

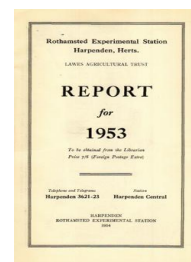
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## Report for 1953

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### The Farms : Woburn

**J. R. Moffatt**

J. R. Moffatt (1954) *The Farms : Woburn* ; Report For 1953, pp 153 - 156 - **DOI:**  
<https://doi.org/10.23637/ERADOC-1-75>

#### ESTATE WORK

General estate duties, including hedging and fencing, were carried out during the year. Owing to the large amount of time taken in hedging, it is hoped to purchase a mechanical hedge trimmer in the near future. Several old post-and-wire hedges were renewed during the year. The woodlands were cleared of dead and dying trees, which have been sawn up for use on the farm.

#### STAFF

Mr. S. Meyler has been appointed Deputy Farm Manager, and commenced his duties in April 1953.

#### Woburn

The work of the Woburn Farm was carried out under the direction and management of the staff of the Rothamsted Farm.

The year, although by no means an easy one, can be considered a satisfactory one, in that the result of several years' endeavours showed up in very satisfactory crops on the experiments and on the non-experimental parts of the farm. The attention paid to hedges, ditches and fences over recent years not only greatly improved the appearance of the farm, but resulted in a general improvement in the crops.

Of the 127 acres farmed, 60 acres were under cereal crops, 18 acres under potatoes and 33 acres under grassland of varying age. The remaining acreage was under various experimental crops, with a small fallow area.

The experimental field work was restricted to the Classical wheat and barley plots and the modern long-term experiments, except for some microplot experiments. In all there were 550 plots, of which 104 were micro-plots.

The year started off badly, as the adverse weather conditions in the late autumn of 1952 resulted in the wheat being sown rather late. Germination was delayed by the early onset of wintry conditions, and rooks and pheasants very seriously damaged the crop just as it was emerging. About 25 acres of wheat, fortunately all non-experimental, were almost completely destroyed, and had to be ploughed up. A small experimental area of spring cabbage on the Market Garden Experiment was so badly damaged by pigeons that it had to be scrapped, and two isolated areas of winter cabbage were also badly damaged.

Weather conditions improved considerably in the latter half of January, and the fine spell lasted well into February. During this period farmyard manure was applied to the potato crop, and several of the fields were ploughed a second time. After another short spell of bad weather a four-week spell of fine, dry weather enabled land work to continue without a check. Twenty-four acres of light land were given a dressing of 3 tons/acre of ground carbonate before sowing to Herta barley, and Atle spring wheat was sown on those areas where winter wheat was destroyed.

The preparation seedbeds for root crops followed, and good tilths were readily obtained. Sugar beet and early potatoes were

planted by mid-March, and main-crop potatoes were sown during late March and early April.

All crops made good growth during April and May, but the cold and unsettled weather during June slowed down growth. The warm, wet weather during July enabled all crops to put on a spurt of growth. During this month, with one exception, all corn crops were looking very promising. The disappointing one was Pioneer winter barley, and as its poor growth was erroneously ascribed to shortage of nitrogen, it was given 5 cwt/acre of nitrogenous fertilizer. Soil tests made after harvest showed that the poor crop was due to soil acidity. The root crops were cleaner and more forward than for many years.

The corn harvest started rather later than usual, and at first the weather was unkind. However, it improved by the middle of August, and the operation was completed by early September. All crops were cut by binder, and most were stacked under Dutch barns. No lodging took place on the non-experimental Herta barley or Atle wheat, but was severe on some experimental areas of Plumage Archer barley. Yields obtained so far are well above the average.

The main-crop potatoes, grown from seed from Northern Ireland, were lifted by casual labour obtained from Bedford on a piece-work basis. The yield was heavy, and the tubers were of excellent size and shape. Precautionary sprayings were given against late blight, and the haulm was burnt off by acid before lifting. Weather conditions were excellent for the early part of the lifting, but deteriorated towards the end. The crop is now being gradually disposed of. An experimental area of first earlies (Ulster Chieftain) was disposed of satisfactorily, but a small non-experimental area could not be sold owing to the glutted market and the presence of late blight on some of the tubers. These were eventually sold to the Ministry of Food as sub-standard, as were some of the main-crop variety, which were damaged by wireworms.

The small experimental areas of sugar beet were harvested under good conditions and yielded well. The roots were of excellent size and shape, but the sugar content was only moderate.

The small acreage of winter corn was drilled in excellent conditions during October and early November, and germination was good and rapid.

The mild dry weather during November and December enabled land work to continue without interruption. Dung was carted out for the 1954 potato crop, and nearly all ploughing was completed by the end of the year.

The crops on the Market Garden Experiment had a very favourable season after a bad start. The spring cabbage were destroyed by pigeons in the early winter of 1952, and were replaced by green peas; the red beet failed to germinate satisfactorily, and as the area rapidly became very weedy, the beet was replaced by white turnips. Both substitute crops yielded very well, and the following crops of leeks and spring cabbage are looking well. The leeks promise to give us a very heavy yield.

The wet weather in July gave the winter cabbages on the Green Manure Experiment a good start, and despite a moderate attack by clubroot disease, the plants have grown well, and heavy yields are now being obtained. The winter cabbage following early potatoes

on the Irrigation Experiment have made very disappointing growth, and are not hearting up at all well. None have been cut as yet.

The grassland was very productive throughout the season, after a rather late and slow start. It was all top-dressed with nitrogenous fertilizers during the season, and this, helped by the wet weather, prevented the usual shortage of grass in late July and August. Haymaking began late, and was a very protracted and tedious operation in the inclement weather, but yields were good and quality fair. The crop was mostly baled in the field with a pick-up baler. During the late summer and autumn some of the grass fields which had become rather acid were given ground carbonate of lime at about 3 tons/acre.

About 7 acres of very hilly land were chalked and seeded down under barley to a cocksfoot-meadow fescue-S.100 clover mixture, and a good take has been secured. A small area of very rough old pasture behind the farmstead was ploughed and reseeded to a lucerne-timothy mixture.

Twelve cattle were fattened on the grass during the summer, and graded satisfactorily. In view of the good stocks of hay and a plentiful supply of home-grown feeding-stuffs, more cattle are being wintered during 1953-54. Twenty-two crossbred Devon steers were purchased in the autumn, and because of the mild weather were still lying out at the end of the year.

The Large White pig herd was maintained at about ten breeding sows. Some of the older sows were replaced by gilts of our own breeding, but a new boar was purchased. Most of the pigs were retained to bacon weight, but any found making only small live-weight gains were sold for pork at an earlier stage. All pigs over about 100 lb. are weighed regularly. Of the eighty-one baconers sold since the start of the payment-by-grade scheme last April, 95 per cent were graded A.

Two infra-red heating units have been in use for very young pigs, and were found to be of great benefit in preventing overlying by the sows.

The feeding of antibiotics to some of the poorer pigs after weaning commenced in the autumn, but no experimental work is being done.

Very little expenditure was incurred on new implements, as the Woburn farm is now fairly well equipped. The light tractor running on vaporizing oil was exchanged for one with a diesel engine, so that both tractors are now fitted with this type of engine, which is showing great economy of fuel.

A small threshing machine fitted with a slow-speed peg drum was overhauled and converted to a high-speed beater-type drum, and will be used for threshing experimental plots. This will make the farm independent of Rothamsted for this work.

The difficult labour position eased considerably during the year, as two cottages were made available for farm workers. Also a pair of new cottages for farm workers have been erected by the London and Devon Estate Company, and are almost completed. When these are available, most of the regular workers will be satisfactorily housed, but casual labour will still be needed for work on the market-garden crops.

The covered yards have been completely re-roofed, and the badly

rusted purlins replaced. The drainage system in the yards has also been renewed.

The Woburn farm is now reasonably well equipped with machinery and buildings. The labour position has eased considerably, the fields are reasonably clean and fertile, and the hedges and ditches are in a satisfactory condition. Damage by game and vermin was considerably reduced in the last few months. The future at Woburn can now be faced with some confidence.