

is deciding which records really are worthy of permanent preservation and which can safely be destroyed.

We don't only advise on records which are actually in or coming to the Record Office - part of our work is giving advice on archives to any individual or organisation in Hertfordshire. An eye is kept on records in County Council departments, and regular inspections of records in parish churches are made as part of our responsibilities as the Diocesan Record Office, but anyone in the County may ask for advice.

Of course the public face of the Record Office is important and the advice given in the Search Room is a significant part of our work. We also receive around 1500 telephone calls and 1200 letters a year which all have to be answered. Enquiries about which documents will best answer a particular enquiry or topic of research are answered free of charge, and we also offer a research service which is charged by the hour - one member of staff spends almost all her time carrying out research on behalf of members of the public. Archivists also give talks outside the office, which serve both to educate those who use the Record Office, or who may need to, and also to entertain and inform those who may have no desire actually to use the Office.

Work with schools and schoolteachers is an increasingly important aspect of our work - one member of staff, assisted by a specialist teacher, spends much of her time working with schoolchildren who visit the office, advising teachers on how they can best use the resources of the office and sometimes even taking documents out to schools.

Finally, no busy office, whatever its work, can run without an efficient administrative backup. The room which most users visit to obtain their readers' tickets or to pay photocopy bills is also the home of the essential 'housekeeping' services including typing, wordprocessing, running the office's finances and general administration.

Future articles in this series will look in more depth at what makes the Hertfordshire Record Office tick. But in the mean time, if you want more information do ask any member of the Record Office staff - or look at the Office's annual report (the report for 1990 will be out soon).

Gillian Sheldrick

#### CENSUS ENUMERATOR'S RETURNS FOR 1891

Microfilm copies of the census enumerator's returns for the county of Hertfordshire are available for 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871 and 1881 at the Hertfordshire Local Studies Collection.

The returns are released for research when they are over 100 years old - therefore the 1891 census will be made available by the Public Record Office from 2nd January 1992.

If you have enquiries concerning any of the census returns, please contact the Hertfordshire Local Studies Collection. Tel: 0992 556624.

#### Rothamsted Experimental Station Archives

Rothamsted Experimental Station at Harpenden is part of the Agriculture and Food Research Council's Institute of Arable Crops Research (IACR) and is funded by the Department of Education and Science, the Ministry of Agriculture and increasingly by special grants; it is the oldest agricultural experimental station in the world.

Agricultural experiments were started at Rothamsted in the early 1840s by John Bennet Lawes, Lord of the Manor and owner of the Rothamsted estate. He was always interested in chemistry and by 1840 had established a successful artificial manure business in east London. He began his experiments by observing the effects of different manures on turnips and wheat in his fields and in 1843 was joined by Henry Gilbert, a chemist. This partnership lasted until Lawes' death in 1900 and was one of the longest and most productive in the history of science. Today research at Rothamsted is concerned with nutrition, production and protection of arable crops and extends from molecular studies through to field experimentation. The Classical Experiments begun by Lawes and Gilbert continue to yield valuable information; samples from the earliest experiments still exist and have been used to provide important evidence of environmental change.

Records of Lawes and Gilbert's work are held in Rothamsted Library. Unfortunately very few of Lawes' personal records have survived but there is a large amount of Gilbert's correspondence, including many letters from British and foreign scientists. Gilbert had an international reputation and this correspondence, together with his own letters to Lawes describing scientific meetings, is of considerable interest.

The largest series of records, however, consists of production papers for Lawes and Gilbert's printed articles. Their output was enormous and recorded the work at Rothamsted on such diverse subjects as continuous wheat and barley growing, leguminous and root crops, permanent grassland, fairy rings, animal feeding, the use of sewage as fertilizer, rainfall and drainage. The records consist of drafts, calculations, correspondence between the partners, with other members of staff and their publishers, together with details of the experimental work. The finished articles, many of which opened new ground and set new standards, appeared in *The Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, *The Agricultural Gazette*, *Philosophical Transactions* and other scientific journals.

In addition to records of 19th century experimental work the archives also contain records of administration. These include records of the building of the Lawes Testimonial Laboratory in the 1850s, of the setting up of the Society for Extending the Rothamsted Experiments in the early 1900s, of the purchase of Rothamsted from the Lawes family in 1935 by the Lawes Agricultural Trust and, most importantly, of the early work of the Lawes Agricultural Trust, the body established by Lawes in 1889 to ensure that his experiments would be continued after his death.

After Gilbert died in 1909 the work at Rothamsted was continued and expanded. There are in the archives a few documents relating to the work of A D Hall, Director 1902-12, and considerably more relating to E J Russell, Director 1912-43. There are also records of meteorological work from the 1850s onwards, of the botany department from the early 1900s to the 1970s and of the experimental farm set up at Woburn in the 1880s and managed from Rothamsted. However apart from Lawes and Gilbert's papers the largest series of archives in the Library is from Rothamsted farm. This includes records from the 1840s

to the 1950s (later records are still held by the farm manager) and consists of the field superintendent's diaries and notebooks, harvest books, threshing results and dairy and manure tables.

Today scientific work is carried out at Rothamsted by a number of different departments all of which keep their own records. Some of these are at present being surveyed for archival purposes but they are unlisted and not available to the public. There are two catalogues of the records in the Library, *The Catalogue of Rothamsted Archives* (1987) and *The Catalogue of the Letters of Sir John Lawes and Sir Henry Gilbert* (1989). Both cost £15 and are available from the Librarian. A bibliography of Lawes' printed work, *John Bennet Lawes, A Record of His Genius*, by G V Dyke, Scholar Press, Taunton, £69, has recently been published.

The Lawes Trust employ an archivist at Rothamsted for two consecutive days a month, usually a Monday and Tuesday, who can be contacted via the Library. The records in the Library are open free of charge to serious researchers and application should be made to the Librarian, Rothamsted Experimental Station, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, AL5 2JQ.

Margaret Harcourt Williams, archivist.

[The above account of a private archive is the first in a series, designed to introduce local historians to unknown or unfamiliar sources.]



*J. B. Lawes*



*J. H. Gilbert*



Rothamsted Laboratory 1856 - 1912  
(The archives are now housed in part of this room)



Two sixth formers from St George's School, Harpenden with archivist Susan Flood during a recent visit to the Record Office.