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ROTHAMSTED
RESEARCH

Report for 1982 - Part 1

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Computer Department

L. Fowden

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COMPUTER DEPARTMENT

L. FOWDEN

Staff

as at 30 September 1982

Head of Department **D. H. Rees, B.Sc., A.R.C.S., Dip.Eng.

Specialist Typists

*Dawn E. Johnson
†Mrs Susan I. Melville

Honorary Scientists

*F. G. W. Jones, Sc.D.
*F. Yates, C.B.E., Sc.D., F.R.S.

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†I. C. Crouch
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MICROPROCESSOR SYSTEMS

Section Head

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Scientific Staff

*W. J. Moore, B.Sc.
*Denise J. Pallett

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*Mrs Gwyneth Frier
‡Mrs Pauline E. Hakesley
‡Joanne T. Harris
*Denise V. Legg

Messenger

‡G. L. Floyd

* Appointed to Rothamsted Computing Unit (inc. Honorary Scientists)

† Left between 1.10.82 and 31.12.82

‡ Seconded to ARC Computing Centre

§ Appointed to ARC Computing Centre

**Home-based study leave with effect from 1.10.82

Rothamsted acquired its first computer in 1954. The installation of an Elliott-NRDC 401 machine in the Statistics Department, then led by F. Yates, had followed a Visiting Group 'recommendation' that 'With an electronic computer of their own, both to use and "play about with", valuable advances may be made in the theory and method of handling this kind of data on electronic machines'. The wisdom of this viewpoint was quickly confirmed, and the Statistics Department pioneered the application of computing methods in agricultural research. During this early period, D. H. Rees was responsible for the maintenance of computer equipment and for much development work, at a stage when Rothamsted was able to both propose and undertake modifications to hardware. The original computer was augmented in 1961 by an Elliott 402, and these were

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superseded by the acquisition in 1963 of a Ferranti Orion, an advanced machine with an early high-level language.

The second half of the 1960s witnessed a widening appreciation of the power and applicability of computing, a situation marked at Rothamsted by the creation in 1968 of a separate Computer Department under the leadership of D. H. Rees. The ARC Advisory Committee on Computing agreed that the Department should develop and operate a multi-access computing service for agricultural research institutes in England and Wales, and an ICL 4-70 system was installed in 1970 to provide this service; it was supplemented by an ICL 4-72 in 1977. In the 10-year period from 1972 to 1982, the number of jobs run on the computer increased 3.5-fold and the work-load by more than five times, although the complement of the Department at the beginning and end of this period was little changed.

Striking technical progress in computing and dramatic relative cost reductions in hardware have opened up the possibility for a network service that will provide a wider circle of users with 'hands-on' experience of computing; this development should further stimulate the use and exploitation of computer methodology within agricultural research. A new organizational structure has been created to oversee this next phase of development, and Rothamsted's Computer Department was disbanded at the end of September 1982 (see General Introduction, p. 12).

An account of the activities of the new Rothamsted Computing Unit is included within the Statistics Department report.