

2. 18th and early 19th century Pleasure Grounds (Sketch Plan III)

The first¹ accurate plan to show the house and its surroundings dates from 1833 (see sketch plan III).

The position of the house, the miller's house, and the immediately adjacent farms are unchanged - one new farm, just downstream - 'de Nijhof' - is shown. It was then (and still is) tenanted by the Kok family, who had moved from another farm (demolished in the last century) on the northern edge of de Wiersse. The Kok family for three generations, perhaps longer, have acted as bailiffs to de Wiersse (their shrewdness and devotion to the place have been responsible for de Wiersse's continuity through some very difficult years, particularly during the last war.)

The two first wooded rectangular enclosures, straddling the stream, are now shown to have been doubled by a further two to the east, and the shape of the whole has been defined by planted allées.

The old main road (Wiersser Allée, superseded in the middle of the 19th century by the present metalled road some 300 metres further south) was also lined by trees, as were the drive leading to the house and a parallel avenue to the east. The three last roads continue in the same form to the present day; but the inner drive, rather than being a continuous avenue, has, since at least the beginning of this century, been straddled by four major groups of trees, rather than be lined by a continuous avenue.

In the North-east rectangle a circular field is shown, surrounded by water - of this only one corner (of the water) survives today. It is in shape related to a surviving field and moat at het Medler (the neighbouring estate downstream), which, in the case of het Medler, is now believed to have been the site of a grain store in the 15th century.

The two rectangles, south of the stream, are designated pleasure grounds - 'grond van vermaak', garden - 'tuin', orchard - 'boomgaard', and kitchen garden - 'moestuin'.

The immediate surroundings show a changing landscape of oak (eiken), oak coppice (akkerbosch), arable (bouwland) and meadows (wei).

note 1. Since writing the above two important plans have come to light, which provide much additional information

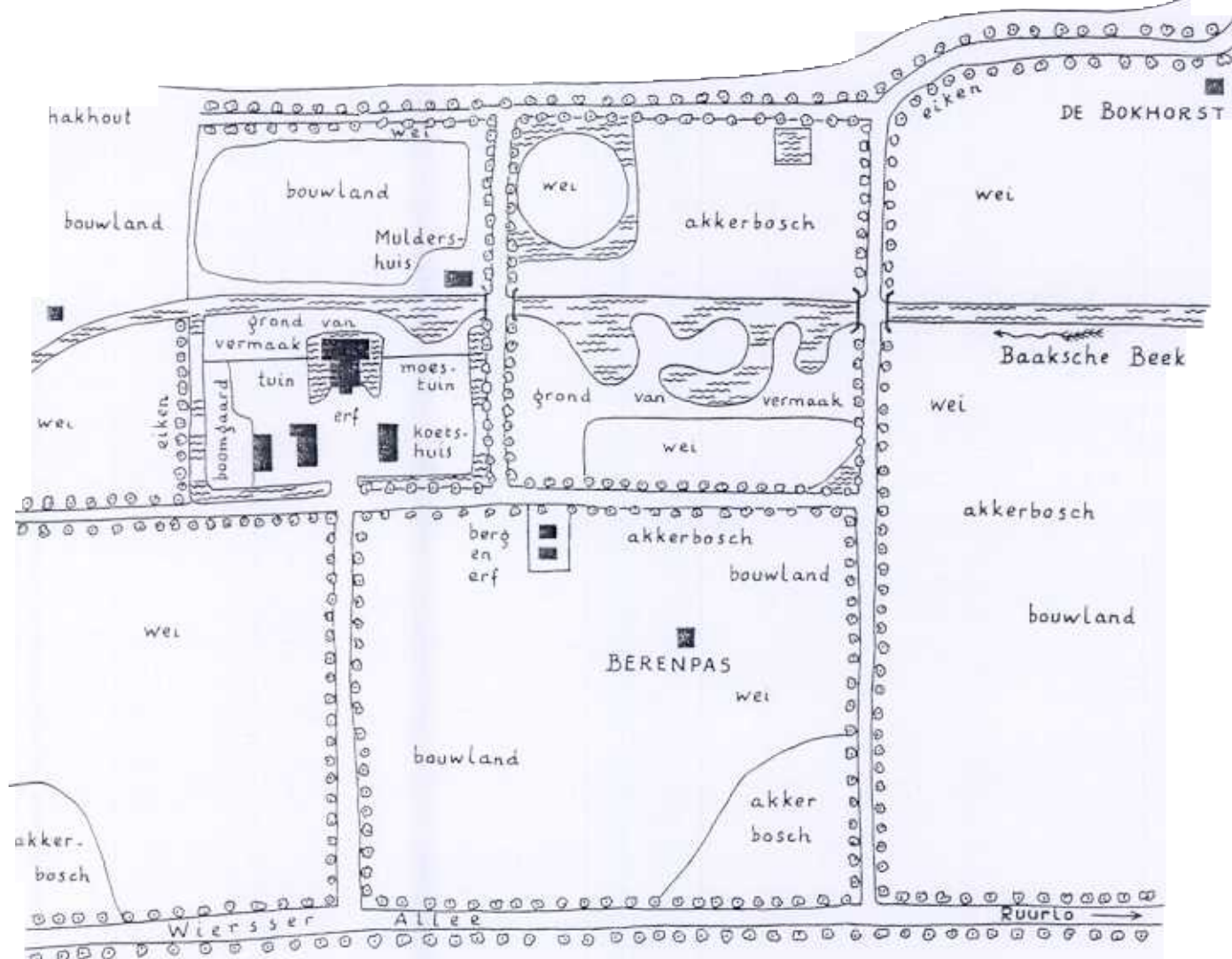
1. Figuratieve kaart van het Frontier des IJssels door J.H. Holtinger 1783. 1: 14.400 in the Rijksarchief in The Hague.

2. MS cxviii 118 door 1^e luit. Besier van den generalen Staf 1844-45 1:25000 in the library of the Topografische Dienst at Delft.

DE TRAGTER

akkerbosch

bouwland



III 1833 kadaster Zutphen gemeente Vorden Sectie E eerste blad)

100 meter

E.V.G Aug. '75

DE WIERSE

From 1869 de Wiersse was lived in by J.B. van Limburg Stirum, who married a van Heeckeren.

They had plans drawn up (which survive in the archives of de Wiersse to reface the house in the Neo-Renaissance manner then fashionable and to romanticise the surroundings of the house by changing the shape of the moats and even the stream (as well as the planting) into one of total, curved, assymetry.

Fortunately van Limburg Stirum's funds did not allow him to complete his scheme - and his wife's pleas, to leave her parents' old house alone, prevailed.

Early 20th century - Restoration and Embellishment - Victor de Stuers and his daughter Alice - sketch plans IV & V

Van Limburg Stirum's daughter married Victor de Stuers, who bought de Wiersse from his parents-in-law's executors in 1893. From about this time the changes in the house and the garden are recorded in photographs in the archives at de Wiersse.

De Stuers' initiative had been largely responsible for the establishment of a National department concerned with Monuments, Museums and Archives, of which he was the first head. He lived and worked principally in the Hague and only visited de Wiersse for brief periods in the summer; but in 1904 (age 61) he found time to record the shape of the house and its surroundings (see sketch plan IV) with characteristic care, and insight.

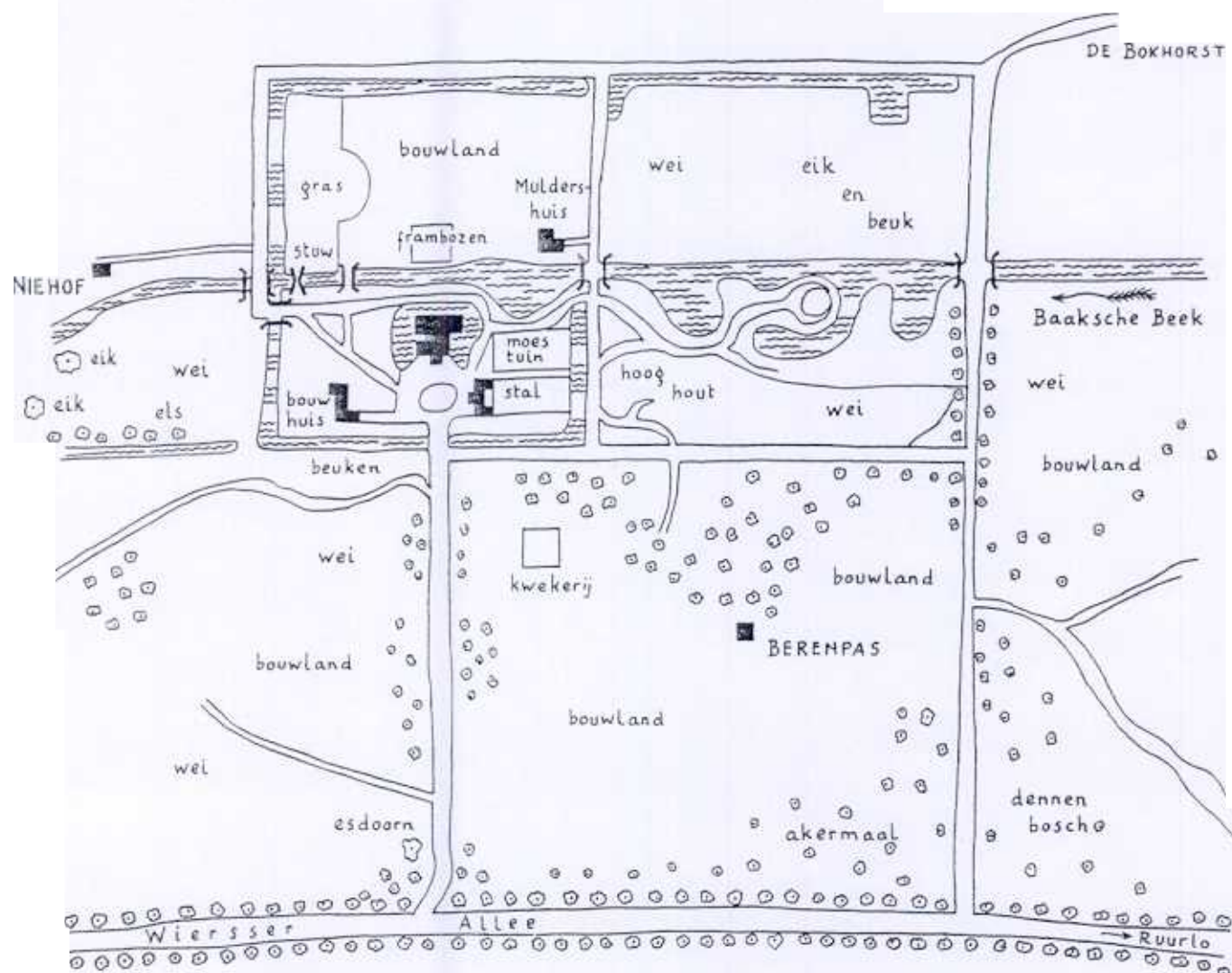
Between that date and his death in 1916 (but for the greater part before 1913 - see 'Buiten', p. 502 18 October 1913 and p. 514 25 October, 1913) he, a widower, and his only child, Alice (born 1895), carried out a number of changes to the house and to the garden.

The 18th century glazing bars and small panes (which survived in a few windows) replaced the larger scale 19th century glazing, and the house was renovated inside.

Outdoors, the principal changes were the extension of the drive (1906, across the old main road (Wiersser Allée) to the new main road and the removal of the kitchen garden (moestuin) to the arable northeast of the Berenpas (see sketch plan V). The kitchen garden was surrounded on three sides by a high solid boarded fence, lined on the inside with treillage.

In the place of the old kitchen garden, immediately to the east of the house, Alice de Stuers designed a classical parterre of box, the beds filled with roses, the whole surrounded by the former kitchen garden's solid fence to the north, and by yew hedges on the other sides. The success of the design

DE TRAGTER



IV 1904 Victor de Stuers archief de Wiersse

± 100 meter



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DE WIERSSSE

was such that Victor de Stuers had the plan repeated (see drawings in the archives of de Wiersse), to fill the whole length of the old kitchen garden.²

The varieties of roses used in 1913 were : Laurent Carle (now as a cutting rose in the kitchen garden), Jules Grotez, Lady Ashton, Mrs. Cynthia Forde, Madame Caroline Testout, Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt, Madame Abel Chasenay, Madame Ravary, and Sunburst. In 1975 they consist of : Gertrude Westphal, Katie Duvigneau, Fashion, Tantar's Triumph, Irish Elegance, Moonlight, Tom Tom and Rodeo.

Initially every box edged border was separated from the next by narrow strips of grass and a narrow path of cement tiles. Before 1924 the tile paths were doubled to occupy the whole space between the borders, and in some cases removed altogether to give place to grass. This process of simplification, as the scale of box and yew increased, continued until the 1960s, when the limit of simplification, within the spirit of the original character, was reached.

About 1913 Alice de Stuers added a sunk garden in the southeast quarter of the old kitchen garden. This followed the then universally illustrated ideas of Gertrude Jekyll and others: the combination of foliage, funkias and ferns for example; a small formal pool in the centre, surrounded by bergenias; a dry brick wall containing rock plants around the edge; italian oils jars placed at the corners; and the old kitchen garden tool shed, thatched, slightly off axis, backed by apergola originally carrying rambler roses and old man's beard. The whole framed by a herbaceous border of delphiniums, gypsophilia, verbascum and michaelmas daisies.

The house remained shut in by high trees - some growing even inside the moat. 'Views' were few, and except for the drive, confined to the immediate area of the 'pleasure grounds' marked on the 1833 Kadaster. (See Sketch Plan III).

The landscape outside the garden was that of the Geldersche Achterhoek; alternation of oak coppice, alder and birch; arable on the high ground, growing rye, oats or roots; meadows on the lower; on the higher sand, patches of pine with junipers, and heather (cut for cattle bedding until the beginning of the 20th century); in the low places, pools and marshes; some good oak and

2. Evidence has come to light, since writing the above, that there was a formal garden on the same site in the 18th century, incorporating statues and a fountain.

beech, a few ash and willow. Almost the only naturalised exotics being Robinia Pseudoacacia. The farms ranging in size from 3 - 15 hectare on the Saxon model (cattle behind, the family in front, hay above), but with brick and tile replacing wattle and daub and thatch, and, since the beginning of the 19th century developing out of subsistence farming (in which each farm even grew, bleached and wove its own linen) by means of artificial fertiliser, and the co-operative marketing of milk and butter - the co-operatives being small and locally established: the district covered by de Wiersse having its own steam dairy.

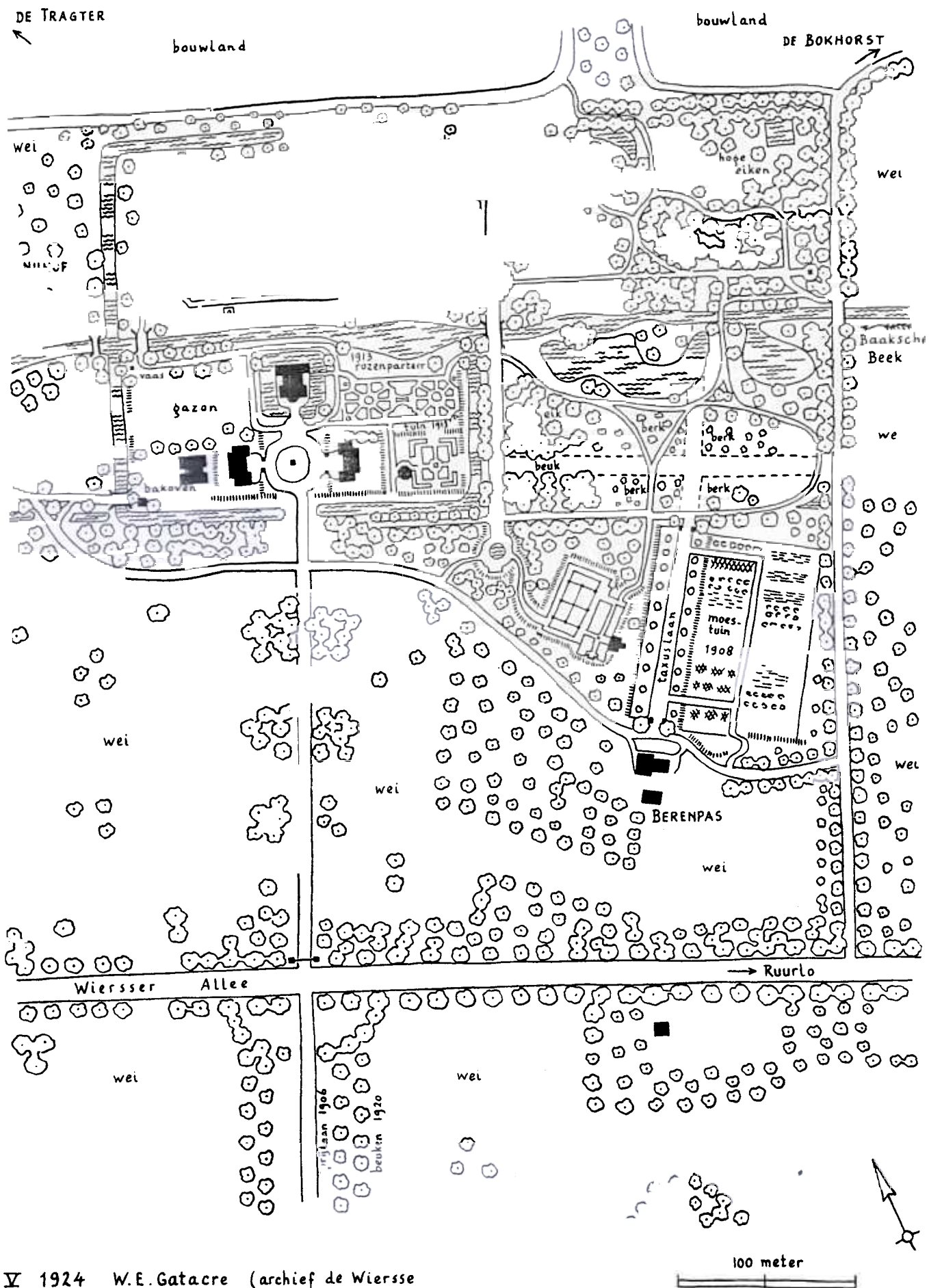
Landscaping of the whole : W.E. Gatacre and Alice de Stuers - Sketch plan V

From 1918 another, more directly English influence, began to work on the surroundings of de Wiersse: W.E. Gatacre. Alice de Stuers, who he married, continued to be concerned with the smaller scale of the enclosed gardens and with the choice of plants, he with the landscaping. Gatacre, born in 1878, had been brought up in England and Ireland in a landowning family of soldiers, sportsmen and amateur artists. He had an instinctive understanding of the shape of terrain and developed great vision in giving shape to existing planting and to the development of new.

In outlying woods, he followed the current forestry practice (on a very small scale and with an eye to the shooting : douglas, larch, norway spruce, mixed or interspersed with american oak or poplar) but in the garden and park he kept, with a very few exceptions, to indigenous species. There are some American oak (for rapid results) and an avenue of Italian poplars (suggested by Alice de Stuers) north of the house, already referred to. Otherwise only a dozen or so exotic specimens.

The exceptions perhaps are the rhododendrons (already introduced in the 19th century by J.B. Limburg Stirum) but these Gatacre used only as fast growing, all-year screens, to separate the character of each part of the garden and park from the next, and to ensure the element of surprise, which he applied so skilfully.

Despite Gatacre's sensitivity to the existing topography, some foreign influences introduced by him in the garden and park are still noticeable, if in diminished form. These include the 18th and 19th century English landscapers' avoidance of any sight of functional buildings - including farms; the banishment of arable - or indeed any activity not essential for garden or landscape purposes. Hence also the diversion of roads to the new boundaries of the park, and the planting of screens along these boundaries. Most



V 1924 W.E. Gatacre (archief de Wiersse)

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obvious of all is an evident indifference to getting straight timber out of all park trees, that is particularly jarring to the continental forester.

More positively, Gatacre overcame the restrictions of the small scale of the Achterhoek with amazing skill.

He produced effects in a few hundred metres that usually require several kilometres. The view, across the big lawn and over the meadows to the west of the house, for example, is no more than 700 metres long - but this is only evident if milk cows, rather than calves, are pastured in the furthest fields. The whole of the old garden - the four rectangles which straddle the stream, with their various sequences and unexpected changes of character - is only 400 metres x 200 metres.

Victor de Stuers had already extended south from the old rectangle with his new kitchen garden. Gatacre, primarily in the years 1918 - 1924, (but continuing to embellish until his death in 1959) developed an extraordinary variety of vistas, romantic views and formal axes, defined by gates, statues, benches, formally shaped yew and linked across water by bridges. The different mood of each of Alice de Stuers' private gardens was kept a surprise by screens of rhododendrons or yew or beech scrub (see sketch plan V and also the illustrated article by Alice de Stuers, 'Floralia', Assen, 26 September 1924, p. 615).

The old North-South Road, bisecting the pleasure grounds, was turned into a broad walk, terminated in the north by a statue, in the south by a fountain in an enclosure of beech hedges. A new long walk to the north of the stream crossed the broad walk at right angles. Beside it, to the north of the house, was an over-ambitious and short-lived parterre (1924 - 1928) : its hollowed out form became waterlogged too easily.

The existing form of the mill ponds and mounds was accentuated. The meadow in the south east quarter of the old garden was turned into a grove of silver birch (underplanted with daffodils and bracken) and bisected by glades running east-west (giving a view from the sunk garden) and north-south (extending the line of Alice de Stuers' Irish yew walk northwards, from alongside the kitchen garden, to end in the high oak, north of the stream).

On the west side of the kitchen garden was built a tile tennis court, lined with beech hedges and pleached limes, its netting covered with wisteria and with iris sibirica and ferns at its base. Beside the tennis court an enclosed orchard, both reached by a beech tunnel. (In 1975 the tennis court and netting had become delapidated and were removed, and its site is now traversed by a continuation of the beech tunnel).

At the same time that the greater part of the work was being done to give the garden its present form, the house was also enlarged to its present size, by the width of the drawing room and library; the moat re-excavated

where it had been partly filled, and two new, externally identical, 'bouwhuizen' (coach house and stables) built. The character was that of the 1913 restoration by Victor de Stuers, and the work was completed by 1924 under supervision of the architect Slothouwer (the eastern bouwhuis was blown up at the end of the war, in 1945).

Outside the garden, the main drive, already extended southwards in 1906 to the new main road, was planted with a double avenue of beech in about 1920, and the fields on either side developed with a series of vistas and cross vistas, between groups formed from a combination of existing timber and new planted trees. This landscaping was extended over farmland (but without altering the traditional character) in views north from the house, and east from the mound at the end of the birch glade. The same eye, indeed, was applied to the whole of the 300 hectares (of which 100 woodland) now comprising de Wiersse.

5. 1963 to the present - Consolidation and Continuity - Sketch Plan VI.

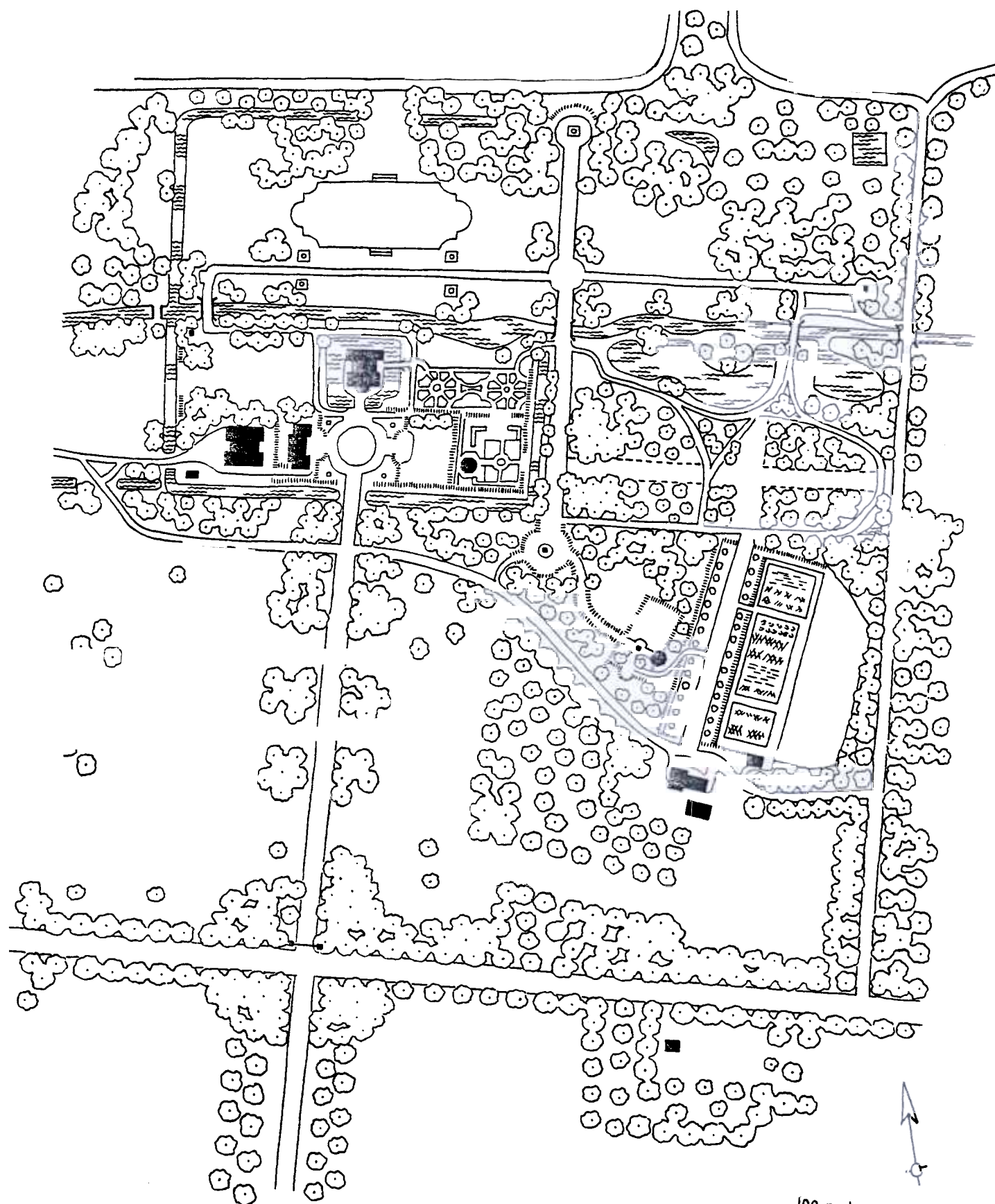
W.E. Gatacre and Alice Gatacre's son, E.V. Gatacre, assumed responsibility for de Wiersse in 1963.

Some simplifications have been made since 1963 (see sketch plan VI): the subsidiary paths north of the stream have been allowed to become overgrown; the parterres on and around the circle of the drive to the south of the house (introduced about 1939) have been removed (except for 4 box 'corkscrews' in the corners). The pergola, to the west of the sunk garden, has been simplified. The removal of the tennis court has already been referred to. The size of the kitchen garden has been halved (and most of it allocated to the gardeners' private use).

The massive line of rhododendrons to the north of the house (forming the north boundary of the garden) has been cut, to open a north view from the house - exposing ploughland to view from the garden, in a way that is more typical of Gelderland than of an English park.

The north east corner of the north east rectangle was also opened up in 1974 and denuded of rhododendrons, partly to provide mechanical access to clean the outer moat; but primarily as a preparation to replanting this corner.

An organic object, like a garden, requires the regular taking of decisions, even if these are dictated by the intentions of previous generations and by the spirit of the place: growth induces changes of scale. The unchecked formation of a canopy, as trees become larger, kills underplanting. Some cycles are short (rhododendrons, planted close, for



100 meter

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screening, on sandy soil, will become leggy and blow over if not cut back every 15 years - fortunately the tops burn instantly and in all weathers). Others, like that of beech, are long, and in their first renewal, inevitably are.

During the last ten years particular care has been taken to plant oak, beech and robinia pseudoacacia in places where the young trees can eventually replace old, and will meanwhile not disturb the pattern of the garden and park.

Limited mechanisation (a broader lawn mower, a leaf blower and electric hedge cutter) and the use of weed killer on paths, has enabled the number of gardeners occupied all the year round to be cut to two, without noticeably altering the character of the garden.

Wiersse has been very fortunate in having had E.J. Vrugink, the son of a tenant, with wide gardening experience, as head gardener between 1938 and his retirement in 1970. He still lives at de Wiersse. His very able young successor, A. Dimmendaal, and the owner, continue to benefit

from Vrugink's experience, and his extraordinary and forward-looking understanding of the character of the place.

The garden is not normally open to the public², but parties which are not organised with a commercial purpose can visit if their organisers apply beforehand; several hundred people see the garden in this way every year. Several thousand participants of the '8 castles tour', arranged every Wednesday during the summer under the guidance of the former Burgemaster of Vorden, see part of the garden - or all, if number and time allow.

Outside the garden and park, changes are more noticeable than within. Government policy to encourage larger farm units has put an intolerable pressure on tenant farmers, either to retire, or to overinvest and overstock. The result is a minimum unit of 20 hectares often supporting 70 milk cows and sometimes worked only by a hard pressed farmer and his wife. Much arable has become grassland, and what is left as often as not is carrying maize. The cooperatives have amalgamated and local control has become nominal.

The old pattern of three generations living on, and working a small farm together, went out in the '50s. A depleted farming population (who have willy-nilly had to assume the anxieties of the urban entrepreneur) has not the time, and in another generation, will not have the skill, to give the countryside the extraordinarily cared-for appearance it has had for so long.

But this is a situation common to much of Europe

2. Since 1977 the garden has been opened on a number of days, in late May, early June; mid July & mid October. (See Sketch Plan VII)

