

Notes

THE PARENTAGE OF SIR JUSTUS BECK

A note in the present journal for 1940 describes the parentage of the ill-fated Sir Justus Beck (1679–1722), 1st Baronet, as ‘unknown’.¹ The brief solution to this problem is that he was baptized 8 November 1679 in the Zuider Kerk, Amsterdam, as Joost, son of Jacob George Beck and Margaretha de Smeth, with sponsors Joost de Smeth and Catharina Crayen.² The index to Amsterdam baptisms is one of the first places one would look for the record of a Dutch person of unknown origin who was born in the modern era.³ But what would otherwise have motivated such a search, and how can we be sure this is the right entry?

Before addressing that question, we shall briefly review what is known of Beck from English sources.⁴ Beck, who besides being a prominent merchant was a director of the bank of England, is said to have been for a time one of the wealthiest men of his day.⁵ A few years after Beck’s death Daniel Defoe, in *A Tour thro’ the Whole Island of Great Britain*, wrote under a description of the county of Surrey: ‘It would also take up a large chapter in this book, to but mention the overthrow, and catastrophe of innumerable wealthy city families, who after they have thought their houses establish’d, and have built their magnificent country seats, have sunk under the misfortunes of business, and the disasters of trade such as Sir Joseph Hodges, Sir Justus Beck, and many others.’⁶ An astute

nineteenth-century editor, detecting an innuendo here, investigated these names and discovered that Hodges and Beck both died in 1722 under suspicion of suicide, following financial collapse.⁷ A London newspaper reported: ‘On Sunday last died Sir Justus Beck, Bart. (the first Baronet of his present Majesty’s Creation), and also his second daughter [Mary], within half an hour of each other. The said gentleman always bore a fair character; but having had the misfortune to lose a plentiful estate through the late calamity of the times, it is believ’d the same was too much laid to heart both by himself and numerous family.’⁸ Beck was buried in the parish church of St Nicholas Cole Abbey, London,⁹ where, it is understood, his monument was destroyed by the fire of 1941.

Sir Justus Beck married 2 May 1701 in the parish church of St Peter Cornhill, London,¹⁰ Rachel Chamberlayne, who died 1 October 1734, her will being dated 4 June 1731 and proved 8 October 1734,¹¹ daughter of Charles Chamberlayne, sometime (1687–88) alderman of London.¹² Of their family of fourteen children, eleven survived infancy, but all appear to have died unmarried or without issue.¹³

There are several clues to Beck’s parentage in English sources. ‘Jacob George Beck’ and ‘Joost Bek’ (*sic*) were received into the congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church, Austin Friars, London with recommendation from the

⁷ William Lee, *Daniel Defoe: His Life and Recently Discovered Writings*, 3 vols. (1869), III, 80. We owe this valuable citation to Pat Rogers, ‘Defoe and the Expiring Peerage’, *Studies in Philology*, cii (2005), 510–35, at pp. 522–34.

⁸ *Daily Post*, 19 December 1722, as printed in Lee, *Daniel Defoe*.

⁹ Peter le Neve, ‘Memoranda in Heraldry’, pt. 5, *The Topographer and Genealogist*, iii (1858), 503–11, at p. 511.

¹⁰ *A Register of all the Christinges Burialles & Weddinges within the Parish of Saint Peeters upon Cornhill*, ed. Granville W. G. Leveson Gower, 2 vols. (Publications of the Harleian Society, vols. 1–4, London, 1877–9), IV, 63.

¹¹ Will of ‘Dame Rachel Beck, Widow of Saint Nicolas Cole Abbey, City of London,’ P.C.C. Ockham, modern archival reference Prob/11/667.

¹² For Charles Chamberlayne see Acres, ‘Directors of the Bank of England’, 57.

¹³ At least, no one came forth to claim the baronetcy after the death of our subject’s second son Sir Justus Dennis Beck in 1764. Death notices and wills of several of the children have been found, but we pass over these as they throw no light on the family’s origins.

¹ W. Marston Acres, ‘Directors of the Bank of England’, pt. 2, *N&Q*, clxxix.3 (20 July 1940), 57–62, at p. 61.

² Amsterdam DTB 97:53.

³ This index is available at <https://stadsarchief.amsterdam.nl/archieven/archiefbank/indexen/doopregisters/zoek/index.nl.html>.

⁴ See generally G. E. Cokayne, *Complete Baronetage*, 5 vols. (Exeter, 1900–6), V, 20–21, where he is described as ‘of foreign extraction, but an eminent merchant of London’.

⁵ Robert E. Moody, ‘Three Documents concerning a Proposal to Establish a Province of Georgia in New England,’ *The New England Quarterly*, xiv (1941), 113–120, at p. 119.

⁶ Daniel Defoe, *A Tour thro’ the Whole Island of Great Britain*, 3 vols. (London, 1724–27), I, letter 2, part 3.

church of Amsterdam, on 9 March 1702.¹⁴ ‘Mr. Jacob George Beck’ died less than a year later, and was buried 28 January 1702/3 from the same church.¹⁵ John Strype’s *Survey of the cities of London and Westminster*, under the heading ‘Broadstreet Ward’, describes this man as ‘Jacob George Beck Merchant, born in Frankford at Mayn: Dyed in London 22 Jan 1702/3.’¹⁶ Finally, the will of Raymond de Smeth, dated May 1715, leaves ‘To Sr. Justus Beck £__ [blank] for mourning’, and appoints him as the administrator of an annuity devised to one of the other legatees. This will also mentions ‘my . . . brother Joost de Smeth of Bremen Merchant’.¹⁷ Papers filed with the will on account of a resulting lawsuit explain that ‘Raymond De Smeth a Batchellor died upon the 7th December 1724 without Parents. . . . The said Raymond de Smeth was very rich and left behind him a clear personall Estate of £140,000.’¹⁸

Plentiful as these clues are, they only coalesce into a firm identification of Justus Beck when supplemented with Dutch sources. For the sake of historiographical interest we shall describe these in the order in which they became known to modern scholarship. First, an old register of the Orsoy family, rediscovered in the late nineteenth century, describes him as ‘Justus Beckx, who was a knight in England, and was married there, and is survived by numerous sons and daughters’ (*Justus Beckx, deese is Ridder in Engeland, en aldaar getrouwt geweest, en heeft diverse zoons en dogters nagelaaten*). This record, which is quite

sketchy in places and contains many blanks, shows him as the only child of ___ Becks and ___ de Smeth, daughter of Joost de Smeth and ___ Fassin, and granddaughter of Joost de Smeth, of Amsterdam, merchant, by Margaretha Engels, etc.¹⁹ Second, an old register of the Leonards family by the antiquary Simon Emtinck (1676–1752), rediscovered in the 1950s, describes our subject as ‘Justus Beck, knight [and] baronet, married in England at London to ___ Chamberlayne’ (*Justus Beck, Ridder baronet, is getrouwt in Engeland tot Londen met ___ Chamberlayne*) and shows him as a son of George Beck and ___ de Smedt, daughter of Joost de Smedt by his first wife Maria Fassin, daughter of Pieter Fassin and Geertruyd Wolters, etc.²⁰ Finally, a recent digitization project supplies an item in which Joost de Smeth of Bremen and his late wife Catharina Crayen, and (their godson) Justus Beck of London, merchant and banker, are mentioned together in a document concerning Catharina’s estate dated 15 March 1706.²¹

So, the Jacob George Beck who accompanied the 22-year-old Justus Beck to London in 1702 and died soon after turns out, not surprisingly, to have been the latter’s father; and the Orsoy family register establishes that the Joost de Smeth who served in 1679 as a baptismal sponsor to Justus Beck was a first

¹⁴ *Register of the Attestations, Certificates of Membership, Confessions of Guilt, Certificates of marriages, Betrothals, Publications of Banns, &c., &c., preserved in the Dutch Reformed Church, Austin Friars, London, 1568 to 1872*, ed. J. H. Hessels (London & Amsterdam, 1892), 151, entries nos. 2183, 2182.

¹⁵ *Marriage, baptismal and burial registers, 1571–1874, and monumental inscriptions of the Dutch Reformed Church, Austin Friars, London*, ed. William John Charles Moens (Lymington, 1884), 148.

¹⁶ John Strype, *A survey of the cities of London and Westminster, containing the original, antiquity, increase, modern estate and government of those cities* (London, 1720), 116.

¹⁷ Will of Raymond de Smeth, abstracted in *Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Archivum*, ed. John Henry Hessels, 3 vols. in 4 pts (Cambridge, 1887–1897), III, 2, pp. 2817–19.

¹⁸ *Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Archivum* (note 17), III, 2, pp. 2811–17, at p. 2817.

¹⁹ W. P. Veeren, ‘Aanteekeningen omtrent de familie van Orsoy en eenige aanverwante familiën’, *De Nederlandsche Leeuw*, xx (1903), cols. 193–204; xxi (1903), cols. 8–12, cols. 44–45 (correction), 159 (addendum), at xxi, col. 8. This source contains an attempted expansion of the Fassin ancestry, but it is erroneous. If our apprehension of the source as printed is correct, blanks represent actual blanks, not illegible passages.

²⁰ Simon Emtinck, ‘Registre contenant des copies authentiques . . . de fragments généalogiques de la famille Emtinck’, MS, City Archives of Brussels, accession no. 3401, fols 14–44 (for Leonards genealogy), at fol. 22. Names shown here as blank are actually blank, not merely illegible. This manuscript is a nineteenth-century copy of an original in the Amsterdam Stadsarchief, series 5015, Collectie Stadsarchief Amsterdam: genealogie-handschriften (<http://stadsarchief.amsterdam.nl/archieven/archiefbank/overzicht/5015.nl.html>), presently inaccessible due to recataloguing of the collection.

²¹ Utrechts Archief 34–4, Notarissen in de stad Utrecht 1500–1905, inv. U110a007, Aktenummer 258–1.

cousin of the child's mother, Margaretha de Smeth.²² These facts confirm the pertinence of the baptismal record attributed to Justus Beck at the outset of this note. It will be observed, however, that none of the materials so far quoted sheds any ray of light on the identity of Jacob George Beck, a problem that might perhaps benefit from inquiries at Frankfurt-am-Main, where he is said by Strype to have been born.²³ Prior to his arrival in England, the only other verifiable fact of his life seems to be his marriage on 8 March 1678 at Amsterdam,²⁴ to Margareta de Smeth, baptized 4 March 1654 in the Nieuwezijds Kapel, Amsterdam,²⁵ daughter of Joost de Smeth, the younger, of Amsterdam, by the latter's wife Maria Fassin (also spelled Fassijn).²⁶ The last date at which his wife was definitely still alive was at the birth of their son in 1679, and she does not appear to have accompanied her husband and son to London in 1702. Possibly, therefore, she was the Margarita de Smeth, residing on the Oude Turfmarkt, who was buried 16 November 1680 from the Wester Kerk, Amsterdam; but the record does not state her age or marital status, or name any relative.²⁷ If she was actually buried in the church, hers was not among the very few old tombstones at that location still legible in the 1920s.²⁸

²² Veeren, 'Aanteekeningen omtrent de familie van Orsoy...' (note 19), xxi, 9, 8; xx, 204, shows Joost de Smeth as a son of Coenraad de Smeth, of Hamburg, merchant, and grandson of Joost de Smeth, of Amsterdam, merchant, and Margaretha Engels.

²³ We have found some scattered references to the name at Frankfurt, but they do not seem worth repeating here.

²⁴ Amsterdam marriage intentions, Family History Library microfilm no. 113,366, as indexed in IGI batch no. M90102-3.

²⁵ Amsterdam DTB 65:127.

²⁶ For a modern scholarly treatment of her parents see Johan E. Elias, *De Vroedschap van Amsterdam*, 2 vols. (Haarlem, 1903, 1905), II, 796-800, at p. 797. Despite the scant details of her biography, a good deal is known about the connections and ancestry of Margaretha de Smeth. Her *huit quartiers* were De Smeth, Jeheux, Engels, Laermans, Fassin, Leonards, Wolters, and Geraerts van Leyden.

²⁷ Stadsarchief Amsterdam, Archief van de Burgerlijke Stand: doop-, trouw- en begraafboeken van Amsterdam (retroacta van de Burgerlijke Stand), Begraafregisters voor 1811, NL-SAA-11187863.

²⁸ P. C. Bloys van Treslong Prins, *Genealogische en heraldische gedenkwaardigheden in en uit de kerken der provincie Noord-Holland*, 5 vols. (Utrecht, 1928-31), II, 76-79.

There is in fact one clue to the origins of the baronet's father Jacob George Beck, but unfortunately we have not succeeded in pursuing it to a satisfactory conclusion. This is the highly distinctive coat of arms borne by his son, preserved in a seal—containing no indication of the tinctures—on a letter from Justus Beck to Messrs. David Jeffries & Co., dated 26 January 1716/7 at London, and blazoned in a published description as 'quarterly, 1st a blackbird, 2nd and 3rd a mullet, 4th a dolphin embowed; crest: within a pair of wings a raven.'²⁹ The blazon is confirmed, and the tinctures given, in a book published while Justus Beck was still alive. Samuel Kent, in his *Grammar of Heraldry*, states: 'Sir Justus Beck, Bar. Beareth quarterly three coats; viz. 1st Or, a raven proper. 2d. and 3d. sable, a mullet or. 4th. azure, a dolphin hauriant argent, on an inescoccheon [*sic*], the arms of Ulster', and the accompanying illustration shows a normal mullet of five points.³⁰ These arms also appear in Rietstap, with the tincture of the dolphin given (probably incorrectly) as Or rather than argent; and they are described, as belonging to 'Beck of Zeeland'.³¹

There is a striking parallel to these arms in continental heraldry, as has been pointed out by previous writers.³² These belonged to Abraham Beck, of London, who according to his own statement was born at Stobbe,

²⁹ Committee on Heraldry of the New-England Historic Genealogical Society, 'Seals from the Jeffries Manuscripts', *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, xxxi (1877), 56-67, at p. 57.

³⁰ Samuel Kent, *The Grammar of Heraldry* (London, 1718), 106.

³¹ J. B. Rietstap, *Armorial Général*, 3 vols. (1884-7), I, 145-46, 148.

³² J. van Duren Dzn., 'Bijdrage tot de Familiegiedenis van het geslacht Koenen', pt. 7, *De Wapenheraut*, v (1901), 138-40, at p. 139 n. 3; 'Het geslacht Peltzer' (anonymous review of H. F. Macco, *Geschiede und Genealogie der Familie Peltzer*), *De Wapenheraut*, v (1901), 197-205, at p. 204; William J. Hoffman, 'Beck—de Wale', *De Nederlandsche Leeuw*, I (1932), 93-94, at col. 93, which presents the best discussion of the heraldic evidence; R. T. Muschart, 'Beck', *De Nederlandsche Leeuw*, liv (1936), cols. 283-84.

near Aachen,³³ and whose will, dated 18 December 1636, was proved in 1637.³⁴ These are tricked in the 1633–35 Visitation of London as: 1 Or, a bird sable, 2 & 3 sable, a star of six points Or, 4 Or [*recte* azure?], a fish proper [*i.e.* argent?].³⁵ This man married before 1611, Catharina, daughter of Jacques de Wael (or de Wale), and had two children who survived childhood, Johannes (1611) and Catharina (1619).³⁶ The latter became the wife of Daniël de Hohepied, of Haarlem; and the tomb of a grandchild at Abcoude in Utrecht depicts the Beck arms as 1 Or, a bird sable, 2 & 3 sable, a star of six points Or, 4 azure, a fish argent, slanting to the right.³⁷ Considering that this representation and the blazon of the arms of Justus Beck agree precisely as to the tinctures against the recording made in the Visitation of London, they are probably correct. But whether the distinction between the star and the mullet, and between the fish and the dolphin, is deliberate or accidental, is impossible to say on the basis of the available evidence.

Furthermore, there seems to be unassailable contemporary evidence both that Abraham Beck was a son of Gerlach Beck, of Aachen, by Ida Bertolf von Belven, and that his father's arms were simpler, having the same coat in

quarters 1 & 4 rather than the fish or dolphin variant in the fourth quarter.³⁸ This would seemingly imply that Abraham Beck was the innovator of the variant, though it is lacking an obvious source; it certainly was not derived from the arms of his mother, which consisted of nothing but a unicorn.³⁹ Furthermore, it would seem to imply that Justus Beck was descended either from Abraham Beck, or from a brother or other close male relative who made a similar alteration to their father's arms. And at the very least, it shows that Justus Beck somehow belonged to the Beck family of Aachen.

However, we can show that Abraham Beck cannot himself have been a direct ancestor of Justus Beck. This would be chronologically possible only if Abraham were the father or grandfather of Jacob Georg Beck, and we can immediately dispose of the first case, for Abraham had only one son, Johannes aforesaid, as shown in the Visitation of London and as indicated in Abraham's will. We can also discount the second case, which would depend upon Johannes having been Jacob's father. Johannes Beck, described as an unmarried man from London, married 19 April 1636 at Middelburg in Zeeland,⁴⁰ Catharina de Wael,⁴¹ unmarried woman from Middelburg, daughter of Nicolaes de Wael Rogiersz. and Maria Crommelin. Thanks to the Crommelin connection, there is a detailed account of the immediate descendants of Johannes and his wife, which though not recorded until 1712 was made by a contemporary of their children, and it accords no place to Abraham.⁴²

³³ Oath of allegiance of Abraham Beck, printed in *Returns of Aliens dwelling in the City and Suburbs of London, from the reign of Henry VIII to that of James I* (Publications of the Huguenot Society of London, vol. 10, in four parts, Aberdeen, 1900–1908), III, 186.

³⁴ 'Will of Abraham Becke, Merchant Stranger of Saint George Botolph Lane, City of London', P.C.C. Goare, modern archival reference Prob/11/173.

³⁵ *The Visitation of London, Anno Domini 1633, 1634, and 1635*, ed. Joseph Jackson Howard and Joseph Lemuel Chester, 2 vols. (Publications of the Harleian Society, vols. xv & xvii, 1880–3), I, 59.

³⁶ In addition to the works mentioned in note 32 see, for documentation of these connections, J. I. D. Nepveu, 'Geslacht de Hohepied', *De Navorscher*, xxvii (1877), 42–44; the untitled and uncredited Momma ancestor table (probably belonging to the multi-part article on the Koenen family) printed in *De Wapenheraut*, v (1901), 210–11; H. F. Macco, *Geschiede und Genealogie der Familien Peltzer* (Aachen 1901), 69–70 n. 4, 185 n. 5; R. T. Muschart, 'Beck-de Wale', *De Nederlandsche Leeuw*, 1 (1932), cols. 122–23.

³⁷ P. C. Bloys van Treslong Prins, *Genealogische en heraldische gedenkwaardigheden in en uit de kerken der Provincie Utrecht* (Utrecht, 1919), 10–11.

³⁸ Besides Hoffman, 'Beck—de Wale', see Herm. Friedr. Macco, *Aachener Wappen und Genealogien*, 2 vols. (Aachen, 1907–08), I, Taf. 5.

³⁹ William J. Hoffman, 'An Armory of American Families of Dutch Descent—Bertholff,' *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*, lxviii (1937), 111–14.

⁴⁰ 'Beck' (signed only P.B. v. B.), *De Nederlandsche Leeuw*, liv (1936), col. 282, quoting Middelburg church-books destroyed in World War II.

⁴¹ As this woman had the same name as his own mother, she was perhaps some kind of cousin.

⁴² Jacob Crommelin, 'Généalogie du nom, maison, et famille des Crommelin, écrite en Hollande, par le réfugié septuagénnaire Jacob Crommelin, en 1712', *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français*, vii (1858), 478–95, at p. 479.

Through his mother, Sir Justus Beck was related to a vast network of De Smeth, Engels, Fassin, and Wolters kindred. But the affiliations of his father remain an almost total mystery. Further information is welcome.

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