopt policies to enhance both ecological and landscape value for the Manor Wood as a whole, varying the approach as appropriate for different areas.
- Develop the spectrum from principally ornamental and/or formal parts managed for appearance (eg. the eastern edge facing the formal garden and the edges to Dirce Avenue) to areas primarily managed as native woodland. The internal woodland walks should fall between these two extremes.

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- The enhancement or establishment of distinct character areas in the wood will extend the variety and quality of habitats - eg. clearings, woodland 'rides', dense undergrowth, daffodil glades, graded woodland edges.
- Clear overgrown laurel and other introduced species where they are out of control or suppressing other species. Where appropriate undertake coppicing, felling, new planting, clearance, and leave deadwood as habitat.
- Encourage use by enhancing the existing path network and improving the path connections to the formal gardens. Establish clear circuit routes.
- Restore historic features where they can contribute to the value and enjoyment of the gardens. This includes built features, formal planting, and planting of horticultural and/or landscape value.

Area 6a - The 'Warren'

- Summerhouse - Aim to restore. This early 20th Century structure plays a key role in the garden design as a destination and focus within the Wood to entice visitors to explore [Figs.22,35]. A small building was shown in this location on the 1838 Tithe map - probably a garden pavilion at the far corner of the walled garden. Also restore setting - open up view to rose lawn and enhance surrounding shrubbery.
- Icehouse - The icehouse at Rothamsted is an entirely functional building without the ornamental features often seen on grander estates. It could nevertheless provide a moment of interest and another destination for a walk around the wood. The crown of the dome is broken, but apart from this, the brickwork appears to be in quite good condition. Consideration should be given to its repair as a long-term objective. In the meantime it should be made safe and its condition stabilised as far as possible.
- Dirce avenue and circle - the principal need here is to renew the shrubbery and trees that provide the backdrop, and to provide additional maintenance for the formal yew hedges:
    - Lawson cypresses - A questionable choice of tree along the avenue, now over-mature. Consider replacement with a different species along the sides of the avenue.
    - Backing shrubbery - Currently patchy laurel with gaps, and scrubby wild species such as elder. Consider in-filling with new laurel (or other) along the avenue, and maintaining a mown strip between this and the yew. Alternatively, the yew hedge could be maintained at eye level or higher, reducing maintenance requirements behind it.
    - Dirce Circle - The ring of trees enclosing the circle is inadequate The surviving Wellingtonias at the far end of the circle are of great value, but are isolated, and do not extend around the sides. The tree planting around the circle must be reinforced several trees deep - to provide the appropriate landscape setting, but also to provide an adequate shelter belt for the Wellingtonias, which are currently very exposed and vulnerable to high winds [Fig.34].
    - Yew hedging - This has been maintained at an appropriate level to be seen from the House, and areas have been replanted in recent years. However, it needs further gapping up and maintenance if the Dirce avenue is to be more regularly visited.
    - 'Rogue' yews within circle - These clipped yews are survivors from the double line of yews that ran along the western edge of the wood before the Dirce circle and woodland extension were added. They are not visible from the House, and were presumably left as an intriguing memory of the past. They should be maintained as such.
- Yew 'exedra' adjacent to ha-ha - This contains narrow curved compartments, enclosed in the yew hedging. These are clipped with the rear hedge higher than the front to give additional emphasis when seen from the formal gardens. Consider increasing the rear height to add to this effect, and adding seating if space allows.
- Eastern edge - Manage as the visual edge of the formal parterres, and as the backdrop to the rose arch. Plant new ornamental trees and/or shrubs.

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Area 6b - Western Avenue ('West Lawn')

- Re-establish the lime avenue leading west from the front lawn to where it meets the approach road. This was one of the glories of the gardens for at least a century, and was only lost in the past 20 years. Include this in the routes around the gardens, and as a link for visitors to the Park Grass field.
- Remove the replanted limes currently in this location, and level the ground. Replant with good-quality stock, and maintain and prune to form good avenue trees.
- Keep surrounding ground clear and manage as a woodland lawn for wild flowers and associated wildlife.
- Further west, make space for surviving avenue trees to be seen (Wellingtonias, yews etc).
- Reinforce boundary planting at the edge of the fields.

Area 6c - Northern Extension

- Yew circle - Re-establish the yew circle as an integral part of the experience of the Gardens. It was probably planted as a hedge to enclose another statue, like the Dirce circle, but it never fulfilled this function, and has now become something very different. There is an almost complete circle of 37 mature yew trees directly on the central axis of the formal gardens - hidden, abandoned and virtually forgotten for nearly a century. There is a wonderful opportunity to 'rediscover' a mysterious and intriguing feature that would add great character and interest. The cost would be comparatively modest, involving clearance, limited treework, and simple maintenance:
  - Clear the central area and manage as a woodland lawn or glade.
  - Undertake pruning to enclose an informal circle. This process will need to be gradual, spread over a number of years, and should be adapted according to the particular form and needs of each tree. It will require something of an 'artist's eye'.
  - Remove or cut back any other trees that impinge on the circle or compromise the yews.
  - Consider whether to complete the circle on the south side, or to open it up with a view down the axis of the parterres.
  - Install a path into the circle from the parterre, and renew the path from the wood to the west.
- Renew and reinforce the southern edge of the Northern Extension, which provides the northern edge of the parterres. The existing trees (particularly the cypresses) do not provide an appropriate backdrop. Consider some removals.

Area 6d - Dirce Extension

- Reinforce planting - The design function of this area was to provide enclosure and shelter to the Dirce Circle. It is now very lightly wooded, and the Wellingtonias are exposed. Replant with native species, and provide aftercare to get them established. Manage as native woodland.
- Boundary yews - Along the eastern side are rows of yews that survive from those that lined the route along the edge of the Warren before the extension was planted. Consider keeping this route clear, marking the historic woodland edge. (See also 'Rogue' yews in Area 6a above).

Area 6e - Western Extension

- Continue with current management.
- When the new wood is established to link to Knott Wood, make a physical link for visitors with a connecting path through this area.

Area 7 - Yard and Outbuildings

- Repair the outbuildings to the north of the walled garden. They are well-located for 'utility' functions and storage, and this is likely to be valuable for the future. If the new use for the walled garden requires the space consider relocating the gardeners' yard to this area, within a new fenced compound.
- Review storage across the whole estate, and aim to find new uses for some or all of the central barns.
- If additional parking is required, consider locating it to the north of the barns and Soil Store.

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- If the Soil Store is developed or public access is increased, consider redirecting through-traffic along the road to the east of the central barns.
- Plant a new shelter belt along the north-eastern boundary to shelter the gardens.

Surrounding Landscape

- Endeavour to improve the view south from the house. This may involve reinstatement of a 'false' avenue, planting of clumps of trees, planting of trees along the B487, or any combination of these. Consider obtaining design advice.
- Establish a 'Rothamsted Walk'; a route designed to take in the most interesting and significant parts of the site. The 'Golden Jubilee Walk' of 1st-3rd June was a move towards this. It encouraged access to parts of the site off the rights of way, and was accompanied by an information sheet. This excellent initiative should be built on and extended, and the following considered:
  - Make the walk accessible on a more regular basis - eg. every Sunday.
  - Present choices of route, eg. long and short;
  - Take in as many places of interest as possible. For example, Park Grass and the Roman Temple should both be accessible;
  - Allow access to the Manor gardens as part of the walk at least a few times a year, and consider providing teas;
  - Expand the information available to accompany the walk - eg. a specially prepared A3 map full of annotation, explanation, anecdote and illustration, with expanded text on the reverse. The production of the map might be a project for a voluntary group from the institute in association with a local artist.
- Find new ways to present Broadbalk and Park Grass to visitors.
- Undertake more tree-planting on the estate - eg. along field boundaries and roads.
- Consider the landscape impact and opportunities presented by the recently planted national willow collection to the east of the Manor site. This occupies approximately the area of the 'Parke' planted with trees by Sir John Wittewronge in 1674. There is an opportunity for additions to the willow collection to be arranged with care in an attractive and imaginative way to enhance the approach to the Manor. A willow plantation can be made an even more beautiful thing without affecting its scientific value.