



Rothamsted Manor



The house that we see today was built by the Wittewronge family after they purchased it in 1623. It is Jacobean in style. The Jacobean style is named after King James I of England, (1603–1625). At the start of his reign there was little stylistic break in architecture and Elizabethan trends continued. However, his death in 1625 came as a decisive change towards more classical architecture with strong Italian, Flemish, and German influences.

1. The chimneys are typical of those found in the 1600's. Chimneys were a sign of wealth; they represented how many fires the owners were able to afford. The ones here bear the date 1654.
2. Above the main door is the Wittewronge coat of arms and higher up is a plaque of the sun fire office which was added when the house was insured for £1000 in 1726.
3. Curvilinear gables were added by Sir John Wittewronge in the 1600's. These are often called 'Flemish' or 'Dutch' gables. The Wittewronge's were from Ghent in Belgium and they clearly wanted to replicate the style of architecture from their home.
4. The bell in the bell tower has the date 1650.
5. Extensions were added on both sides of the house in the 1600's, as were 'The arches' or the 'open loggia' on the west side (now The Orangery). This meant the house wasn't balanced, until a further extension was added in the 1900's to make the house symmetrical.



Welcome

Welcome to Rothamsted Manor, our grade I listed property hidden within the grounds of Rothamsted Research in Harpenden.

John Bennet Lawes was the founder of Rothamsted Experimental Station (now Rothamsted Research) and was born in this house on 28th December 1814. His ancestors built most of the Manor as we see it today in the 1600's. There is, however, a record of settlement on this site dating back as far as the 1200's.

The Manor has a rich and enormously significant history, and one which links directly to the agricultural research that takes place on our estate today. We are delighted to be able to share it with you.



Nicole Sadd
CEO, Rothamsted Enterprises



The Hall

The hall is the oldest part of the house with some of the original timbers visible in the ceiling.

The linenfold wooden panelling on the walls conceals murals dating back to the 1500's. These were discovered in the 1900's when old panelling was removed and replaced with the linenfold panelling visible today (which also dates to 1600's).

The glass in the windows is relatively modern (approx. 1900) and shows nine shields bearing the arms of England from 1189 to the present day.

The floor is oak boarding from 1862, but underneath there are flagstones from 1679.

Little is known about the furniture in the room, but the clock is notable because of who it belonged to. The clock belonged to Alderman William Brenchley who was the father of Dr Winifred Brenchley OBE (1883-1953), one of Rothamsted's most notable female scientists.



Lounge

Panelling is plain oak, again covering some extensive murals believed to depict the 1573 siege of Edinburgh Castle, and a series of animals representing vices.

The seventeenth century fireplace is Bedfordshire Clunch (soft limestone) and inlaid with black marble.

Above the fireplace is a still-life, a painting in oils on an oak panel lined with canvas by Tilman. Sir John Wittewronge purchased it for £2 in 1659.

The windows are designed to show the coats of arms of the owners of Rothamsted from the earliest recorded until 1623 when the Wittewronge's took ownership.

The ceiling beams are of moulded plaster ornamented with arabesques and vine pattern. The date of the plaster-work is controversial, it is unsure whether they are late sixteenth to early seventeenth century, and part may be first-class modern imitation.



Spanish Leather Room

This stunning room is one of the highlights of the Manor. The Spanish leather wall coverings, originating from the seventeenth century, were installed by Charles Bennet-Lawes in 1900. The style of painting is English.

The ornate overmantel is early 1600's and believed to have been bought in from elsewhere in the house. It is divided into 3 niches containing oil paintings: In the centre the arms of the Wittewronge family after Sir John was made a Baronet, and either side there are still life paintings. The gold and black carvings echo that on the chimney piece.

The moulded ceiling was put up in the 1800's.

The chimney piece is made of stone and is carved with arabesques with a flower and fruit pattern.

Sir John Bennet Lawes added a bay window to this room when he added the Great Drawing room, but it was removed by his son Charles in 1900.



Great Drawing Room

This room was added in 1864 by John Lawes to provide a space for the coming of age ball of his son Charles.

In 1900 Charles remodelled the room; he raised the ceiling, replaced the four Victorian windows, added modern panelling of rectangular design which he soon replaced again in 1906 with the present linenfold panelling.

The chandeliers and wall lights bearing the arms of Wittewronge and Bennet Lawes were secured by Sir John Russell (Director of Rothamsted Experimental Research Station) at the time of sale of the furniture of the house in 1936.

The overmantel bears the arms of Sir Charles Lawes-Wittewronge (he added Wittewronge to his name in later years) and the motto 'Pour la foi' which alludes to the flight of his ancestors from religious persecution in the low countries.

The windows depict the marriages of the family through the years.

Of the floor, Sir John Lawes wrote *'There was a floor for sale which had been used by the Marquis of Breadalbane when as Lord Chamberlain he gave a ball to Queen Victoria, and so, I purchased it'*.



Library

This room is Sir Charles's only structural addition to the house.

It was built in 1900 on the model of the library at Rawdon House in Hoddesdon which had shortly before been purchased to be converted into a convent.

Both the ceiling and doors which conceal bookcases were closely copied by architect V.T. Hodgson.

The fireplace is from 1622 and comes directly from Rawdon House.

The fireplace is seventeenth century work. Above the mantelshelf, which rests on supports carved in the likeness of satyrs, two niches, containing seated figures in high relief playing the harp, gong, cymbals and diaulos, are flanked by pillars around whose feet cherubs are executing a dance; and over all runs a sculptured frieze showing the sun centred between scenes containing men and dogs.

The history of the house and its inhabitants

1212

First recorded mention of Rothamsted (interpreted by the English Place-Name Society to mean 'The rooky homestead' from early mentions of 'Rochamstede' and 'Rokemstude'). Richard de Merston held a knight's fee here.

Henry Gubion owned the estate and granted it to Richard de Merston. The house was probably timber framed, and simple.

1292

The property was sold to the Nowell family.

1355

Property purchased by the Cressey family. It is believed that Ralph de Creci owed his name and fortune to distinguished services on the field in the famous Battle of Crecy in Northern France in 1346 during the Hundred Years War. The house stayed in the family until 1519 when Elisabeth Cressey, the only child and heir, married Edmund Bardolph.

1525

On the death of Elizabeth's father, ownership passed to her husband and therefore the Bardolph family.



1623

The family run into financial difficulties and sell the property to the Wittewronge family.

Anne Wittewronge purchases Rothamsted for her son John who is 5. He lives there with his mother and step father (Sir John Myddleton) who he is very fond of, and in 1638 he marries Mary (who is also his step-father's grand-daughter).

Who were the Wittewronge family?

They were a well-connected family from Ghent in Belgium. They escaped the religious persecution of protestants in the Netherlands and came to London in 1564. Jacques Wittewronge (1531 - 1593) portrait is in the drawing room. His son Jacob was schooled in St Albans and then Oxford University. Jacob entered the brewing trade and had a successful brew house in Grantham Lane, London. In 1614 he married Anne and had a son John in 1618 and a daughter in 1616. He died in 1622 and was very wealthy, hence why his widow was able to purchase Rothamsted for her son.

1639

John becomes Lord of the Manor of Rothamsted at 21 but continues to reside in London. His wife Mary dies in 1640, and in 1641 he is knighted by Charles I, marries his 2nd wife Elizabeth, and moves into the Manor permanently. He embarks on major rebuilding works, and he creates the house that we recognise today.

1693

Sir John dies and passes the estate to his son James. James is a lawyer whose first son Jacob is his heir. Jacob dies in 1693, but he already has a child on the way at the time of his death. Jacob (the younger) is born after his father's death. And so, when James dies, the estate goes directly to his grandson.

1721

Jacob inherits the estate. His diary reveals a love for country life and a very keen interest in the Rothamsted estate. He planted a vista of elms from the house to the lane at Christmas 1721 and in the following year fruit trees.

1728

Jacob dies and leaves Rothamsted to his son James who is 8 years old. James later marries Martha but they have no children.



1748

James dies, childless, at the age of 28 and passes Rothamsted to his brother Thomas who is high sheriff of Hertfordshire.

1763

Thomas dies unmarried and childless and is the last of the Wittewronge's. The estate now passes to John Bennet, his first cousin. John also dies, childless, in 1785.

1785

Rothamsted passes to John Bennet Lawes, John's nephew, but he allows John's widow to remain in the house until her death in 1801. On the death of his aunt he moves into the Manor. He marries and his son and heir is also named John Bennet Lawes.

1822

John Bennet Lawes is 8 years old when he inherits Rothamsted. His father had been friends with the Prince Regent and keeping up with the lavish lifestyle of his friend was costly and so the family move into Rothamsted Lodge.

1834

After studying at Oxford, John moves to Rothamsted Manor where he converts a room into a laboratory and manages the farm. By 1839 Lawes is decomposing bones, and mineral phosphates using acids. He creates a fertilizer he calls 'superphosphate of lime' and begins testing on plants. The results on turnips are striking. His family disapprove of him entering the trade, and believe he would be ruined. But in 1842 his patent was granted, and his fertilizer business expands rapidly.

1843

John Bennet Lawes appoints Joseph Henry Gilbert, a chemist, as his scientific collaborator and they plant the first of what were to become the classical Rothamsted long term experiments, on Broadbalk field. The scientific partnership between Lawes and Gilbert lasted 57 years, and together they laid the foundations of modern scientific agriculture and established the principles of crop nutrition.

1900

Sir John Bennet Lawes dies and passes the property to his son Charles. Charles is not interested in science and has no aptitude for business. He becomes an athlete, and later in life he is a sculptor. His work can be seen outside the Tate Britain. In 1902 Charles assumes the family name and arms of his ancestors, the Wittewronge's. He is also one of the founders of the Royal Society of British Sculptors.

1911

Sir Charles dies and his son in Australia does not return to the UK. The Manor is rented to the Sidebottom family for 30 years.

1931

Sir John Lawes - Wittewronge dies and the family decide to sell. Rothamsted Experimental Station launch an appeal for public funds.

1934

Rothamsted is purchased by the Lawes Agricultural Trust, but the Sidebottom's remain as tenants at the house until the start of war.

1939

Manor used by military during WWII. It is used as a listening post, recording and feeding messages to Bletchley Park for decoding.

1946

Rothamsted Research devise a plan to use the house as a Hall of Residence for staff and visiting scientists.

1953

Manor house is given listed status.