

ROTHAMSTED MANOR

~1950s? (post WWII & its de requisition)

The fine South front of Rothamsted Manor, lying back on the high ground about half a mile from the Laboratories, received its present form in the 17th century; but the building has a history several hundreds of years older than this.

The oldest portion is the present Hall, which was originally a simple timber-framed building resting on a flint foundation and probably open to the roof. Some of its oak beams may be seen today in the Hall and in the room immediately above it. Whether this structure was the Manor House in the early 13th century, when the Manor of Rothamsted first emerges in official records, is very doubtful; but it may well date from the 14th or early 15th century.

Under the ownership of the Bardolphs a typical Tudor country house took shape around the earlier building. They added, during the 16th century, a Parlour (now the Dining Room) and a Buttery (now the Morning Room), and, at some time before 1624, a single-storey room at the East end with a gabled roof. The brewhouse range of buildings on the North side of the courtyard (now converted into living quarters and kitchen accommodation) was put up by them. In the Dining Room they decorated the East wall with a fine painting, probably representing the siege of Edinburgh in 1573, in which it is thought that a Bardolph took part.

Early in the 17th century the Manor changed hands. Sir John Wittewronge took up residence there in the 1630s, and the house remained in the possession of his descendants for three centuries. Sir John himself shewed great enthusiasm in altering and expanding the building to suit his own tastes.

The main front was extended to its present length; curvilinear outlines in the Flemish style were placed upon the plain Tudor gables; and a clock turret was added, - since replaced by a sounder structure in which, however, the original bell, dated 1650, still hangs. Kitchens (now remoulded but still serving their original purpose) were erected between the main House and the Brewhouse, and the Little Drawing Room was joined on to the Dining

Room. Sir John put up oak panelling, both plain and linenfold, in several rooms, and constructed (in 1678) the main staircase as we see it today. No substantial alterations were made to the building during the next two hundred years.

Sir John Bennet Lawes, founder of Rothamsted Experimental Station and the father of agricultural science, was a descendant of the Wittewronges, and was born at Rothamsted House on 14th December 1814. Some of his early experiments were made in one of the bedrooms there, before he set up his first laboratory in a barn on the estate. In 1863, to celebrate the coming-of-age of his son Charles, he added the Great Drawing-room. Charles himself in 1900 built a single-storey library beyond it; this was his only structural addition, but he inserted some interesting armorial stained glass in the South front and elsewhere, and adorned the house with a fine collection of Elizabethan and Jacobean furniture.

In 1934, after a public appeal which met with a very generous response not only in this country but in many parts of the world, Rothamsted House and its estate of 527 acres were bought by the Lawes Agricultural Trust. The house remained a private residence until the Second World War, when it was taken over by the Army. Soon after its derequisition, work was begun on converting it into a Hall of Residence for members of the Rothamsted staff and visiting scientists. Six small flats have been constructed at the East end of the main house, in the Gatehouse and in the old Brewhouse, and about 20 single rooms on the upper storeys; but the chief rooms of the main house will be kept for general use. Barns and outhouses have been adapted to serve as a Sample House, a Museum, and garages. The amenities have been carefully preserved, and Rothamsted remains a fine house in a fine setting.