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'To Preserve his Inward Peace': Sir John
Wittewronge's *Discourse* of 1664

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Among the family and estate collections in Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (HALS) at County Hall at Hertford is that of the Lawes Wittewronge family of Rothamsted near Harpenden. It is an extensive collection and includes letters and papers of the Wittewronge family from the 17th and 18th centuries. Two of these are of particular interest, as they describe the Flemish background of Sir John Wittewronge (1618–93), the first of that family to live at Rothamsted, now renowned as an international centre of agricultural research.¹

In the second half of the 17th century, Sir John Wittewronge was lord of the manor of Rothamsted and was to all appearances an English country squire. He had acquired the Rothamsted estate, manor house, and garden on his majority in 1639, altered the house to his own liking, had a large family, and played a part both in the English Civil War and in local affairs. However, his background was not English for his father had been born in Ghent and his mother in Antwerp.

His grandfather, Jacques Wittewronghele (1531–93), was a notary public who left Ghent for England in 1564 with his wife, Marie, and two sons, Abraham and Jacob. He came to escape religious persecution, shortly before the first revolt of the Netherlands against Philip II of Spain and a little before the first significant influx of refugees to England. As Giacomo Wittewrongel he is listed among the members of the Italian Protestant Church in London. This Church had a number of Dutch members at the time, mainly from the Southern Netherlands, possibly because of differences in the government of the Dutch Church in London.²

¹ The manuscript copies of the narrative and the letter about the Vanaker family are the property of Hertfordshire County Council and are kept by Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (HALS). Their references are HALS D/ELw/Z21 and D/ELw/F28. They are reproduced by the kind permission of the County Archivist. They are part of the Lawes family archives, which were at Rothamsted Manor until they were deposited with Hertfordshire County Council by Sir John Lawes (4th Baronet) and the Lawes Agricultural Trust in the 1960s. This deposit was converted to a gift in 1979. More information is available from website www.hertsdirect.org/hals

² Information from *Unity in Multiforimity*; the minutes of the Coetus of London 1575 and the Consistory Minutes of the Italian Church of London, 1570–1591, *Huguenot Society* Volume LIX, 1997 editors O Boersma and AJ Jelsma.



Figure 7a Jacques Wittewronghe in 1574 © Rothamsted Research

Jacques prospered (Figure 7a) and his son Jacob (1558–1622) was granted letters of denization in 1582 and became a successful brewer and prosperous second generation immigrant.³ He was an elder of the Dutch church in London and both his wives had connections with the Low

³ HALS D/ELw/F3.

Countries. In 1594, he was living in Dowgate Court with his mother Mary and sister Susan, according to a list of members of the Dutch Church, and he is also included in lists of church members contributing to the education of the younger members of the community.⁴ He obtained a mortgage on Rothamsted manor house and estate in 1611 and, in 1623, his widow Anne bought the property outright on behalf of her infant son John. She had married Sir Thomas Myddelton, a former Lord Mayor of London who had extensive trading connections with the Low Countries and had lived in Antwerp, and whose association with the Dutch church preceded his marriage to Anne.⁵ Her son was brought up in his stepfather's household and his first and second wives were Sir Thomas's granddaughters.

John Wittewronge came of age in 1639 and his account books show that he immediately started altering the house.⁶ His involvement in both county and national affairs interrupted this work. Charles I gave him a knighthood in 1640, but when the Civil War began two years later he joined the Parliamentary forces and was a member of the Grand Council of War for the Eastern Association. He was elected a Member of Parliament for Hertfordshire in 1654 (the first Parliament of Oliver Cromwell's Protectorate) although by 1656 he was part of the growing opposition to Cromwell. He received a royal pardon at the Restoration and was created a baronet shortly afterwards. He built a large mansion for his eldest son at Stantonbury in Buckinghamshire in 1665–6 and continued to take part in local affairs. He died at Rothamsted in 1693.

In 1664, the centenary of his grandfather's arrival in England, Sir John Wittewronge wrote a *Discourse touching their Auncestors* for his 'beloved sonnes' and 'deare daughters' in which he describes his grandfather as 'the first of our family that was an inhabitant within this kingdom' and himself as the 'first native thereof'. Conscious of the value of his narrative, he also dedicated it 'to bee transmitted to posterity'. There are known to be two manuscript and one printed versions of the document.

Version 1 is the oldest and is a draft in Sir John's hand, with extensive crossings-out and insertions, especially in the early pages.⁷ It is on paper, 11 pages long, using one side of the paper only. It is 30 cm by 22 cm, in good condition, covered by an early 17th-century deed used as a wrapper and bound into a scrapbook with other 17th-century papers relating to the Wittewronge family. The scrapbook was compiled in the mid to late

⁴ Information from Moens collection in the Huguenot Library, T5.1 and T5.8. This collection (T5.1–12) includes notes and transcripts from the archives of the Dutch Church and may contain other information on the Wittewronge family.

⁵ See *Dutch Calvinists in early Stuart London: the Dutch Church in Austin Friars, 1603–1642* by Ole Peter Grells, Publications of the Sir Thomas Browne Institute, Leiden.

⁶ HALS D/ELw/F3.

⁷ HALS D/ELw/Z21/4.

19th century by Caroline, the wife of Sir John Wittewronge's direct descendant, Sir John Lawes.

Version 2 is loose in the same scrapbook.⁸ It is on paper and is 13 pages long, with a preliminary dedication or title page and an additional note on a final page. Again, one side of the paper is used; it is 31 cm by 19 cm and in good condition. From the handwriting, it probably dates from the first half of the 18th century.

Version 3 is printed in the "*History and Antiquities of the County of Hertford*", by Robert Clutterbuck.⁹

The three versions are not identical. Versions 2 and 3 both include some of the alterations, additions, and marginal notes in Version 1 but not always the same ones. It seems that Version 1 was copied at least twice, once by someone unknown for the 18th-century version and once by Clutterbuck for his *History*. As Sir John wrote it for his six surviving children, there were probably several 17th-century copies made, which may have been transcribed by later generations. The transcript printed here is from Versions 2 and 3, with any informative additions and alterations from Version 1 added as indicated.

THE WITTEWRONGE DISCOURSE

To my three beloved sonnes, John James and William (Wittewronge), as also to my deare daughters, Katherin, Anne, and Hellen; for whose satisfaction (as well as information) I tooke the paines to compose the followeing discourse, touchinge their auncestors, I dedicate the same, to bee transmitted to posterity.

Soli Deo gloria.
JOHN WITTEWRONGE.

It is this present yeare, 1664, one hundred yeares agoe, since my grandfather came into England, who was the first of our family that was an inhabitant within this kingdom, as I am the first native thereof, my father being brought over by his parents a child under seven years of age. And since it hath pleased Almighty God to bless mee (who was the only surviving son of my father)^a with three sonns,

⁸HALS D/ELw/Z21/2.

⁹The *History and Antiquities of the County of Hertford* by Robert Clutterbuck, Volume 1, 1815.

^aVersion 1 has "male of our family" which has a slightly different meaning.

to keepe our name alive, I have thought fitt to make you, and the rest of my deare children, this ensuing narrative; wherein I shall briefly informe you, both with the occasion of my auncestors leaveing Flaunders (their native country), and of their comeing into this island of Greate Brittain; wherein, I suppose, are severall particulars which may bee of some use (at least of much satisfaction) to you to be acquainted with.

Knowe, that my grandfather, whose christian name was Jaques, (the same we call James, the Latines Jacobus,) was borne in the then flourishing, but since much decayed, city of Gaunt (the metropolis of Flaunders), in the yeare of Grace 1531 or 1532 (as I collect by his picture, where his age is sett.^b What was his father's name, or of ought else concerning his lineage and descent, I cannot give any certaine particular account; not because he was of meane and obscure parentage, for I may speak it without vanity, that he came from an honourable stock, of such as there are tearmed Edel (that is, gentle or nobleman) but it pleased Almighty God to give my Grandfather but one sonne to sirvive him so my father has being taken out of this world when I was an Infant, I have had little or no meanes to attaine any distinct and true knowledge of thinges touching my progenitors, but what I have^c found or caused to bee searched out of recordes; by which I find that my name and family hath been of auncient standing in the Lower Germany, being reckoned in the number of the noble families of those Provinces, as a certificate which I have, under the hands and seales of the two kinges of armes of Artois and Hainault doth sufficiently justify and attest; wherein is depicted the coat of armes belonging to our family, being the same that left mee with a seale-ring by my father.

I shall therefore begin my discourse with the occasion of my grandfather his coming over and settling himselfe heere in England. You shall, therefore, understand, that it pleased Almighty God, in infinite mercy, to open his eyes to see, and his heart to embrace, the saveing truthes of the Gospel of our blessed Lord and Saviour Christ Jesus, as it had binn, not long before the time of his birth, restored in a good measure to its primitive purity, (by the powerfull and successfull preachings of Luther, Swinglius, Calvin, and severall other eminent servants of God in those transmarine parts,) and reformed from the gross errors of superstition and popery, whereby it had (for many ages) been eclipsed; soe that hee became a Protestant, and of that persuasion which, for distinction sake, is commonly called Calvinist. How long hee had been of that profession before his arrivall into

^bVersion 1: "But my father diing when I was an infant, and my unckl - -".

^cVersion 1: "collected out of some letters & papers I have found of my fathers & have".

Britaine, I knowe not; but that, in the yeare of our Lord 1564, he forsooke his native countrey, relations, friends, and estate, (which hee wholly lost saveing only a few moveables and reddey money) upon the accounte hereafter mentioned, I have good grounds to assert.

It was in the yeare of Grace 1559 that Phillip the second of that name, (King of Spaine and Prince of the Seventeen Provinces of the Netherlands, sonne and successor to Charles the Fifth, (Emperour of Germany,) departed out of the Low Countreyes into Spaine, having first committed the Governement of those countreyes unto his naturall sister Margarett Duchesse of Parma; who, before his departure, did, (History of the Wars of Flaunders, by Cardinall Bentivoglio, pp. 9, 10,) in a sett and solemne speach, command unto her care the execution of those edicts made by himselfe and his father agaynst the hereticks (as hee was pleased to terme those of the true religion), straitly charging her, that they should bee inviolably executed; and, withall, declaring his resolution to introduce and settle the Inquisition into those his Dominions; which severe injunctions of his were, within a few yeares, too rigorously put in execution accordingly, in soe much as an impartiall author, (Bentivoglio, p. 4,)^d at least in this particular, affirmeth it occasioned imprisonments, exiles, confiscations of goods, and even death itselfe, to many of the inhabitants.^e Yea, soe furiously and imprudently zealous was the King, to roote out the profession with the professors of the reformed religion, that, being tould by one of his greate officers how prejudiciall it might prove to him, to proceed with such violence, and representing unto him the danger that he might thereby run into of lozeing either all or many of those provinces (Bentivoglio, p. 8.) that he replied "hee would rather be without kingdomes then enjoy them with heresy." And it seemeth these cruell proceedings, against them of the religion, was noe new thing, but a premeditated designe, mutually engaged in by the said Philip and Henry, King of France; which Henry had a good while before discoursed with William prince of Aurange, on a time as they weere hunting together, whilst the sayde Prince was a hostage to the French king (Famianus Strada de bello Belgico, p. 46.) who tould him, that it was resolved by himselfe and the King of Spaine, that they would destroy all the families of the new religion (as they would call it), which hee was to doe in France and Phillip in the Low

^d Bentivoglio, Cardinal Guido; Histoire de la Guerre de Flandre, De Famianus Strada, Paris 1652.

^e Version 1: "which was in perpetration(?) of his blouddy commandes to the governers by his letter written to her afterwards that hee would have the Anabaptists, etc. (Famianus Strada pag 96)".

Countreyes.^f Which blouddy purpose King Phillip was soe zealous and industrious to accomplish, that (as Strada p. 83, affirmes) hee had gotten catalogues of their names, soe exactly taken as that every one's condition, neighbourhood, age, and stature, was therein to the life described.

What conclusion these inhumaine and barbarous premises had, the same author tells us, saying, "and now the hereticks weere caryed to prison and put to death," &c.

It was in this hott time of persecution that my grandfather left his Countrey to enjoy his conscience, and made shipwrack of his outward estate to preserve his inward peace. Wherefore, Engeland being lately restored into the free exercise of the true religion (by the coming of the glorious and blessed Queene Elizabeth to the Crowne), hee made an escape over hither with his wife and two young children, viz. my father and my unckle Abraham, (who was afterwards father to my Coson Mary Paggon) and settled his abode in London; where, by the blessing of the Almighty, upon his owne industry, having taken upon him the employment of a publick notary, and that pittance of his estate that hee had, as it weere, snatched out of the fyer, he made a shift to live comfortably, untill in or about the year of our lord 1593; when it pleased God to take him out of this vale of misery unto Himselfe, when (as I have Scripturall ground to hope and believe) hee found our blessed Saviour's (Mark x. v. 29,30^g) promise made good to him, in the spirituall and better part thereof, as hee hath been grateously pleased since to make it abundantly good in temporalls to us his posterity. I shall only add, concerning him, that for person, as in his picture, drawne anno 1574, represents him, he seems to have bin a lusty sanguine man withall, and somewhat fatt and burly: for his education, it was certainly liberall and ingenuous, as by one of his letters (in my custody), written in Latine, to my father, then a student at Oxford, and dated July 13th, 1576, it may sufficiently appeare; whereby, you understand his promptnes in the German, French, Spanish, and Italian tongues. Hee left my grandmother (whose name was Mary) alive at his death, who survived him about a yeare, for I find shee dyed in the yeare of Grace 1595.

^f Version 1: "and the same author afterwards reports he wrote to the governers that hee would have the Heriticks, etc."

^g "And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life."

Hee had by his wife Mary (as I collect from a paper written with his owne hand) nine children, viz. four sonnes, whose Christian names were Jacob, Abraham, Marcus, and William; whereof the two eldest were borne in Gaunt, the two younger in London; and five daughters, viz. Christiane (who was borne and buried at Gaunt), Sara, Mary, Sara the 2d, and Susanna, borne in London: all which, except my father, my unckle Abraham, and my aunt Susan, (who was maryed with Mr. Peter Lennarts, sen.) dyed either single persons, or, if ever marryed, left no issue, as ever I heard of.

My father, whose Christian name was Jacob, was borne in Gaunt, on the 16th day of January, 1558, (vide my grandfather's Notes,) whome my grandefather brought with him into England as is before mentioned. And, it being my grandfather's desire to breed him a scholler, hee was sent, in order thereunto, to St. Alban's to schoole, to bee instructed in learneing in the freechoole there, whereof at that time one Helicomius¹⁰ (by nation a Brabander, and soe my grandfather his countreyman) was praeceptor; a man of great esteeme for his abilityes for that imployment, as may be collected from his epitaph, in Latine verse, in the chauncell of the Abby Church, yett to bee scene. Heere my father continued until 1576, about which time hee went to Oxford, and was student in Magdalen collegde there, of which one Dr. Humphreys, a person that (it seemes) was a Maecenas of his age, was then president.

How it came to pass that my father did not prosecute his studdyes, but shortly after left the University, and betooke himselfe to another course of life, I cannot tell; but it seems the providence of God had otherways determined concerning him; for, it appeares that within a few yeares after, he marryed with one Susanna Tielman, the daughter and heyre of Bernard Tielman, a German gentleman, by whom he gained a considerable fortune; some in Engeland (of which the howse and land at Walthamstow, which my father gave my half-sister Mary, the wife of Peter Lennarts, jun. was part), and some in Germany, which (if I mistake not) lay in the Dukedome of Cleve, which my father sould; Afterwards, having binn brought up to noe callinge, and (in that regard) not knowing which way to imploy that fortune which, by God's blessing, he had attained unto, it pleased God to bring him to the acquaintance of one Matthias Otton, at that time a brewer in London, with whome hee became partner, and, withall, contracted soe great a friendship, that there happened, afterwards, a double mach between their families, two of the said Mr. Otton his sonnes marryng with two of my father's daughters.

¹⁰ John Thomas Hylocomius is referred to in *Foreign Refugees and English Schools* by Foster Watson, Huguenot Society Proceedings volume ix, 1909-10.

After some yeares of compartnership, (my father having purchased severall houses and tenements in a part of the city called Grantham-lane,) hee pulled them to the ground; and, in their place, erected (to his great charge) a faire new brew-house and severall tenements together with a mansion-house thereunto adjoyning, where he lived many yeares, exercizeinge that callinge by himselfe; and, by the blessing of God, attained unto a very considerable estate, which may bee the less wondered at, considering the paucity of those that in those dayes exercised that mistrey within the city, in comparison of the number of them now. And I have heard from my mother, that my father for many yeares cleared at least one thousand pounds, and over and above all disbursements, which was the more in regard of the great charge of his howsekeeping, which, in my mother's time, was soe much that three quarters of beefe, besides other meat, was spent weekly in the house. It having pleased God to take his first wife out of this world, hee marryed for his second my mother, whose name was Anna, the daughter of Monsieur Garrard Van-Acker, on Tuesday the 3d day of May, 1614, which is just 50 yeares since this very day on which I am writing this narrative. My father continued in London about five yeares after his marriage with her, viz. until the yeare of Grace 1619, when being (as it seemes) desirous to lead a more private life, hee retired to a house which hee had, a little before, purchased at Westham in Essex, where he lived untill the 22d day of July, anno 1622, when it pleased Almighty God to take him to himselfe, after hee had a long time conflicted with a sore tedious fitt of the gout, (with which malady he was much afflicted,) which brought him to his end. Hee was buried in the church of Westham aforesaide," and on his grave is laid a faire stone, on which the epitaph ensuing is given:

Jac. Wittewrongio Jac. F. Flandro summo
iam pietatis quam doctrinae cultori;
Insigni verbi ministrorum fautori; doctorum
Virorum estimatori; studiosae juventutis
Maecenati; bono ecclesiae nato, ejusdemque malo
denato (cujus animam coelum, membra solum,
Orbis famam, filius nomen tenent)
Ad Gloriam resurrecturo
H. M. P. conjux.
Obiit quinto die Julii, ingressus annum
Sexagesimum quartum M.D.CXXII.

To Jacob Wittewronge, son of Jacques of Flanders; a pre-eminent cultivator both of piety and learning; an outstanding supporter of ministers of the word; one who valued erudite men; a Maecenas to studious youth; happily born into the

church; sadly died in the same; (Heaven holds his soul, the earth holds his body, the world holds his fame and his son holds his name); his wife placed this monument to him, who will be resurrected to glory.

He died on the 5th day of July at the beginning of his 64th year, 1622.

My father was, for person, a tall slender man, faire of complexion; and what manner of man he was, in his elder time, may be seene by his picture, which my mother affirmed to have been very like him.

Hee had by his former wife several children; I find the names of these hereafter mentioned, viz. two sonnes, both (after his owne and father's name) called Jacob, and one daughter named Elisabeth, all which dyed before himselfe. He had three daughters more by the same wife, the eldest of which was Elisabeth, who married with Mr. Mathias Otton, eldest sonne of Mr. Mathias Otton before mentioned; as the youngest, named Susan, was marryed with John Otton the younger sonne of the sayd Mathias Otton: the middlemost daughter Mary was married (as is before mentioned), with Mr. Peter Lennarts the younger.

By his second wife Ann (who was my mother), my father had two children, viz. my sister Anne, who was borne in November 1616, and dyed when shee was about a yeare and ? old, and my selfe.

And thus I have deduced my discourse to my own time, where I might putt a period to it (my designe therein being principally to give an account to posterity, of such thinges, touching my auncesters, as are quite out of ken, and which, without this helpe, had probably been buried in oblivion); yett, since it may not bee alltogether unusefull to say something relating to my selfe, and cannot be unacceptable to write something more in reference to my mother, especially in regard to her marriage with your auncestor by your mother's side; I shall briefly lett you know, that my mother was borne in the noble city of Antwerpe, the principall of Brabante, and was the youngest daughter of Mr. Garrard Van Acker before mentioned, who was then a merchant in that city, whose progenitors, being of French extraction, had changed their name of Champaigne (at their settling in the Low Countreys), into that of Van Acker, being of the same signification in the Dutch tongue, and in English is as much as Field, or of the Field. My mother's father, who was also of the reformed religion, having left his country, in the beginning of the troubles, to enjoy his conscience, came over into England, where, for some time, he sojourned, but returned again afterwards into those provinces that had revolted from Spaine, and ended his life in the city of Rotterdam in Holland anno 1602.

My mother, after his death, came into Engeland, and lived with her eldest sister, who was marryed to Mr. Segar Corsellis, a

marchant, liveing in Love Lane in London (who was father to my cosen Nicholas Corsellis liveing at this time in his father's house), where the providence of God bringing my father acquainted with her, hee marryed her as I have before related. Shee was his wife eight yeares and neare three monthes, after whose death shee continued a widdowe untill when shee marryed with her second husband Sir Thomas Myddelton, knt. and alderman of London, a person who for his wisdom, justice, and good government, (both in the time of his maority and afterwards,) is untill this day of famous memory in that noble citty. Sir Thomas Myddelton, my father-in-law, diinge the beginnige of August 1631, left my mother a widdowe the second time; in whome hee allsoe had soe greate confidence, that hee left her sole executrix of his last will and testament. Shee continued his widdowe till her death, which was on the seventh day of January 1646, haveing a long time binn sick of a dropsy, and layen by it from the Michaelmas before, in all which time, shee stirred but little out of her chamber. She lyeth buried in my vault in Harpenden church.

Haveing finished what I intend concerning my auncesters, I come to my selfe. Know then, that I was borne at my father's house in Allhallow's parish, London, in the month of October 1618, the precize day I know not, but that it was in that month, I may presume, because I was baptised the 1st day of November following, in the Dutch church, whereof my father was at that time both a member and an elder.

My owne father dying when I was under four yeares of age, and my mother marryeing with Sir Thomas Myddelton (as I have before related), my education was wholly under him, who (like a worthy person) gave mee the same breeding as if I had been his owne child; and I cannott (without a huge deale of ingratitude) but acknowledge his care of mee was such, that it resembled more an owne father's then a father-in-law; and I shall neede to name but one instance of his affection, which was his earnest desire to match mee into his owne blood, viz. to a grandchild of his, by his eldest sonne; and I was accordingly marryed when wee came to maturity of age, and long after his decease, to the second daughter of Sir Thomas Myddelton, of Chirck Castle, in the county of Denbigh, knt. Her name was Mary; we were marryed on the 30th day of December 1638, being the Lord's day, in the chappell of the castle. By her, I had my eldest son John, who was borne in London on Tuesday the 18th of February, 1639/40, about 9 o'clock in the forenoone; but it pleased Almighty God to deprive mee of the comfort of that relation, very quickly, my wife dying (of the small Pox), on Satterday night, aboute 11 o'clock, being Easter eve and the 4th of April following. Shee was a person, who. for her many excellent virtues, more particularly her singular piety and learning, her judiciousnes in, and studiousnes about the

best things, that left not many equalls behinde her, and dyed justly lamented of all that knew her. She lyeth buried in the church of Westham, in the same grave with my father.

I was not much above one and twenty yeares of age at her death; and, being resolved to enter into a marryed condition againe, I tooke unto my second wife a cosen-german of my former, viz. Elizabeth, the second daughter of Timothy Myddelton, of Stansted Mountfitchet, in the county of Essex, esq. (who was allsoe the second sonne of ould Sir Thomas Myddelton, my mother's husband, and brother, by the father's side, to Sir Thomas Myddelton, of Chirck Castle aforesayd). We weere marryed on Wednesday the 23d of June, 1641^h, at Stansted-hall. By this second venter, I have had three sonnes, viz. Jacob, James, and William. Jacob, my eldest, was borne in London on Satterday the 7th of December, 1644; he lived but until the 6th or 7th of March, 1645/6, when he dyed at Rothamsted, and lyeth buried in my vault in Harpenden church.

My second sonne James was borne in Coven Garden parish, London, on the 13th of June, 1647, being the Lord's day, about six o'clock in the afternoone, and was baptized on the 22d of the same month. My third and youngest sonne William was allsoe borne in Coven Garden on Wednesday, being the 1st of November, 1648, about four in the morning, after which I enjoyed my wife not a twelvemonth; for shee dyed of a violent feaver on the 6th of October, 1649, at Rothamsted, being Satterday, betweene twelve and one o'clock at noone, whereby I was the second time rendered a most disconsolate widdower, as I had reason for the loss of so virtuous and discreete a consort: Shee lyeth buried, in my vault at Harpenden, by my mother and her eldest sonne.

After the death of my second wife, I tooke to my third, Katharin, the eldest daughter of Mr. Maurice Thomson, of London, marchant, to whome I was marryed on Thursday, July 4th, 1650, at her father's house in Stepney parish. By this, my third wife, I have had my three daughters, viz. Katharine, Anne, and Hellen; my eldest daughter, Katharin, was born at her grandfather's house, then in Bishopsgate-streete, London, on Monday, being the 19th day of Aprill, 1652, between ten and eleven of the clock in the forenoone, and was baptized on the 6th day of May following. My second daughter, Anne, was born at Rothamsted, on Monday February 13th, 1656/7, a little before two of the clock, afternoone, and was baptized in Harpenden Church, on the 29th of March following, 1657, being the Lord's Day. My third and youngest daughter, Hellen, was allso borne at Rothamsted, on Wednesday, being the 17th of November, 1658,

^hVersion 3: "1642".

about a quarter and half past tenn at night, and was baptized on Thursday, the 9th of December following; after whose birth, those fitts of the mother, which my dear wife had bin sorely afflicted withall, for severall yeares past, grew stronger upon her, and, in the spring following, seized upon her with soe much violence that it brought a feaver, accompanied with distraction for want of rest; which, with the loss of much blood, taken away by the order of her physitians, brought her soe weake, that, on the 10th day of her sicknes, which was allsoe the tenth of the month of Aprill, 1659, shee departed this mortall life about 12 o'clock at night, being the Lord's Day, and lyeth buried in my vault at Harpenden, by my mother and my second wife, leaveing mee againe a most sad widdower for the loss of a wife who was not less dearly affected by mee then eyther of my former.

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Figure 7b Sir John Wittewronge in 1669 © Rothamsted Research

Sir John was also interested in his mother's family. Towards the end of his life and on the reverse of a letter from his son, he wrote the following, which appears to be a reply to a question from his son James about their background and on which James has written 'my father's account of our relation to Cousin Vanacker etc'. It is a paper document, damaged on the right hand edge and rather fragile. The complete paper is 39 by 27 cm; the text is written below a fold and is 25 by 27 cm. Some words have been struck through in the original and this is indicated.

JOHN WITTEWRONGE'S LETTER ABOUT HIS MOTHER'S FAMILY

Decemb. 5th 1690

Son James, all the account I can give you, concerning that you askt mee of the other day in relation to the family of Vanacker is this, that my Mother was a daughter of that family, & she has at severall times tould mee something of her discent, which is as followes, viz

That her Fathers name was Garrard Vanacker, that ~~he was descended from~~ his family within a few discents before were French & their name Champaine which ~~came out of~~ transplanting themselves out of France into the Low Countryes they changed ~~their name~~ into Vanacker which is as much of the same signification & in English ~~as much~~ as Feild (or of the Field) That they were all Catholicks, before her Father, but it pleasing Almighty God to open his hart ~~eyes to see~~ to embrace the reformed religion, about his time ~~newly~~ begun to be preached, hee left his native country which was Brabant, & came first into England, & after a short stay heer returned into the Low Countryes, & after the P of Orange had taken Holland & Zeeland, & revolted wholly from the K. of Spain, hee lived in Middleborough in Zeeland, where hee dyed. My Grandfather had severall children, of ~~which my~~ how many Sons I doe not well remember, but there were 3 daughters of which my Mother was the youngest. The eldest daughter whose name was Josina was married to Mr Zeagar Corsellis a Dutch Marchant living in Love Lane in London, & my Mother living with her soe became acquainted with my Father & from thence married him. I remember their lived an ancient Gentleman in London whose name was Van Jur [manuscript damaged and remainder of word indecipherable] my Mother called Cosen whom I have seen at his howse, & as I remember ~~his house~~ it was in Leadenhall Street; how near of kin he was to my Grandfather I know not & I knew a merchant in London some severall yeares ago whose name was Vanacker, and I have heard of 2 others of that name whom I do not know now living there. Al I shal ad is this that my Mother

severall times tould me that my Gr ~~was~~ [and another word struck through] lived in Antwerpe, & was a merchant in that Citty, being then a town of great trade, that hee was a capt. of the Citty bands, when the D. of Alanson [ie Alencon] with his frenchmen though to have sackt Antw. but was valliantly repulsed by the Citizens, in which Action my G; was shott through both his cheeks &c.'

This ends rather abruptly at the bottom of the page but no continuation has been found.

Sir John Wittewronge left the Rothamsted estate to James, his second son, a lawyer of Lincoln's Inn, and an estate at Stantonbury near Wolverton in Buckinghamshire to his eldest son John. Rothamsted remained in the possession of the Wittewronges until the death of James's great grandson Thomas in 1763, when it passed to his first cousin, John Bennet. Stantonbury passed from the second Sir John to his son and grandson and the latter sold it to Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, in 1727. The title became extinct with the death of Sir William Wittewronge in 1771. The name Wittewronge was revived for two generations at Rothamsted in the early 20th century by Sir Charles Lawes (1843-1911), who became Lawes-Wittewronge by royal warrant.

Rothamsted Manor still retains its Wittewronge heritage. The shields of Sohier Wittewronghele of Ghent and of Jan Wittewronghele and Marguerite van Coudenhove, also of Ghent, ancestors of Jacques Wittewronghele, as well as the arms of Ghent and Antwerp, are represented in early glass in the windows and there are portraits of Jacques, Jacob and John, and of some of their wives and children, in the Great Drawing Room.

Twenty years after he completed his discourse, Sir John wrote his 'Observations of Weather', a daily diary recording the weather and other matters at Rothamsted from January 1683/4 to March 1688/9¹¹ which forms an extraordinarily vivid record of some aspects of life in 17th-century Hertfordshire. It is contained in a notebook that also starts and finishes rather abruptly, leaving the reader with the intriguing thought that there might have been other similar diaries, now lost¹².

Sir John Wittewronge's direct descendant, John Bennet Lawes, inherited the Rothamsted estate in 1822 and began the agricultural experiments for which Rothamsted is now famous; he is considered by

¹¹ HALS D/ELw F19.

¹² MM Harcourt Williams and J Stevenson 'Observations of Weather' *The Weather Diary of Sir John Wittewronge of Rothamsted, 1688-1689*. Hertfordshire Record Society Publications, 15, Hertfordshire Record Society, 1999. There is a copy in the Huguenot Library.

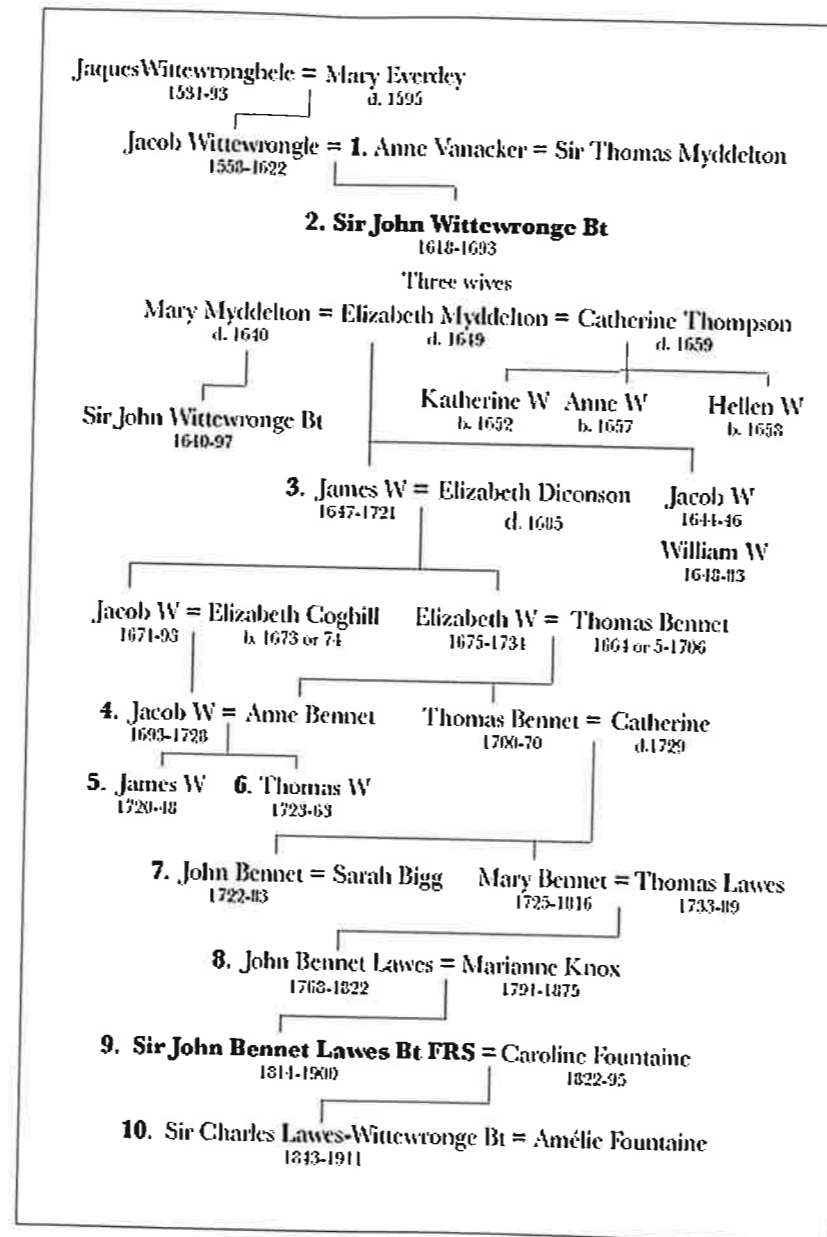


Figure 7c Sir John Wittewronge's descendants

many to have founded modern agricultural science. A Fellow of the Royal Society, he was created a baronet like his ancestor and he endowed and founded the Lawes Agricultural Trust, which bought the Rothamsted Manor and estate from the Lawes family in 1934. Figure 7c is a part of the Lawes-Wittewronge family tree, abstracted from the *Manor of Rothamsted*, and clarifies the relationships of the persons mentioned in the *Discourse*, as well as showing the continuation of the line through Sir John Bennet Lawes to his son Charles. Family members 1 to 10 both owned and resided at Rothamsted.¹³

The authors gratefully acknowledge the help of Professor Roger Plumb for valuable advice, Canon John Laird and Mr Robin Harcourt Williams for the translation of the Latin inscription in the Discourse, and Mr Tony Hansard for preparation of Figure 7c.

¹³ DH Boalch *The Manor of Rothamsted and its occupants*, 2nd edition revised by JM Carpenter and T Cawley, Harpenden, Rothamsted Experimental Station, 1978. There is a copy in the Huguenot Library.