

# Maurice-Quentin de La Tour's family<sup>1</sup>

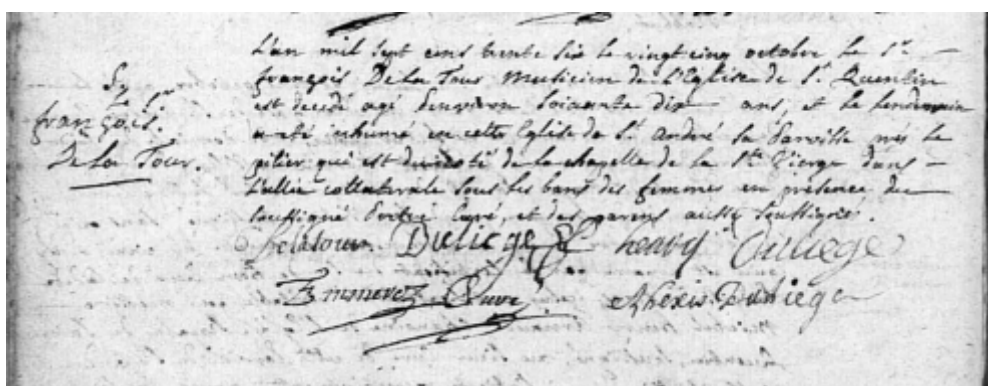
NEIL JEFFARES

ONE OF THE JOYS OF RESEARCHING a neglected field is how easy it can be to find things that are not already known. But the converse is that we are all inclined to think that the scholars before us have explored to the full the available biographical information about the big names – something which isn't always true.

La Tour, for example, who is so “big” in pastel that the published literature on him alone probably exceeds that on all the other French eighteenth-century pastellists put together, nevertheless has left quite a number of biographical puzzles despite the intensive industry from the early twentieth century pioneers to today. But the assumption that something has already been done always needs to be questioned.

You will find quite a number of new documents on my [chronological table](#), expanding significantly and correcting occasionally the standard work of Georges Wildenstein (“B&W”, 1928). To take a handful surrounding the pastellist's father, François de La Tour, first recorded (in 1694) as a “trompette au régiment des carabiniers de Mgr le duc du Maine”, but later employed as a musician in the Église royale de Saint-Quentin (now the Basilica), a church that preserved a very high musical standard. The celebrated Pierre du Mage, almost François's exact contemporary, was organist there at the time of the pastellist's birth : his [Livre d'orgue](#) gives you some idea of what music must have sounded like in Saint-Quentin.

An error in Maurice Tourneux's 1904 monograph implied that François died in 1731. This got into B&W and has persisted to this day, even appearing in the chronology to Xavier Salmon's 2004 exhibition catalogue. Yet in fact he died five years later (as Christine Debie knew):

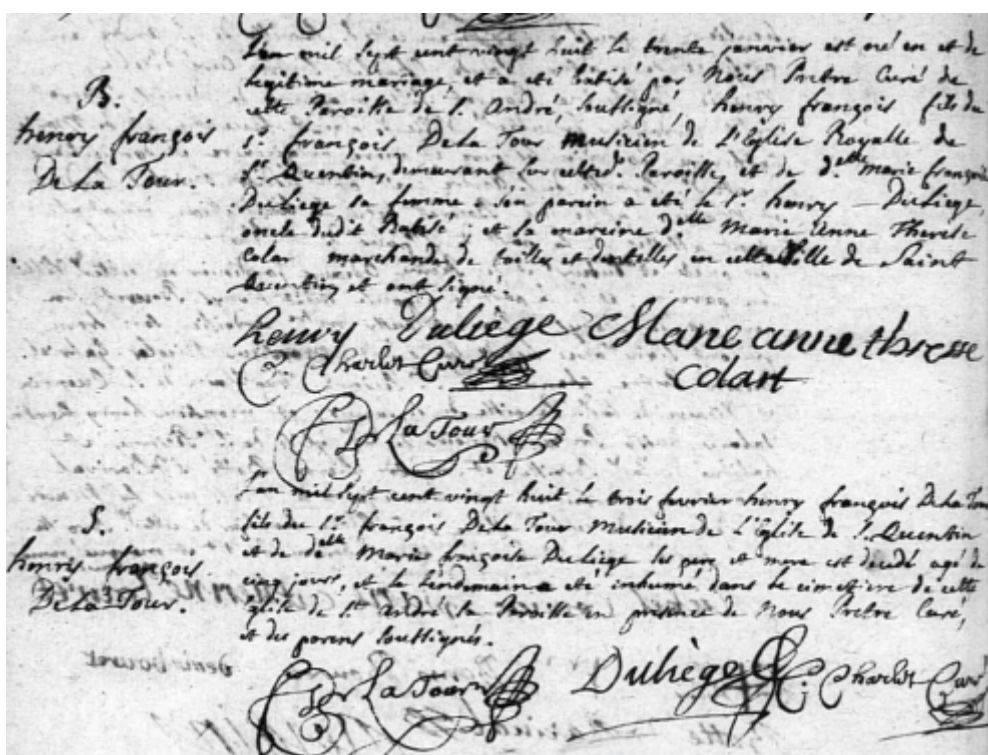


(You'll find transcriptions of all of these documents in my [chronological table](#)) Of more interest perhaps is some detail about his second marriage. Early sources tell us the correct date of birth for La Tour's half-brother Jean-François (although a different year continues to persist), but since the parish is omitted, few have bothered to check the document:

<sup>1</sup> This essay first appeared as four posts on my blog, “Minutiae about Maurice-Quentin de La Tour”, “Maurice-Quentin de La Tour's parents”, “Less about La Tour” and “Maurice-Quentin de La Tour's cousins”, [neiljeffares.wordpress.com](http://neiljeffares.wordpress.com), the first on 31 December 2014 and the others between 19 and 28 September 2016. It may be cited as Neil Jeffares, “Maurice-Quentin de La Tour's family”, *Pastels & pastellists*, [http://www.pastellists.com/Essays/LaTour\\_Family.pdf](http://www.pastellists.com/Essays/LaTour_Family.pdf), and is referred to within the Dictionary as Jeffares 2016j. An important update was issued in 2022.

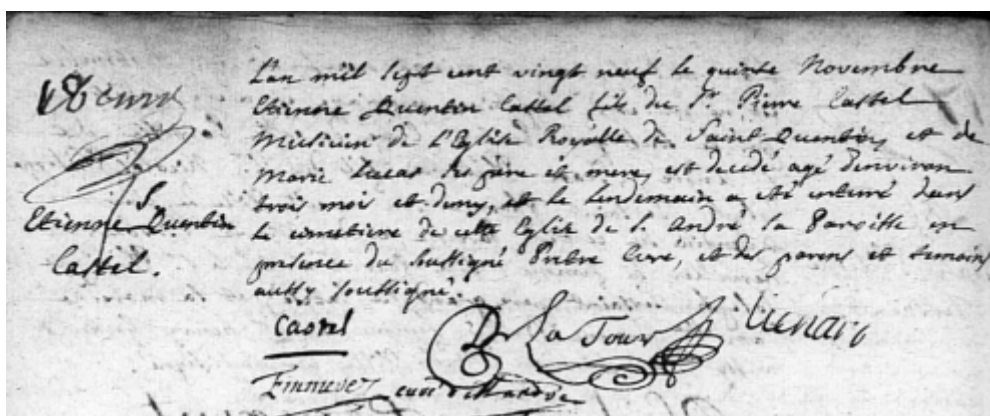


This provides us with an interesting fact which I believe has hitherto lain unreported, namely that Maurice's stepmother was the daughter of one of François's colleagues, another musician at the Église royale de Saint-Quentin. And similarly, although it may have seemed unimportant to previous scholars, there is an unreported third half-brother, Henry-François, who died five days after his birth (1728), as the immediately succeeding entry tells us.



Again details of the choice of godparents all help complete the picture of the household in which the pastellist grew up.

Of course infant mortality was a common problem. Here again is François, signing the register as witness to the death of the son of yet another colleague:

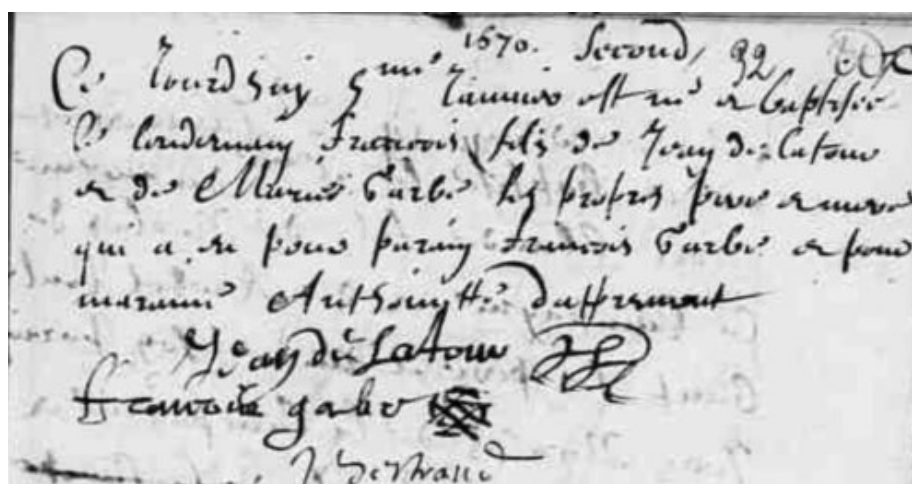


These brutal, apparently unimpassioned documents somehow manage to convey remarkably some of the emotions of those involved, and are tempered by the delight in seeing François's penmanship, and the evolution from the "Delatour" seen in some of the earlier documents to the aspirational "de La Tour" of his final years (not, we note, Maurice's invention, but his father's ambition) – decorated with the flourishes and arabesques that no doubt embellished his musical voluntaries.

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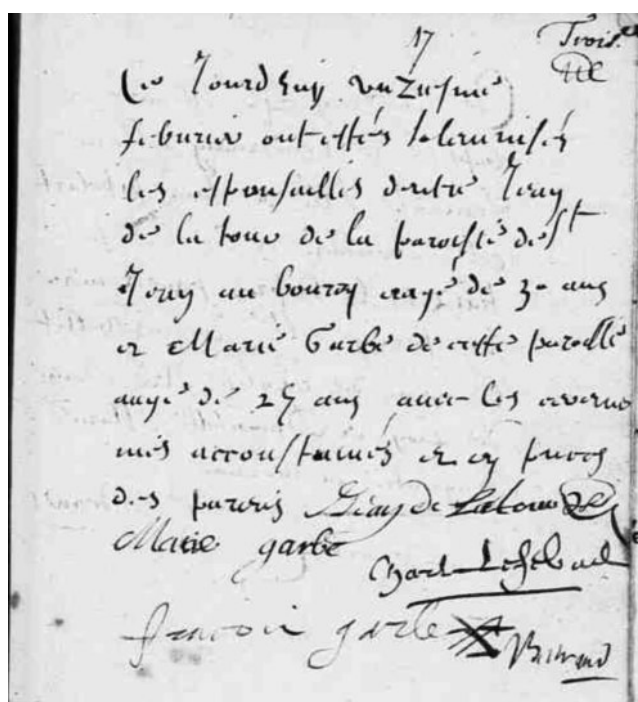
NEARLY TWO YEARS AGO I posted the [piece](#) above with some *trouvailles* concerning Maurice-Quentin de La Tour, introducing the [Chronological Table](#) on my website in which I am updating the table that was originally published by Georges Wildenstein and which forms the main structure of the text of Besnard & Wildenstein's 1928 monograph (apart from the catalogue). The format has always struck me as a particularly useful way to present complex, untidy information so that readers can find what they want. I have tried to show the extent of additions to the 1928 edition by printing the original text in Times New Roman and new material in Garamond (you can ignore the typeface quite easily if the progress of scholarship is of no interest).

Several important documents were still missing in 2014. Firstly, although we knew the dates of the birth of La Tour's father François and of his grandfather Jean's marriage to Marie Garbé, these came from Georges Grandin, former conservateur du musée de Laon, who omitted to tell us the parish for these documents or to provide transcriptions with the details that (occasionally) make such research illuminating. As it happens the parish was Saint-Michel, Laon, and you can find these recent additions in my revised table (which also has the dates, document codes etc.). François's baptism (Laon, Saint-Michel, 5 janvier 1670):



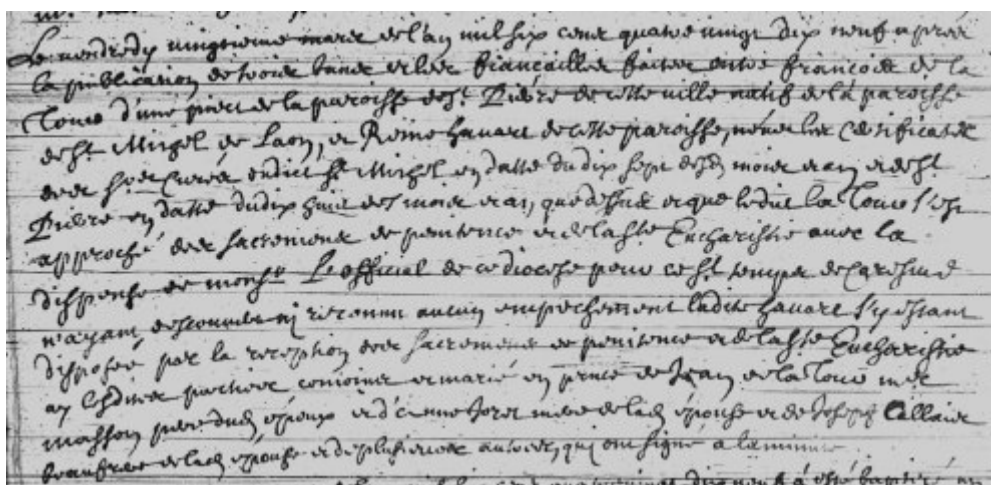


Jean de La Tour's marriage to Marie Garbé (Laon, Saint-Michel, 2 février 1669):



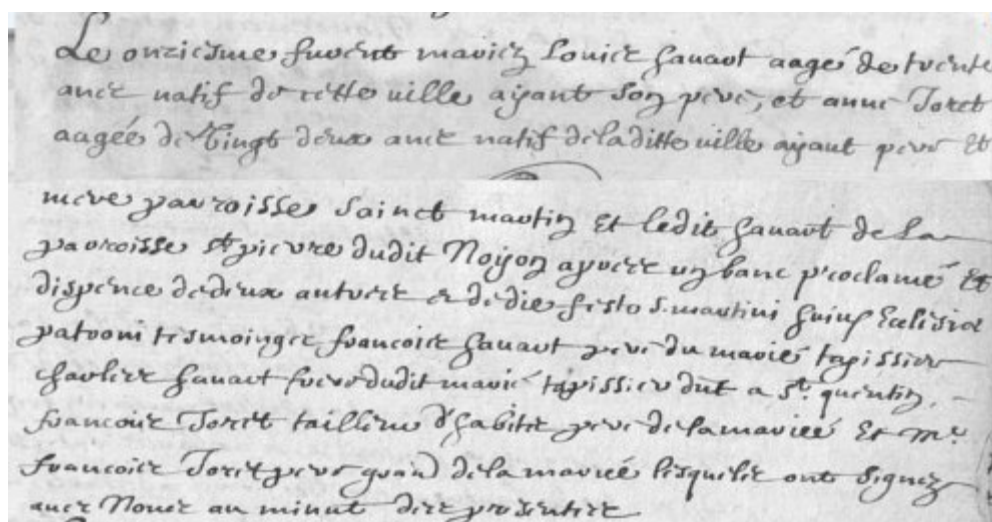
Incidentally proponents of the “Delatour” spelling will find no support here.

Grandin also searched in vain for documents relating to La Tour's mother, Reine Havart. He came up with a silly theory that she was the Reine-Françoise Havart, daughter of François Havart, avocat au parlement, gouverneur, maire perpétuel de Bus and Marie Cressonnier, who appeared in a 1691 document when she already had legal rights (and so could not have been born in 1673 as other documents suggested). In any case this is wrong ("Reine-Françoise" Havart even appeared in Debrie & Salmon 2000). Grandin, and all other researchers who (as far as I am aware) have been unable to take this further, were looking in the wrong place. Courtesy of Geneanet (where it has recently been indexed by Christophe de Mazancourt, to whom we should be most grateful), I found the key document – the marriage of François de La Tour and Reine Havart. It took place neither in Laon nor in Saint-Quentin, but in Noyon (parish of Saint-Germain) in 1699 (20 mars). Here it is:

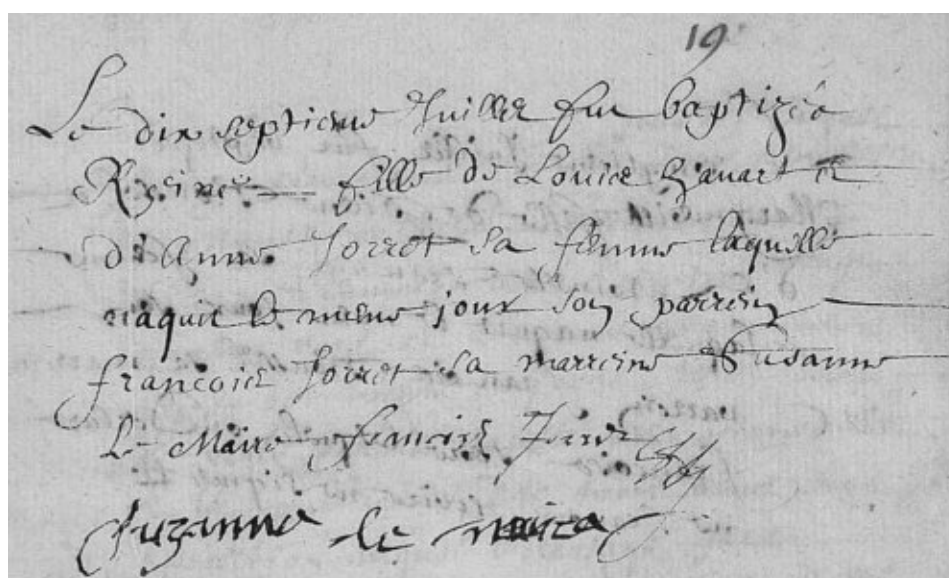


Again you will find the transcription in my [table](#). What emerges is that François de La Tour was living in Noyon, the town where Reine was born. Further searches, now knowing where to look

(what town at least: unfortunately there were a number of different parishes), elicited the parish register entries for the marriage of Reine's parents, Louis Havart and Anne Joret, in 1669 (11 novembre), this time in Saint-Martin de Noyon:



And for Reine's baptism, in 1673 (5 janvier) at Noyon, Saint-Hilaire:



From these we can establish a clear picture of Reine's background. Her father's family were tapissiers, while that of her mother, Anne Joret, were tailors. Hence we can see, for example, how Maurice-Quentin was related to the Raphaël Joret, tailleur, described as a cousin in his will, a statement which had mystified us until now (Anne's brother François Joret moved to Beaune and, despite having raised himself to the level of "grammarien, écrivain et arithméticien" married into another family of tailors called Terrion; their son Raphaël stuck to the trade). From Reine's parents' marriage we see that she had an uncle, also a tapissier, who lived in Saint-Quentin. While barely legible, his name is Charles; and he was evidently the godfather of the pastellist's brother Charles, baptised at Saint-Quentin (Saint-Jacques) 14 avril 1702.

All three towns were not far apart (about 50 km) by today's standards, but distant enough for the connection to be possibly significant. Noyon also perhaps provides a clue to another puzzle. The pastellist's own baptismal entry is well known (the Goncourts printed the transcription first

provided by Desmaze; it was reprinted in B&W, and so is in Times Roman print in my table; there is a facsimile in Debric), but nothing is said about his godparents:

son parrain, M<sup>e</sup> Maurice Mégniol; la marraine, Dam<sup>elle</sup> Marie Meniolle, épouse de noble homme M<sup>r</sup> Jean Boutillier l'aîné, ancien mayeur de [Saint-Quentin]

I provided a gloss on Boutillier, a marchand drapier, mayeur en 1682, anobli par lettres patentes de juin 1696; but did not until now make the link with the Maurice Méniolle (c.1685-1761), bourgeois de Noyon who was a member of an influential family with links in both towns.

Another document shows that Reine's sister Anne married just a few months later in 1699; her husband, Joseph Callais, from Aumale, near Rouen, was greffier et receveur de l'évêché et comté de Noyon; their son became receveur général des aides au département de Charly, thus illustrating a pattern of ascension which was not uncommon in the ancien régime.

None of these documents has the significance of say the apprenticeship deed published by François Marandet in 2002, but cumulatively they contribute to a picture of the artist's social situation – and reveal just how far his extraordinary genius took him. But it is I think of interest to learn just how deeply La Tour was connected with the world of tapissiers and tailleurs (just as, [you will recall](#), Perronneau and other pastellists were brought up among perruquiers; the greatest French portraitist of the previous century, Hyacinthe Rigaud, was the son of a tailor): he was surrounded from birth by textiles and patterns in an age when people spent a vast percentage of their means on clothing (and wardrobe items were listed in detail in estate inventories), and this must have influenced his eye.

Some of my transcriptions contain errors for reasons which will be obvious from the images above: I shall of course be grateful for corrections, and also for any further documents which relate to La Tour or his pictures. Actually let me rephrase that: I shall be genuinely pleased to be told of the mistakes in my clumsy attempts to render these documents into something a computer can cope with, and I shall be thrilled if anyone can direct me to what I've missed. There must be invoices and bills and other material out there which I'm not going to come across without your help, and I hope the sight of these examples will make you share my enthusiasm for gathering them together.

\* \* \*

In my last [piece](#) I added a little about La Tour's mother and her background which I hope was of interest. But sometimes it is the duty of the researcher to call into question parts of a story which have been repeated so widely as to seem beyond doubt. Several niggles while I was revising my chronological table seem to fall into that bracket, each perhaps because they seem so plausible but also because you find them in printed books that are nearly a century old – and then in more recent ones by scholars whose thoroughness is otherwise exemplary. And as so often it turns out to be harder to prove a negative, I put these out in the hopes that one of you can provide the missing evidence that will allow me to restore these parts of the conventional narrative. You may however remember my earlier [analysis](#) of how the mythology around La Tour spread from even earlier sources, and I fear we have more trips to London here.

The first point is a very small one about La Tour's father François. In Besnard & Wildenstein's chronology, the section on the first page (B&W p. 27) headed 1596-1704 appears to reprint Georges Grandin's 1894 notice. But silently and unsourced they introduce this sentence, after the correct statement that François was chantre at Saint-Quentin:

L'extrait baptistaire de son fils François le qualifie d'ingénieur-géographe (corps créé en 1696)

Three of his sons were called François, and perhaps there were others (although I have been through most of the parish registers without finding another); but none of these entries indicates his profession as “ingénieur-géographe”. One wonders if there is a confusion with the unrelated Louis Brion de La Tour. This sentence has however been universally repeated, possibly because an interest in cartography demonstrated in his aerial view of Saint-Quentin and his military background would seem plausibly to support the idea.

But what about this military background, even more widely repeated? And no less plausibly given my recent discovery of the fact that he was living in Noyon in 1699 when he married the pastellist’s mother; soldiers were so often stationed in such places. But as far as I can see no document mentions this apart from the evidence first published by Grandin (in the same 1896 article where he misidentifies La Tour’s mother, as discussed in my last post). This document is the record of a law suit taken in the Tribunal civil de Laon in 1694 by one “*Jean-François De La Tour, trompette de la compagnie de Monseigneur le duc du Maine, au régiment des carabiniers*”.

It does not seem to have troubled Grandin (or any subsequent authors who have republished this without question that while de La Tour is rather a common name, nowhere else is the pastellist’s father given the forename Jean: he is everywhere simply François – including on his 5 January 1670 baptismal register entry. (You will of course find this and the 1694 transcript in the [chronological table](#) I mentioned before.)

Further the social question arises of how the son of a humble mason could enter this élite regiment, founded by Louis XIV personally and entrusted to the command of his favourite son, the duc du Maine. You might say that perhaps a musician was allowed in on the basis of skill, the social rank overlooked; but in 1694 people of such quality did not sue officers. Further nowhere does François de La Tour cite his former rank in any document. In the absence of more evidence I’m inclined to think that La Tour’s father was not in the army at all.

Finally I turn to the sad story which appears in every account of La Tour’s life, and which isn’t in dispute. This concerns his liaison with his cousin Anne Bougier, her pregnancy and the birth of her illegitimate child (details again in my table), for which as we all know La Tour felt permanently guilty, and for which he made amends through his philanthropic donations many years later.

But one aspect of this does seem to be another myth. Tourneux this time was responsible, although it again is widely repeated by modern authors – including by me (though not by B&W). And again it makes us feel better to be told that the unfortunate girl did marry, soon after the affair with her cousin, and settled down with her husband, a workman called Bécasse, in the parish of Saint-Thomas in Saint-Quentin where she died in 1740. I compounded this by finding an earlier register entry for the baptism of a child from this legitimate marriage, in 1728. But examining these entries carefully, they don’t refer to a Marie-Anne Bougier at all, but to a Marie-Anne Bruge or Bruche: the writing in each case is quite clear. It’s neither a likely phonetic mistranscription nor a likely pseudonym if she wanted to disguise her past; nor do the witnesses seem to have any connection with the pastellist’s family. And the age given at her death (unlikely to be exaggerated) was 45, so that she would have been born in 1695.



Le 5. Juillet 1728. Off. nuel de Legitime Mariage et Le lendemain  
a été baptisé Louise Marie Anne fille de Jean Baptiste  
Becauffe et de Marie Anne Drucke. son parrain Monsieur  
Christophe De Saux organiste; La marraine Mad<sup>le</sup> Louise  
Margueritte Guiniffaux épouse de M<sup>r</sup>. Novet Marchand  
Marchand de Truillette qui ont Signé avec moy Curé  
L'Deslandet. Louise Guiniffaux femme de Novet; Devaux  
Baptiste Becauffe

Now it's true that we have not yet found Anne's own birth certificate, although I've scoured the registers at La Fère for 1701 (the age and place she gave her tribunal) and years on either side, back to 1695. (I could find no entry for her stillborn child in the hôpital de Laon either.) But I fear that Anne's illegitimate child did indeed remove her chances of legitimate union.

There is however one further discovery, which I find almost as disconcerting: as we know she was the daughter of the pastellist's aunt, Marie-Anne de La Tour, who married a Philippe Bougier, a fellow chanter in the church. The marriage took place in Laon in 1695 (17 mai) when Philippe, a widower, was 26 years old (which was one of the reasons I continued to believe Tourneux's identification). But I've since located Marie-Anne de La Tour's baptismal entry:

[illegible]



She married Bougier when she was barely twelve years old. This was no dynastic match in which contracts were entered between children to be consummated when they reached adulthood. There is likely to have been a pressing reason, but whether it was Anne Bougier or an unrecorded sibling the registers do not vouchsafe.

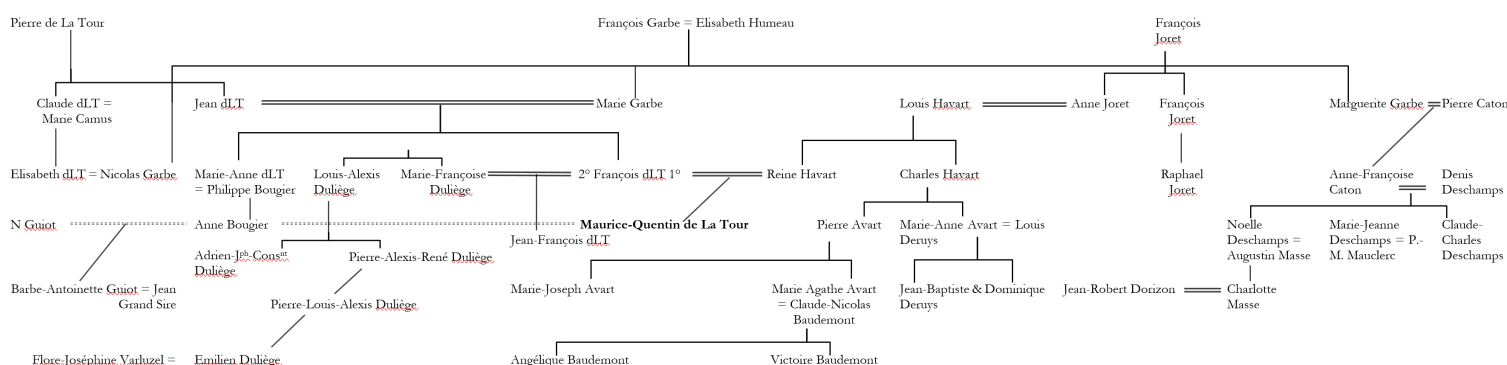
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Ever since the publication of La Tour's wills, there has been something of a puzzle concerning the beneficiaries he describes as his "cousins", among them the tailor Raphael Joret whom I mentioned before, but also (from the 1768 will, as transcribed by Maurice Tournoux):

A mon cousin Deschamps, chanoine de Laon, à la fille de son frère, à ses sœurs Masse et Maclair, mes cousines, à chacun cent pistoles; deux mille livres à mes arrières petites cousines Beaudemont, qu'elles partageront, et [à] sa sœur Joseph, rue du Petit-Pont, à Saint-Quentin, et à leurs cousins Dominique et Jean Baptiste Devrin

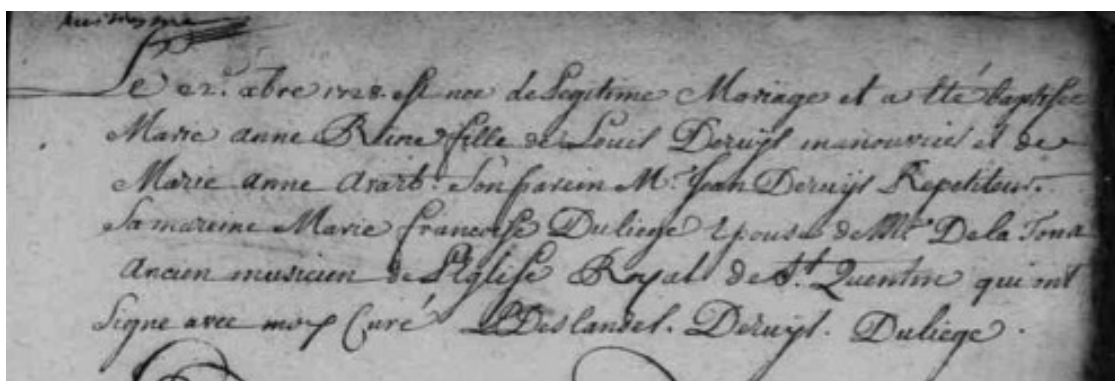
The fact that La Tour leaves money to these relatives suggests that the exact relationships are worth exploring. As you will be aware from my last two posts ([more](#) or [less](#) about his parents), I have been spending time in the parish registers of Noyon, Laon and Saint-Quentin looking into his family, and I think I have unravelled the connections that previously eluded my research.

You can find the key documents once again set out in the chronological [table](#), with a number of further dates of actes for individuals in the genealogies for [La Tour](#), [Deschamps](#), [Garbe](#), [Havart](#), [Joret](#), [Masse](#). I wish there were a simple visual to present all these connections, but the genealogy software on the market is tedious to use and childishly simplistic in the graphical output; and my patience doesn't stretch to drawing an old-fashioned pedigree on a very large sheet of paper. But here's a terribly oversimplified [version](#):



Abbreviated pedigree of the La Tour and related families

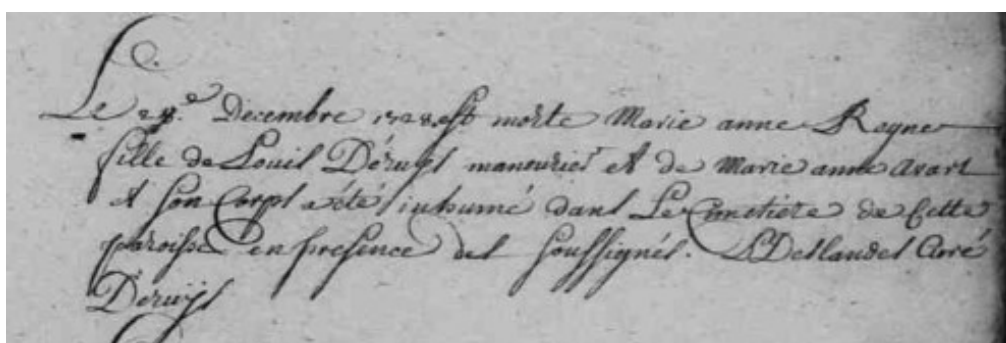
Armed with the dates in these genealogies you can find the deeds online (in the Archives départementales de l'Aisne ou de l'Oise), with my transcriptions in my table. I will only burden this post with what turned out to be the hardest to find (since I didn't have the dates or parishes for any of these documents), but which is touching in its way.



It is the baptism of the daughter of the niece of La Tour's mother, who you will recall was named Reine Havart or Avart (curiously in Laon the spelling Havart is standard; in Saint-Quentin, Avart is used). Reine's niece married Louis Deruys (sometimes Deruis or Deruis; but previous scholars have settled for Dervet or Devrin), who was, it turns out, the son of a Latin tutor ("répétiteur de Latin" in another document). Louis himself was a humble manouvrier or labourer, but later became a jardinier; his son Jean-Baptiste (who appears in La Tour's will), remained a mulquinier, or weaver. So some of these families went down as well as up.

Anyway: you can see that little Marie-Anne-Reine Duruys, who was given the name of the pastellist's mother, could not be held over the font by her, as Reine Havart was dead; but La Tour's stepmother, Marie Françoise Duliège, was in effect step-god-mother to the girl.

Further down the same page there is another event, which unlike the baptism was attended as was normal only by father and curate, its sadness only partly dimmed by the passage of nearly three hundred years and the knowledge of the frequency of infant mortality:



Here however is a summary of the key relationships as they emerge from dozens of similar documents (the majority far less legible than these two).

La Tour's mother was the niece of Charles Havart, a tapissier from Noyon who settled in Saint-Quentin. As we have seen his daughter married Louis Deruys, while her brother Pierre Avart was also a manouvrier; Pierre's daughter Agathe married Claude-Nicolas Baudemont, a mulquinier: they were the parents of the young girls Angélique and Victoire Baudemont who were mentioned in La Tour's will, as also was Agathe's twin sister Joseph [*sic*; both in the registers and in La Tour's will].

On his father's side there were several connections with the Garbe family of blacksmiths. La Tour's paternal grandmother Marie was the daughter of François Garbe (1610–1678), maréchal ferrant in Laon; her brother Nicolas married Elisabeth, Jean de La Tour's niece (La Tour's father was parrain to one of her numerous children), while Marie's sister Marguerite married Pierre Caton, a tapissier in Laon; their daughter Anne-Françoise married écrivain Denis Deschamps,



father of La Tour's subject chanoine Claude-Charles Deschamps; one of the canon's half-sisters, Noëlle, married an Augustin Masse, marchand de tabac à Paris: their daughter Charlotte Masse (pictured) married Jean-Robert Dorison, the son of a tailor. Finally, "la petite-cousine Morelli, vitrier, à Sceaux" is Louise-Catherine, daughter of the chanoine's brother Pierre-Denis Deschamps; she married Pierre Morel, vitrier-peintre at Verrières-le-Buisson.

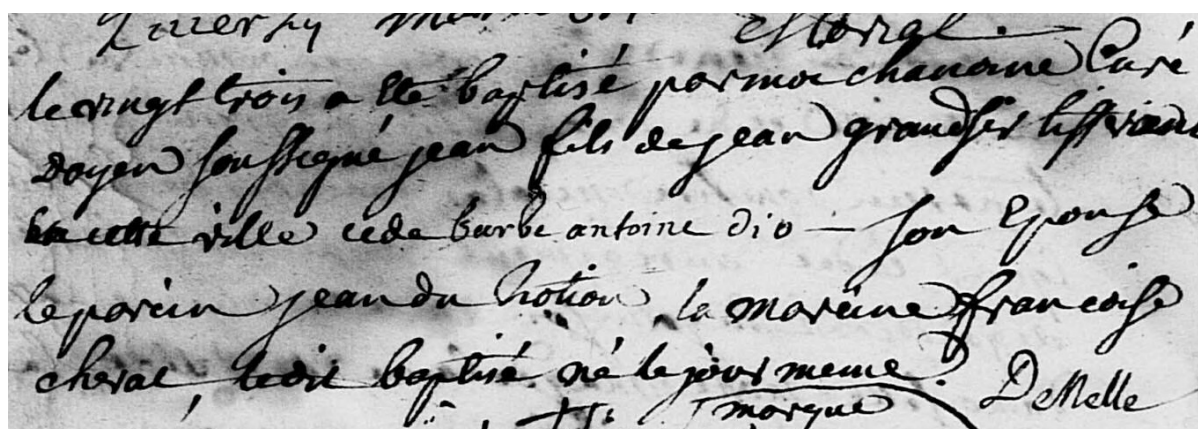
Confusingly (although this has been known for some time) Augustin Masse was not related to the marchand orfèvre, Grégoire Masse, who, in 1752, married the sister of Dufloquet, comte de Réals, a senior cavalry officer (from an altogether different level of the social hierarchy): that Mme Masse was another La Tour subject, but not a relative.

The family circumstances, on both sides, were clearly artisanal, not even bourgeois. What is remarkable is that La Tour – an artist who chose his clientele with a

close eye on their ability to pay, if not with outright snobbery – retained contact with so many of these people who worked with their hands and owned little. It is not that they were simply mentioned in the 1784 will, made when he was senile, had returned to his native town, and may have been in contact with them; but they mostly appear in the 1768 will, alongside calculations of his annual income (a formidable 19,975 livres). One might cynically conjecture that his impoverished relatives badgered him for money, to which he developed a standard reply: I'll mention you in my will. Or one may guess that he felt a real sense of family loyalty, akin to the motives that led to his charitable foundations. Documents can only take us as far as they go.

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One further piece in the jigsaw slotted into place in June 2022. I remembered that one of the unexplained beneficiaries named in his later (1784) will was a "Mme veuve Grand Sire, a La Ferre en Picardie" (La Fère). Despite spending a vast amount of time in numerous archives and websites trying to unravel this in 2016, I stumbled on the answer – in the parish registers of Saint-Montain, La Fère when I was researching something quite different. This was evidence that there was indeed a Mme Grand Sire, or Grandsir, in La Fère, of an age that meant she might well have been a widow still there in 1784:





It was evident that the curate had not been able to get the mother's name correctly, but it was sufficient to make me return to the search for details. This yielded the entry for the marriage of Barbe-Antoinette and her husband, Jean Grand Sire, a tisserand, the previous year, in Laon, Saint-Jean-au-Bourg:

Le vingt Janvier mil sept cent quarante Neuf apres avoir  
 publie les trois bans de mariage en deux Dimanches et une fete entre  
 Jean Grand Sire <sup>fils de Jean Grand Sire</sup> fils de Jean Grand Sire Maître Tisserand, et de Margte  
 Guilbert dem<sup>r</sup> a Aubegart diocese de Roien d'une part et de Barbe  
 Antoinette Guiot <sup>fille d'Anne Bougier</sup> fille d'Anne Bougier dem<sup>r</sup> a Laon de l'autre  
 d'autre part sans qu'il soit venu a ma connaissance aucun empochement  
 qui puisse retarder la celebration dudit mariage. Je soussigné Jean  
 Antoine Puët pretre licencie en Theologie de la faculte de Paris  
 Curé de la Paroisse de St. Jean au bourg de la ville de Laon ay recus  
 de Jean Grand Sire et de Barbe Antoinette Guiot les promesses et  
 consentemens de mariage et l'ay celebre en l'Eglise de l'aditte  
 Paroisse avec les Ceremonies accoutumees en presence de Jean Charles  
 Marteau fleur laie de la paroisse de St. Michel d'Antoine Lannors fleur  
 laie de l'aditte paroisse de St. Jean au bourg de Nicolas Taitet M<sup>r</sup>. Cornetier  
 et de Felix Benbion Vigneront dems tous en l'aditte ville sous signes et  
 L'epoux et l'epouse qui ont signés aussi le Jour et annes dits.

Jean grand sire barbe antoinette guiot Marteau  
 #640 felix ben Lannors.  
 Puët Curé

From which we can see that Mme veuve Grand Sire was in fact Anne Bougier's second child, born almost certainly in 1724, the year after the stillbirth of La Tour's child that caused the trial discussed above. But the format of the entry is far from standard. Minor children (any unmarried person under 25) could only marry with their parents' consent (and normally their presence at the wedding), so it is extraordinary that Barbe-Antoinette Guiot, aged 24, married without any father being named, nor it seems with her mother present (or identified as deceased). Evidently she was illegitimate, the father unknown (possibly called Guiot, and there is nothing to suggest this was La Tour again). It seems likely that the trial would have made it extremely difficult for Anne to follow a conventional married life.

Neil Jeffares