

Sir Nigel Loring

c1315 - 1386

Nigel's earliest known ancestor was Albert of Lorraine, a cleric in the times of Edward the Confessor who became a court chaplain to William the Conqueror. Albert was a wealthy man, owning much land in Bedfordshire. The Domesday Book of 1086 records him as holding: -

In Manshead Hundred, the manor of Chalgrave from the King, valued at £7; the manor contained the villages of Chalgrave, Tebworth, Wingfield and part of Hockliffe.

In Redbornstoke Hundred, the manor of Wootton, valued at £10;

In Shelton Hundred, 3 hides of land, meadow for 3 ploughs and woodland for 100 pigs, valued at £2;

In Willey Hundred, at Sharnbrook, 3 hides, a mill, meadow for 2 ploughs and woodland for 40 pigs, valued at 50 shillings. The mill was probably a water mill on the River Great Ouse.

There are about seven generations between Albert and Sir Nigel. There are several Rogers and Peters, so that they need to be numbered.

In 1177 Albert's grandson, Roger I, gave the Chalgrave tithes to Dunstable Priory. In return, it would ensure that the Priors prayed for his (Roger's) soul after his death. They would also send canons to celebrate mass or appoint vicars. Roger I died in 1185. He and his wife, Akina had two sons, Peter I and Hugh.

Chalgrave Church was consecrated on Holy Cross day 1220. It is noted for its wall paintings, most of which date from the time of Sir Nigel. They contain many coats of arms associated with his family and allies. In 1250 Peter I was in dispute with the Prior of Dunstable over the rights to tithes from neighbouring farms. Peter was probably the first to assume the family coat of arms. In the year 1273, Peter II sought permission from the Priory to build a chantry at Chalgrave. In 1275 Peter II held the whole manor of Chalgrave from the Barony of Bedford, the Beauchamps, who held it from the King (Edward III). Peter II died in 1286.

His son was Peter III, whose own son was Roger II. The latter had three sons, Nigel, William and Thomas. Nigel is the famous warrior.

1302 Peter III has land in Chalgrave and Sharnbrook. He is said to have married Joan Morteyne of the Marston family. From 1313 to 16 and in 1324 Peter III was returned as a knight of the shire to the Parliaments. In 1324 he was certified as unfit for military service owing to advanced age and to illness. Nigel Loring was born sometime between 1315 and 1320. By 1330, Peter III's son, Roger II was lord of Chalgrave. Roger II married Cassandra, daughter of Reginald Perot of Harlington. In 1330 The Abbot of Woburn made a claim to land in Chalgrave and an inquest was held to investigate its validity. The claim was dismissed. Chalgrave manor is later described in Sir Nigel's time as a 'substantial hall house with a cellar below, being situated in a compound defended by mud walls with a gatehouse. Sir Nigel's offices included two larders, a pantry, a buttery, bakehouse, brewhouse, malthouse, kilnhouse and wellhouse'. It had its own chapel and garden. The original manor was just to the east of the church but has long since vanished. The site was ploughed up after WWII and later subsumed into the golf course.

In 1335 Nigel Loring was awarded a life annuity of 100 shillings for service in the Scottish campaigns. At the Siege of Dunbar, 1338, Nigel served as an independent trooper and drew a shilling a day in wages. Nigel later registered as an esquire in the Earl of Salisbury's retinue. By the end of the year he is 'the King's yeoman' and served in the Low Countries. He received an annuity of 20 marks and his horse was valued at 35 marks. A mark was worth two thirds of £1.

The Hundred Years War, between England and France, was fought on and off from 1338 to 1453. Most medieval monarchs laid claim to the French crown. Edward III's claim lay through his mother, Isabella,

daughter of Philip IV. Edward's Chief of Staff was his son, Edward the Black Prince. In 1340 the smaller English fleet destroyed the larger French fleet near the Dutch port of Sluys. Despite being robbed of his 'armour and other goods', before the battle, Nigel Loring was knighted for his 'conspicuous valour'. He must have done something particularly brave on this occasion but no record survives as to what it was. Records often say he 'distinguished himself' or 'did good service' but nothing specific is mentioned. As a result he was given a grant of 33 marks and an annuity of £20 for his lifetime and to his male heirs. In 1341 a tournament held in Dunstable was in honour of Sir Nigel and the victory at Sluys. Edward III and Queen Phillipa were present. Sir Nigel organised the event and was paid 'five quarters of wheat for his expenses.' This does not sound much but is approximately 65 kg or 3,000 litres. He would not have taken possession of the wheat but sold his rights to it. In 1342 He served under Sir Walter Manny in Brittany but later served with Henry Grosmont, earl of Derby, earl of Lancaster and the first Duke of Lancaster. Grosmont, Manny and Loring were all original members of the Order of the Garter.

1343 is probably the year when Sir Nigel married Margaret, daughter of Sir Ralf Beupel, of Knowstone in Devon. Two years later, Nigel was sent on his first diplomatic mission. He went to Rome, with the future Bishop of London, to secure a papal dispensation for the intended marriage between the Black Prince and Margaret of Brabant. This did not come about as Edward subsequently made a love match with Joan of Kent. Nigel then found service with the Earl of Derby and fought under him in Gascony in the following year. Soon after this, he entered the service of Edward the Black Prince.

Nigel became Lord of the manor of Chalgrave in 1346, on the death of his father, Roger II. In August of that year Edward III defeated the French at the battle of Crecy. Victory was gained because of a miscalculation by the French king. Nigel Loring fought with distinction alongside the sixteen year old Black Prince. On his way back from Crecy, Henry III besieged Calais. The inhabitants were starved and humiliated. Sir Nigel played an active part in the long drawn out siege, which established an English bridgehead on continental Europe.

1348 saw the founding of the Order of the Garter. Sir Nigel Loring was one of its original members. His garter-plate, dating from 1421, is now in the 20th stall, which is on the Prince's side of St. George's Chapel, Windsor. The shield is derived from the arms of the Beauchamps, Barons of Bedford, whose knights the Lorings were. The crest is a bush of feathers encircled by a scroll. St Albans Abbey has a miniature, painted in about 1380, showing Sir Nigel in his regalia. He is wearing the white surcoat and hood of the Order. They are decorated with little blue garters, which have been embroidered in silk and gold thread. The cap is scarlet. The sword belt is of rectangular gold plates on brown leather; the sword hilt is white and the scabbard gold. The peaked shoes are scarlet like the cap. In his left hand he holds a moneybag; symbolic of the gifts he gave to the Abbey. He gave money on several occasions to the Abbey, all for the rebuilding of the wooden Norman cloisters in stone. He also gave a cask of wine. St Albans was the Black Prince's favourite Abbey. The Order may have been established to celebrate the taking of Calais. In 1841, Sir Nigel's stall, number 20, was occupied by the Duke of Wellington

The Black Death had reached England by the time of the Garter celebrations. Sir Nigel is second on a list of 21 indentured retainers to the Black Prince. He is retained by the Black Prince to 'stay with him for life, for peace as well for war' and was granted an annuity of £50. He was regularly rewarded for each military campaign in which he was involved. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle begins his story of 'Sir Nigel' at this point. Bob Ferdinand, a Loring expert, intends to weave his fiction around the events leading up to this date. Between battles, soldiers could either return home or form into bands, which roamed around Western Europe raiding rich estates and monasteries. Sir Nigel and Sir John Chandos lead the White Company during these intervals in fighting. They were feared by the local communities. Doyle makes them sound like a troupe of boy scouts. The king rewarded Sir Nigel for service in Aquitaine with tin rights in Cornwall. Much Cornish tin was used in coin production.

In 1350, he was sent to the Low Countries as part of a diplomatic delegation to discuss the French succession with the Empress Margaret. He was also told to sound out these countries to see if they would join the English in their quarrels with the French.

1351 Sir Nigel returned to Calais. It was about this time that he became Chamberlain to Edward, the Black Prince. He held this position for 24 years. Between Crecy and Poitiers, Sir Nigel was one of only five knights retained by the Black Prince. He is given many gifts by the Prince, including money, a bay horse and many cartloads of hay. Nigel witnesses many orders issued by the Prince. On one occasion the Prince uses Nigel's seal on a letter, as he has mislaid his signet ring.

At the battle of Poitiers, in 1356, Nigel took part in the initial raid and was a member of the Prince's bodyguard. The English, under the Black Prince, were victorious, but unlike Crecy, this was a close run battle and resulted in huge casualties on both sides. At the end of the battle, the French wished to discuss peace with the Black Prince but he wished to consult his father first. He sent Sir Nigel and Sir Roger Cotesford to England, to tell the king of the victory and to establish his wishes. Nigel received an annuity of 85 marks. This was the total of several small awards of income from estates in Cornwall. In the following years he spent much time as an emissary of the prince. There are records of his expenses for journeys all over France.

In 1357, the Black Prince rewarded Sir Nigel with 600 marks and calls him his 'cher at trebien ami'. This was commuted in 1359 to an annual payment of £80 for life.

During 1358, Sir Nigel spent much time on the Prince's business across Europe. His expenses are recorded for a journey from Bordeaux to England. He was granted the office of surveyor of the forest and steward of the lordship of Macclesfield. This would have given him control over the collection of royal dues from all the people working in this area.

In 1359, a letter to the Bishop of London from the Prince calls Sir Nigel 'our very dear and beloved knight.' During the 1359/60 campaign he served in the Prince's retinue and was involved in the negotiations at the treaty of Bretigny and was appointed to oversee its implementation. He was given the estate of Trematon. These he leased to the burgesses of nearby Saltash. Some of the money came from ferry rights on the River Tamar.

By 1362 he was again in Bordeaux. He was present at the investiture of Edward as Prince of Aquitaine and had a seat on the prince's council in the principality. He was present at court in London for the visit of Peter of Cyprus. In 1363 'Nigel Loring and his two esquires' are listed in the household of the Black prince. In 1365 Sir Nigel was given exemption from service on juries and assizes in England on account of his residency in Aquitaine. He also obtained a royal licence to enclose a park at Chalgrave where he later founded a chantry.

In 1366, Sir Nigel was in Spain as an emissary of the Black Prince to Pedro, king of Castile. Pedro had been expelled from his kingdom and had become known as Pedro the Cruel. The English crown had had ties with Castile since the marriage of Edward I to Eleanor in 1254. Next year Sir Nigel was with the Black Prince at the invasion of Castile on behalf of Pedro. Victory came at the battle of Najera but the Prince was taken ill and was forced to withdraw his English troops. Pedro was so hated that his subjects expelled him again. 1369 marks the last recorded military action by Sir Nigel. He served on the Gascony border under Robert Knolles and later with Sir John Chandos and the Earl of Pembroke.

In 1370 Sir Nigel retired from military service and was granted 100 marks a year. Next year he returned to the service of the Prince and stayed with him until Edward III died in 1376. Sir John Chandos died at the end of 1369. Sir Nigel was granted John's offices and received his manor of Drakelow. About this time, Sir Nigel acquired a quarter of the manor of Luton from John de Mohun. He received royal permission to grant a tenancy on it to his two younger brothers. Edward, the Black Prince, died in 1376, never having fully recovered from the illness, possibly dysentery, which he contracted in Castile. A grant of 180 marks from the Prince's Devon revenues was made to Sir Nigel, maybe from his will. A year later Edward III died, to be succeeded by Richard II, son of Edward the Black Prince.

William Loring, Sir Nigel's brother, was Constable of Bordeaux from 1379 to 1381. In 1380 Sir Nigel retired from active life. Richard II's esquire, John Bevyll, was granted custody of Trematon castle and Sir Nigel had to pay him £10 a year as tenant. In 1382 Sir Nigel is appointed a commissioner of the peace in Bedfordshire. By 1384 He is patron of Wylien (Welwyn) Church in Hertfordshire. The following year he is given £40 to transfer the patronage to the Bishop of London.

Sir Nigel died on 18th March 1386. He had two daughters, Isable and Margaret. Isabel married twice, firstly William Coggan and secondly Robert Harrington. Margaret married Thomas Pevyre, son of the lord of the manor at Toddington, the boy next door. Consequently, Sharnbrook passed to the Harringtons and Chalgrave to the Pevyres. Wootton and Sharnbrook had passed to other relatives much earlier. His will, dated 12th March 1385 and written in medieval Latin, received probate on 3rd April 1386. In it he says that he is to be buried in the churchyard of Dunstable Priory, next to his wife, Margaret, who is already buried there. He leaves 100 marks for burial expenses and for gifts to the poor, 15 marks for the monks to pray for him, his wife and other relatives, 30 marks for the Prior of Dunstable to pray for his soul on the anniversary of his death, in perpetuity. He left 15 marks to each of four orders of friars in London and Oxford to say a thousand masses for him and his wife, the rest of the money to be for the rebuilding of their churches. He also left another 400 marks to monks, friars and religious houses all over the south of England. Besides this he left much wealth to his daughters, mainly in the form of 2,367 great marguerite pearls. He left his soul to Jesus, Mary and the blessed saints.

There is no evidence that Sir Nigel was buried as he requested. In Chalgrave church there are two tombs with effigies, which date from approximately 1390. One knight is resting his feet on a lion, denoting that he died in battle. The other's feet are resting on a talbot, which symbolises that he died at peace. If one of these tombs is Sir Nigel's, it will be the latter. Sir Nigel's chantry was completed in 1409.

BHRS 10; BHRS 14; BHRS No 28, Court Roll of Chalgrave Manor;

Domesday Book, History From The Sources, ed John Morris, 1977

Memorials of the Most Noble Order of the Garter under Edward III and Richard II, by GF Beltz, 1841.

Bob Ferdinand

The Institution, law and Ceremonies of the Most Noble Order of the garter, Elias Ashmole

The Black Prince's Register. PRO 1930

The Chronicle of Geoffrey le Baker, translated by David Preest