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Rothamsted Experimental Station - Guide to the Experimental Plots 1906

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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

MR (afterwards Sir) JOHN BENNET LAWES was the founder of the Rothamsted Experimental Station. He began experiments with various manurial substances, first with plants in pots and then in the field, soon after entering into possession of the estate of Rothamsted in 1834. In 1843 more systematic field experiments were begun, and the services of Dr (afterwards Sir) J. H. Gilbert were obtained as Director, thus starting the long association which only terminated with the death of Sir John Lawes in 1900, followed by that of Sir Henry Gilbert in 1901.

The Rothamsted Experimental Station has never been connected with any external organisation, but has been maintained entirely at the cost of Sir John Lawes. In 1889 he constituted a trust for the continuance of the investigations, setting apart for that purpose the laboratory (which had been built by public subscription, and presented to him in 1855), certain areas of land on which the experimental plots were situated, and £100,000.

By the provisions of the trust-deed, the management is entrusted to a committee nominated by the Royal Society (four persons), the Royal Agricultural Society (two persons), the Chemical and Linnean Societies (one each), and the owner of Rothamsted.

The field experiments, which began in 1843, have on some of the plots been continued without break or alteration up to the present day; on the Broadbalk wheat field certain rearrangements were made in 1852, in which year also the barley experiments on the Hoos field began. The leguminous crops on the Hoos field were started in 1848, the experiments on roots have been continued on the same field since 1843, and on the same plan since 1856. The grass plots began in 1856, and the rotation experiments in 1848.

It should be remembered that the object of the Rothamsted experiments is to ascertain "how the plant grows," and only indirectly to find the most paying method and manuring; hence both the nature and the quantities of material applied are not to be taken as indicating the manures to be used in practice.