

The Wasseige Kite—George Webster and John Dobson

Introduction (George Webster)

The Wasseige is a well-known Belgian kite shown on the badge of the Nouveau Cervoliste Belge (NCB, the Belgian Kitefliers Club — see below). I made one years ago; it has two interesting features: firstly, the lower corners of the sail are not braced and simply flapped, presumably adding stability, although I read somewhere that French designers 100 years ago believed flapping reduced drag; secondly, there was the use of a wooden rod in the bridle to help achieve the best inflation of the Conyne triangular cells. At that time I didn't recognise the connection to the Conyne and indeed when I first saw a Genki in the mid-1980's I felt it could be a Wasseige with fins replacing the triangular cells and with the corners braced. The Wasseige appeared to be one of a series of kites with variations in the number of cells and the sail shape.

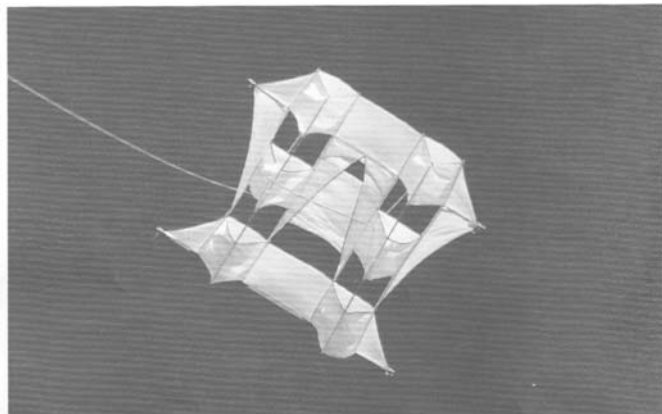
Now, years later, thanks to the work of Nest Lernout presented in NCB 177 we have the story of the 'true Wasseige'. The NCB kite is very obviously a derivative of a double Conyne and should be called a Manson, as explained below. We owe thanks to Nest Lernout for his original work in Dutch and translating it into French. I owe a large debt to John Dobson who translated everything that follows. It is the most dramatic history of kite design which I know. Pierre Wasseige was a 17 year old civilian shot as part of German reprisals after a battle when Germany invaded Belgium in 1916.

The True Wasseige,
Truly

Nest LERNOUT

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177 (July—September
2016)

Translated by John
Dobson



Fécamp, Sunday 11 June 2016.

After weeks of rain in the country, it is our first good day of summer.

Here in Fécamp, there is brilliant sunshine and the wind is ideal for kites. It is an onshore wind, which means that there is almost no turbulence and it is Beaufort 3. What more could you want? In the evening, the wind freshens slightly and becomes a bit harder for our train of bees which have been flying all day. It would be best to take them down before having a bite. We'll be going to eat soon.

Just at that moment I suddenly saw two all-white kites take to the air. I recognised them immediately: they were two genuine Wasseiges, like those which Pierre Wasseige published in 1911! A few seconds later, I was returning to the shingle beach.

The first kite was flown by Joël Lassey (FR) but he told me straightaway that the kite was in fact a copy of a kite made by Bernard Ghesquière (FR, ex-NCB). Bernard described the research which preceded its construction.

The idea of a new article about the kite, emblem of the NCB, was born, and Bernard said he would help me with the plan.

Next day we met at Fécamp with Thierry Nénot who is seriously interested in the history of kites. We talked about the true Wasseige which I had seen the previous evening. He told me in detail about the change in the name of the Wasseige. He is certain that the kite which is found in the logo of the NCB is absolutely not the true Wasseige.

And we have found an old photo of 1911 with Pierre Wasseige and his true Wasseige.

About the Wasseige Kite

The Wasseige had already been the subject of a number of articles in the NCB magazine.

Unfortunately they were about a kite which was not a Wasseige at all.

It began in no. 2 (September 1982!). A plan of a "Modified Double Conyne" by Jacques Durieu was published, which added in parentheses that this kite was also called a "Wasseige". This was the source of the confusion. This kite, which is found on the logo of the NCB, has become very popular with a number of members who have made it.

A year later, in NCB 8 (September 1983), the author of a new plan, Jean-Pierre Dierendonck, reused the name "Wasseige" and spoke no

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more of a Double Conyne but of a "modified Wasseige".

Everyone then called the kite a "Wasseige", although it was in fact a Manson.

In NCB 53 (March 1991) Jacques Durieu published a plan under the title "The Wasseige". He gave three versions: 140, 300 and even 420 cm wingspan. But again he was referring to the "Manson".

In no. 60, NCB reprinted an article from the Lettre du Flandre of Marcel Fourez about the true Wasseige, published in the magazine Le Cerf Volant of October 1911. The author was a certain Pierre Wasseige. The original plan is included in this article, made more readable by the addition of a redesigned plan showing lengths and using standard symbols. At the end of the original article the author writes "Pierre Wasseige is Belgian, more precisely from Namur".

The kite in question resembles only slightly that which we now refer to as a Wasseige.

In the Dutch NCB 105 (reprinted in the French NCB 107), Nest Lernout published a series of articles on the subject of "Wasseige".

Throughout he maintains that the kite on the NCB logo is not the original Wasseige but a model which was published in a book by Charles Lebailliey in 1957 called Les Cerfs Volants, 45 Modèles à Construire. On page 136 is found a kite explicitly called a "Wasseige" but which is really the idea of "our friend and photographer, R. Manson".

In 2000, during the preparation of the article in NCB 105, Nest Lernout sent a dozen letters to all the Wasseiges in Namur which he found in the telephone directory. He received five responses. Pierre Wasseige seemed to be unknown . except for the email of François-Louis de Wasseige:

"About Pierre Wasseige, who was alive in 1911, I know only a little, that he was born in Dinant in 1894 and died in 1914. At age 17 he became a student. I do not know of his interest in kites. I do not think I can tell you any more."

Following up on the date of death (1914), Nest Lernout immediately asked if he knew whether he had been a soldier. Immediately the answer came back

"No, he was not a soldier, but a student at the abbey school Maredsous. He was shot along with his father and brother 23 August 1914 following the battle of Dinant".

This cuts short any further reference to kites in following the trail of Pierre Wasseige.

In NCB 107 Raoul Fosset published his plan of a Wasseige (but again this was a Manson) with a wingspan of 300 cm.

And then about 10 years passed without anything more on the subject of Pierre Wasseige.

On 19 February 2010 (10 years later) Nest Lernout received a new email from François-Louis de Wasseige in which he said:

"My father's brother was the author of the article. Following the arrangement of family papers, I have found the article in question with some yellowing photos of the kite with the handwritten date '1912'. Pierre Wasseige was born 9 April 1894 and so was 17 years old. He was in England at the beginning of hostilities and thought he should return to his homeland against the strong advice of his father.

He was killed at the same time as his father and brother in the Battle of Dinant on 23 August 1914.

Here are the photos."

Nest Lernout sent this information to Pierre Mazières who set earnestly to work, but, partly because of the death of his companion Bettina, it was another three years before Pierre could finish the article.

NCB 165 displayed the true Pierre Wasseige on its cover. Pierre Mazières finished his biography, entitled "Pierre Wasseige (1894-1914)".

At the end of that article, you can see a plan of the true Wasseige. And the article finishes with the words "Who can make a replica of the true Wasseige?".

And so you have it. We have finished at last. Thanks to Bernard Ghesquière.

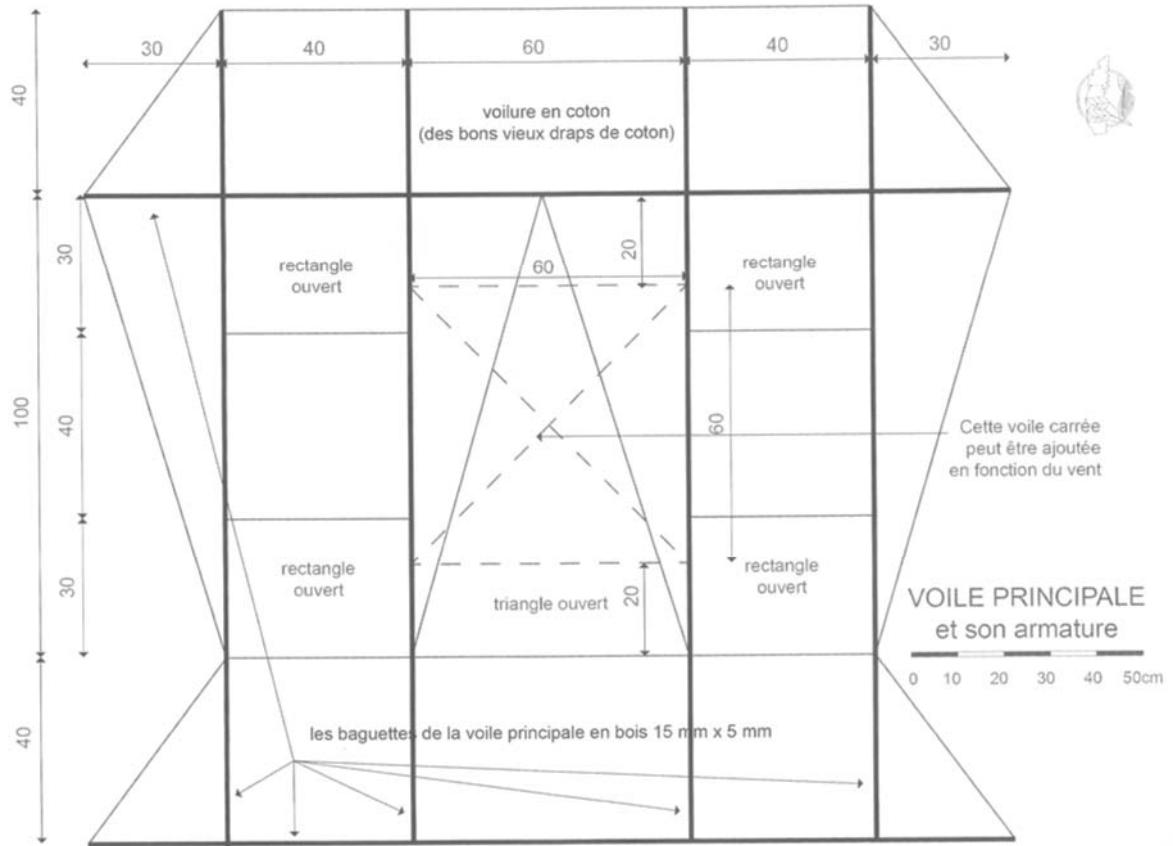
In preparing this article on the true Wasseige, I made contact with François-Louis de Wasseige, grand-nephew of Pierre Wasseige.

He has shown me a retouched photo, the only one of Pierre holding aloft his kite. The photo was in a bad state, but I did some restoration.

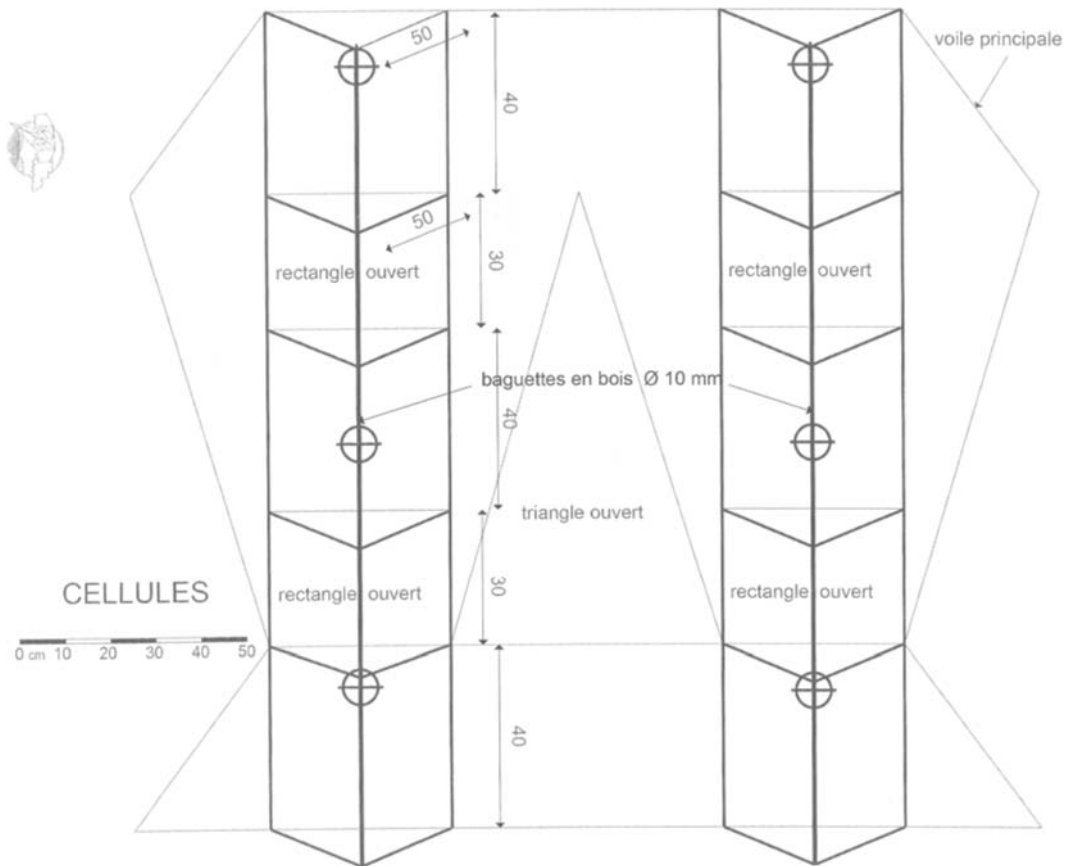
To my great surprise, it is even possible to see the bridle lines. I asked Pierre Mazières if he could restore the bridles on the photo. He got the same result. here is his answer

I do not know this photo. I guess it is taken from a newspaper article.

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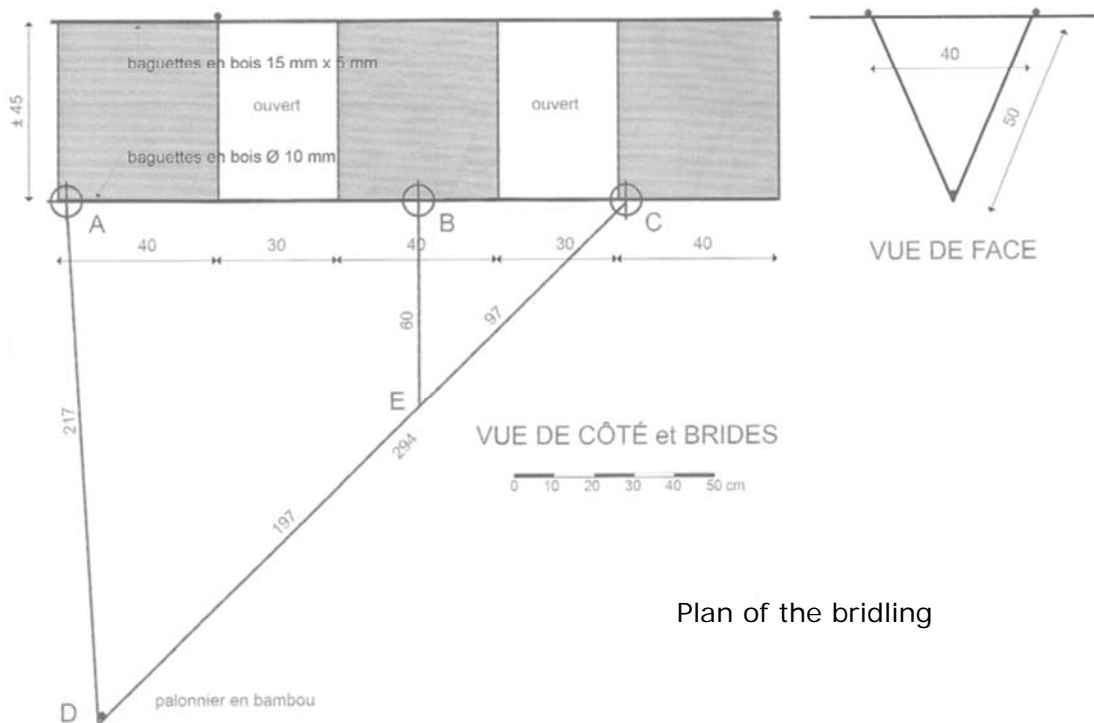
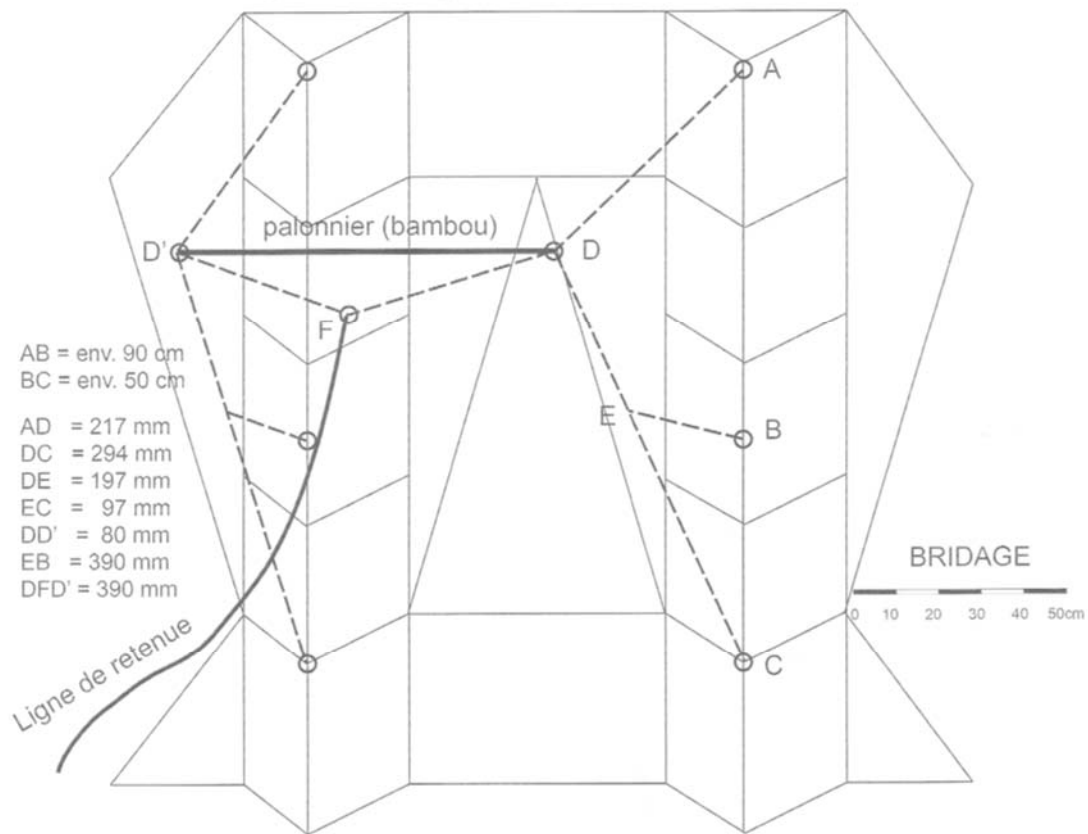


Plan of the sail



Plan of the keels

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Plan of the bridling

I am also certain there is no bridle bar (palonnier). There are 4 lines coming together at a point.

The top 2 are fixed and 1/3 along the top cells, and the lower 2 are fixed to the top of the low-

er 3rd cells. The bridle is more like a Brookite which resembles the Wasseige.

See the photo and the design below.

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The bridling used is not the original but one inspired by Manson with the bridle bar between the bridles.

When I asked Pierre Manzières if he could estimate the length of the bridles with the help of the photo, I received the following answer, with a diagram:

- The dimensions of the kite are those of the Pierre Wasseige design.
- In order for the keels to be held tight it is necessary that at the minimum the bridles join together on the line XY. Further apart is even better.
- On the kite the lines are attached at A and B and symmetrically on the other side.

A is above the lower cell (that is certain) and B is (according to the photo) about 1/3 of the height of the upper cell.

And now for a bit of geometry. First calculate the angle α which allows the calculation of $EF = CH$. Now calculate the dimensions of the triangle ABC. I find that $AC = 168$ mm and $BC = 1370$ mm. These are the minimum dimensions but they will do.

It would be best to check.



The only known photo of Pierre Wasseige and his kite

Postscript (John Dobson)

In the course of my own investigations into Pierre Wasseige, I came across a letter he wrote to the French magazine *Le Cerf-Volant* which was published between 1909 and 1912. This letter is probably

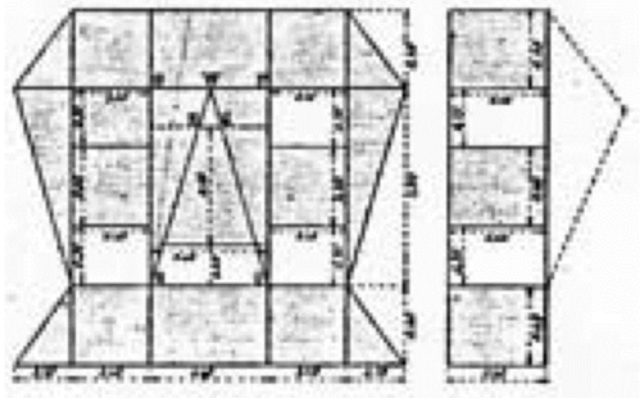
the only place where he described his kite. It appears in issue 27 (October 1911) pages 41-42. My translation follows, my annotations being enclosed in brackets []:

As a reader of *Le Cerf-Volant* I am pleased to make known to kitefliers a kite derived from the Conyne. The kite is very stable and has a large lifting power. In a medium wind of 5 m/sec [11 mph] with gusts of 9 to 10 m/sec [20 to 22 mph] it is well-behaved and returns to earth without breaking up, after being aloft for 1 h 40 min on 500 metres of line. In a steady wind it flew at an angle of 58° to 65° and never lower than 45° .

To make this kite you need the following materials:

1. Two lengths of cloth 2m long and 0.3m wide
2. Two lengths 1m long and 0.3m wide, both cut at an angle to form the wings
3. Two square pieces 0.4m
4. One rectangular strip 0.6m
5. Six lengths 1m long and 0.4m wide for the cells or pockets
6. The total width is 2m and the height is 1.8m.

The clarity of the figure needs no description. [Unfortunately the original text was scanned in at a low resolution so this sentence is not true of the copy.] You can refer to the detailed article by M.G. Dubouchet of a double keeled kite



in Issue 18 [correction: should be 19] of *Le Cerf Volant*. [The text of this article can be found, in French, in the version of this article on my website by following the link on <http://tinyurl.com/z8wwcnu>.]

The framework of the kite is composed of 6 lengths of wood 1.8m long placed longitudinally and two others 2m long placed transversely. Finally note that in the area OPRQ there is a triangular gap WEG formed by the two wings 0.3m wide meeting at the apex and slanting to the base in which you apply a rectangle of cloth 0.7m long and 0.2m wide along the edges.

Pierre Wasseige

Readers of *The Kiteflier* who wish to pursue their own research into French kite history of the period will find the online archive of *Le Cerf-Volant* an invaluable resource. It may be accessed at <http://tinyurl.com/lecerfvolant>, but be warned that the scanning resolution was low so diagrams do not reproduce at all well when the writing on them is small, and there is nothing that can be done about this without access to the original copy. The text is human-readable though beyond the capabilities of my OCR software to render accurately.