

# Rothamsted Manor



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# A history of Rothamsted Manor



John Bennet Lawes, the founder of Rothamsted Experimental Station, now Rothamsted Research, was born in this house on 28th December 1814. The house had been the ancestral home of his family since 1623 when it was bought by Anne Wittewringle (née Vanacker), the wife of Jacob Wittewringle, from the Bardolph family, on behalf of her son John, who was then 4 years old. The Wittewringles/Wittewringlehes, spelling varies, were Huguenot refugees who fled to England in 1564 to escape religious persecution in Flanders. Jacob Wittewringle was a brewer and a man of considerable wealth when he died in 1622. His son John (Wittewringle)

became Lord of The Manor of Rothamsted in 1639 but did not live at Rothamsted before 1641.

The first record of Rothamsted was made in 1212, and in 1221 Henry Gubion owned the estate. By 1292 William Nowell (Noel/Nele/Neale) was the owner and he sold the estate to Ralph de Creci in 1355. The Bardolph family acquired it by the marriage, in 1519, of Edmund Bardolph to Elizabeth Cressy, the heir of Edmund Cressy.

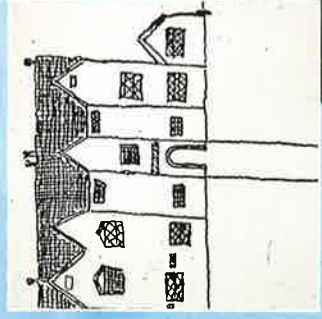


## The Exterior

The earliest image of Rothamsted Manor is that associated with the 1623 conveyance which shows a small house with conventional gables (Fig. 1). However, by this time the house had already been extended by the Bardolphs; the original dwelling was probably little more than an open hall.

It was John Wittewronge who, after the civil wars, began the creation of the house we see today. He further extended it to both sides, built the open loggia or "The Arches" at the west end, and created the four curvilinear gables on the south front and the two on the west side, and the clock-tower. The clock bell has the date 1650 and the stack of 5 chimneys bears the date 1654 on its base.

The space between the two windows to the left of the front door was also incorporated into the hall at an unknown date. The extensions, however,



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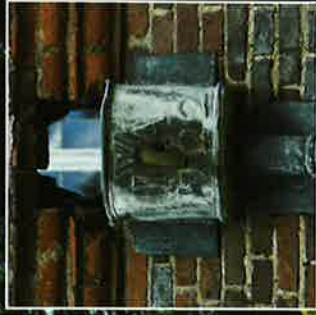
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did not create a symmetrical façade and in c.1900 a small extension was built at the east end to complete the front as it is today.

Above the main door is the Wittewronge coat of arms (Fig. 2) and higher up is a plaque of the Sun Fire Office (Fig. 3), issued in 1726, when the house was insured for £1,000.

The northern part of the west side (two gables) was built in 1863/4 by John Bennet Lawes and subsequently altered by his son Charles in 1900/1910. In the wall above one of the west windows are the arms of Wittewronge quartering Vanacker (Fig. 4); all that survives of the house that John Wittewronge built at Stantonbury, Bucks, in the 1660s for his eldest son John. A lead rain-water head on this side bears the initials of Jacob Wittewronge (1693-1728) and of his wife Anne, née Bennet, and the date 1722 (Fig 5).



## The Interior

**The Hall** The oldest part of the house; some of the original timbers may still be visible. The floor was paved with stone flags in 1679, which were replaced by oak boarding in 1862. The stairs and fireplace probably date from c.1635 and the room was panelled by John Wittewronge in 1654. This panelling was removed in 1900 and replaced with the current linenfold panelling, dating from the sixteenth century; it conceals fragments of murals dating from the Bardolphs' time.

The armorial glass in the windows is of c.1900, and shows the coats of arms of England from 1189 to the present day. On the west wall are portraits of Sir John Wittewronge in 1669 and Anne Bennet, wife of Jacob Wittewronge the younger and great granddaughter of the first Sir John Wittewronge. To the right of the fireplace is a portrait of Sir John Lawes' son Charles, by Frank Salisbury. On the east wall is a photographic copy of a painting of Sir John Bennet Lawes by Hubert Herkomer; the original, at Rothamsted Research, was presented to Sir John, in 1893, on the 50th Anniversary of Rothamsted Experimental Station.

**Dining Room** This room, part of the Bardolph extensions, was originally two rooms and the dividing wall, along the line of the moulded ceiling beam, may have been removed by John Wittewronge. He also panelled the room, again covering some extensive murals on the east wall from the time of the Bardolphins. The fireplace, is of Bedfordshire clunch, inlaid with black marble: above is a still life in oils by Tilman dated 1638, bought by Sir John Wittewronge for £2. The armorial glass (c.1900) shows the coats of arms of previous owners of Rothamsted Manor up to 1623.

The murals, in tempera, on the east wall, which are rarely shown, were preserved behind the panelling from c.1650 until revealed in c.1900. They date from the late sixteenth century and the consensus is that the top half represents the siege of Edinburgh Castle in 1573 (Fig. 6); the lower half is incomplete and shows a series of niches in trompe l'oeil form containing a plump cat, a Talbot hound and a bear, possibly representing vices (Fig. 7). The right hand niche has a pencilled outline of an elephant, possibly drawn by Charles when the murals were revealed.

**The Arches or Loggia** This is part of the eastward extension by Sir John Wittewronge with a chequer board floor of Purbeck marble and limestone. It was glazed-in probably at the time of the 1863/4 extensions.



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**Small Drawing-Room** This was added by Sir John Wittewronge but the painted and gilded leather wall coverings of c.1710 were not introduced until c.1900 by Sir Charles Bennet Lawes. Recent conservation suggests that the wall coverings are a fine example of English workmanship. The fireplace and overmantel date from the 17th century but were brought from elsewhere in the house and they show the arms of Wittewronge in the centre, after Sir John was made a baronet. The ceiling is probably part of the modifications of c.1900-1910. The marquetry floor may be that laid by Sir John Wittewronge. The armorial glass shows the coats of arms of the 4th and 5th Baronets of Stantonbury.

**Great Drawing-Room** Until 1863 the north wall of the Small Drawing Room was the limit of the house. The Great Drawing-Room was added in 1863/4 by Sir John Lawes to provide a space for the coming of age ball of his son Charles in 1864. In 1900/10 it was remodelled by Charles, who raised the ceiling, replaced the windows, added the monumental fireplace, and added panelling, initially plain but subsequently replaced with the painted linenfold panelling present today.

The centre of the ceiling bears the arms of Charles Lawes-Wittewronge, who changed the family name to Lawes-Wittewronge in 1902, quartered with those of his wife 'Amy'. The motto "Pour La Foi" refers to the flight of the protestant Wittewronges in the sixteenth century. The chandeliers and sconces bear the arms of Wittewronge and Bennet Lawes and were presumably added by Charles.

The three portraits on the north wall are of, in the centre, Sir John Wittewronge, aged 70, in 1688 by Mary Beale (Fig. 8); to the right his

grandfather, Jacques Wittewronghele (1531 – 1593) (Fig. 10), the original refugee, and to the left Sir John's father Jacob, the brewer (1558 – 1622) (Fig. 9).

On the left of the fireplace are the brothers James (1720 – 1748) to the left and Thomas Wittewronge (1723 – 1763) to the right. Neither had issue and the ownership of the Manor passed to their first cousin John



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Bennet. When he died childless in 1783, the estate passed to John Bennet Lawes (Senior), the son of his sister Mary.

The portrait between the windows is of John Lawes the grandfather of John Bennet Lawes (Senior) and the great-grandfather of Sir John Bennet Lawes.

The female portraits on the south wall are of, on the right Martha Wittewronge, née Strange the wife of James Wittewronge and on the left an unidentified girl of the Wittewronge family. To the right of the fireplace are the portraits of the sisters, Elizabeth, next to the door, and Anne Wittewronge, grand-daughters of Sir John. Anne died young but Elizabeth married Thomas Bennet.

The armorial glass (c.1900) mainly shows family marriages up to and including the marriage of Charles Bennet Lawes-Wittewronge and Marie A. R. ('Amy') Fountaine (Fig. 11).



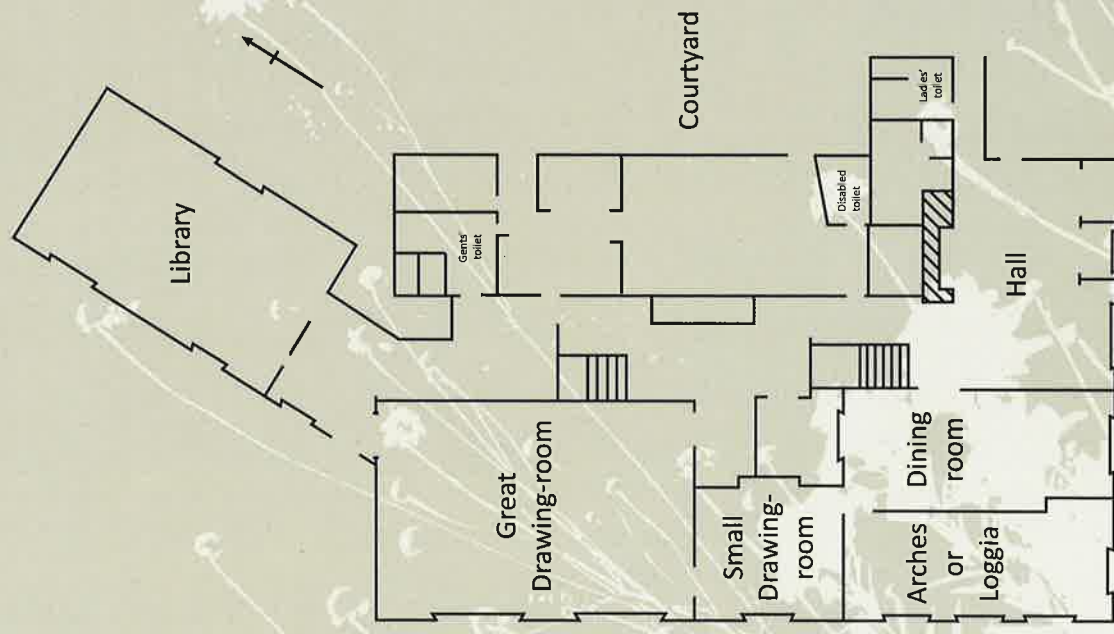
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**The Library** The Library was added by Charles after 1900 and was modelled on the library of Rawdon House, Hoddesdon. The bookshelves are concealed behind panelled doors and part of the wall of an existing studio was built in, which accounts for the curious angle of this room to the rest of the house. The highly decorated fireplace (Fig. 12) is from Rawdon House and dates from 1622. The two pieces of heraldic glass show the arms of Flanders and Antwerp.

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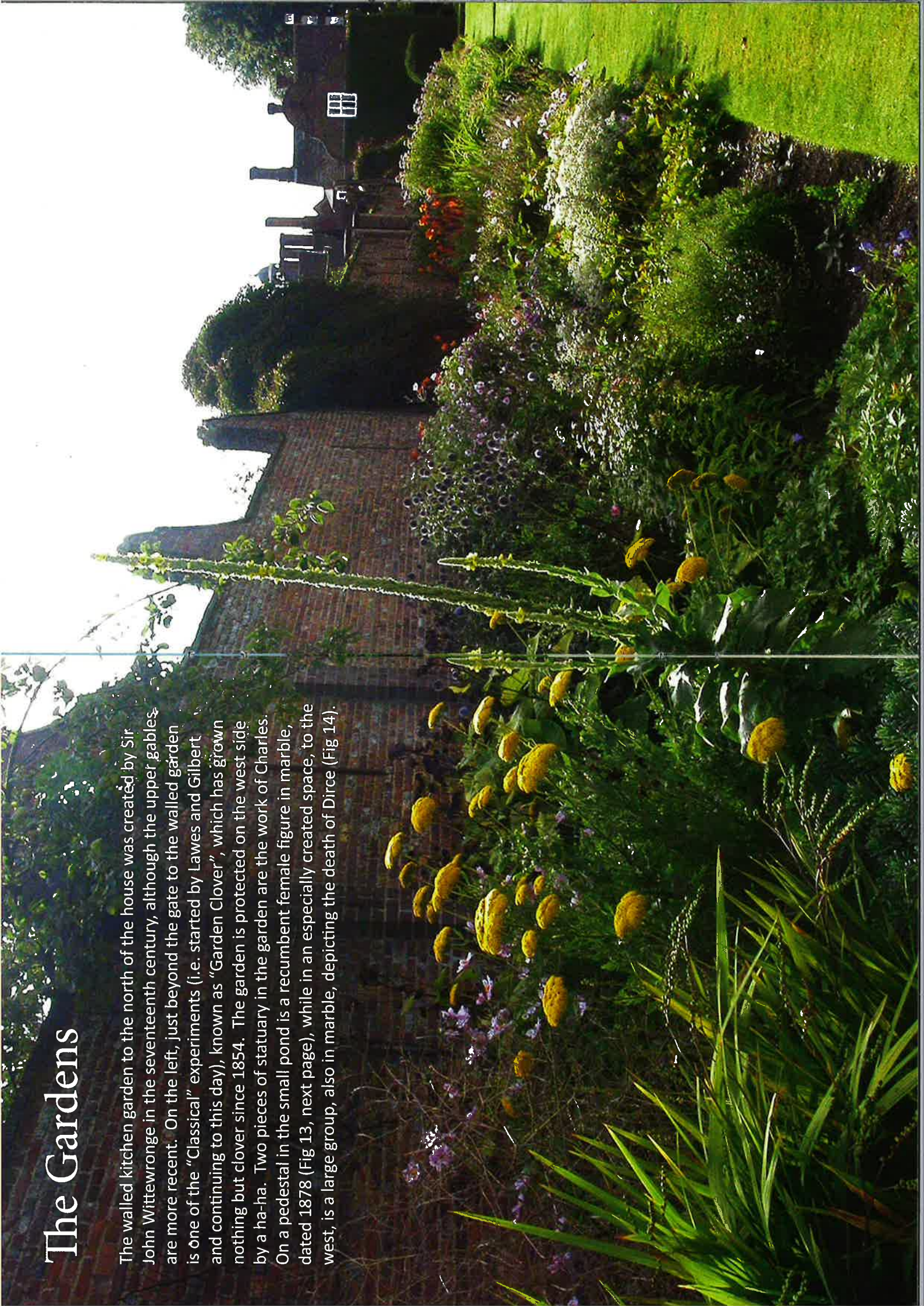
# Floorplan of Rothamsted Manor





# The Gardens

The walled kitchen garden to the north of the house was created by Sir John Wittewronge in the seventeenth century, although the upper gables are more recent. On the left, just beyond the gate to the walled garden is one of the "Classical" experiments (i.e. started by Lawes and Gilbert and continuing to this day), known as "Garden Clover", which has grown nothing but clover since 1854. The garden is protected on the west side by a ha-ha. Two pieces of statuary in the garden are the work of Charles. On a pedestal in the small pond is a recumbent female figure in marble, dated 1878 (Fig 13, next page), while in an especially created space, to the west, is a large group, also in marble, depicting the death of Dirce (Fig 14).





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Rothamsted Manor and Gardens were bought from the Lawes-Wittwronge family in the 1930s after public subscription raised the required £35,000 in seven weeks. The house was at first let, but during WWII it was requisitioned for the use of the military and became a listening post, recording and feeding messages to Bletchley Park for decoding. After the war it was converted into accommodation for staff and visitors to Rothamsted and this use continues.



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