

LEICESTER-SHIRE MEN AT THE FRENCH WARS
OF 1346—1347.

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THE documents stored in the Public Record Office contain a mass of information relative to many important historical events, much of which is as yet unpublished. The French Wars carried on by King Edward III., when he invaded Normandy in 1346, in order to assert his claim to the throne of France, including the battle of Crecy and the siege of Calais, are not the least interesting of these. In this paper I purpose to point out the part taken by Leicester-shire men in these Wars. In the Public Record Office are preserved the French Rolls, the Norman Rolls, the Calais Rolls, and the Memoranda Rolls, which contain the names of a large number of Knights, Esquires, and others who served with the King in France in 1346 and 1347; and in the College of Arms are the Accounts of Walter de Wetewang, the Treasurer of the Household, which give the names of the Earls, Bannerets, and Knights present at the siege of Calais. Most of these documents have been very carefully abstracted by Major-General Wrottesley,^a and from them it is easy to ascertain the names of many of the Leicestershire-men who fought at Crecy and were engaged in the siege of Calais. And I must own my indebtedness to Major-General Wrottesley's researches for much of what is here given.

The war was a popular one with the English nation, and was undertaken "at the prayer of the Commons and with the consent of the Lords." In 1345, Parliament enacted that all who held lands or rents to the annual value of 100s. should find an archer, to the value of £10 a lightly-armed horseman, to the value of £25 a man-at-arms, and so on in proportion. The towns were also assessed to find men-at-arms and foot-soldiers. The land-owners too who held their lands of the crown were bound personally to serve, and bring their retainers. In this way a very effective force was raised, the men being clothed by their localities in a uniform manner, though paid regular wages by the Treasurer of the Household. The number of men who were engaged in the battle of Crecy (26 August 1346), did not exceed 20,000, the northern counties not being summoned for this expedition on account of an invasion from Scotland being apprehended. Presently, however, the army was reinforced by additional levies raised in England and by troops that had been employed in Gascony, so that at the siege of Calais (which surrendered 4 August 1347), about 32,000 men were employed.

^a See the *Wm. Salt Collections for Staffordshire*, vol. xviii., part 2.

The earliest writ for the expedition seems to be dated at Westminster on 3 August 1345, when the Sheriffs of the various counties, including the Sheriff of Warwick and Leicester,^a were ordered to proclaim throughout their bailiwicks that all Barons, Bannerets, Knights, and Esquires, between the ages of sixteen and sixty, prepare themselves to set out for Gascony and Brittany. (*French Roll, 19 Edward III., pars 2, m. 1.*)

On 28 August 1345, a writ was directed to John de Charnels,^b Ralph Basset,^c and the Sheriff of Leicester,^d commanding them to array eighty archers in the County of Leicester, to provide them with bows, arrows, and other arms, and to bring them to Portsmouth by three weeks from Michaelmas. They were also directed to make enquiry concerning all able-bodied men-at-arms^e in the county of Leicester, between the ages of sixteen and sixty, and to warn them to be at Portsmouth with horses and arms by the same date. (*French Roll, 19 Edward III., pars 2, m. 8, 9.*) On 12 November, this assembly was postponed until 1 March 1346, and on 20 January it was still further postponed until the Sunday in Mid-Lent. On 24 January, Sir Thomas de Chaworth the younger, knight,^f and John Levere^g were added to the Commissions of Array.

A writ was addressed to the bailiffs, good men, and commonalty

^a In 1345, and throughout the French War, Thomas Beauchamp, 3rd Earl of Warwick, was Sheriff of Warwick and Leicester. Leicestershire had no separate Sheriff until 1567.

^b John de Charnels was lord of Snareston, and as such attested a grant in 1349—50. He was son of William de Charnels, and had a son William who died in his lifetime, leaving a son John as successor to his grandfather.

^c Ralph Basset was son of Simon, lord Basset, whom he succeeded. He also attended expeditions to France in 1359, in 1369, and again in 1372. He married first Sybil, daughter of Giles, lord Asteley, and secondly Alice, daughter of Sir John Digby, and died in July 1378. In 1376 he founded a chantry in the north aisle of Sapcote Church.

^d Thomas Beauchamp, 3rd Earl of Warwick, K.G., son of Guy de Beauchamp and Alice de Todeni, was a man of the highest eminence. He was born in 1313, was hereditary Pantler of England, and was Knighted in 1330. He was Captain and Leader of the Army against the Scots in 1337, and Marshal of the Army and Special Envoy to treat with France in 1346, and Commander of the Fleet before Calais in 1347. He was Sheriff of cos. Warwick and Leicester, for life, 1344 to 1369. He married Katherine, daughter of Roger Mortimer, 1st Earl of March; and died 13 November 1369.

^e The men-at-arms were the hereditary owners of land, the knights, esquires, etc. who were clad in armour from head to foot, and mounted on powerful horses. It seems hard to believe that a boy of 16, or a man of 60, could wear the heavy armour of the period, or that the King meant to take *all* able-bodied men-at-arms with him to France.

^f Sir Thomas de Chaworth the younger was son of Sir Thomas and Joane Luttrell his wife. He married Margery, daughter of Sir Richard Delapoole, knight, by whom he had a son William. The Chaworths held the manor of Medbourne, and lands at Saxby and elsewhere.

^g Of John Levere, I have been able to ascertain no particulars.

of Leicester, on 10 February 1346, to array twelve armed men without delay, to provide them with suitable horses and arms, and to bring them to Portsmouth by the Sunday in Mid-Lent at the latest. Market Harborough had likewise to provide three armed men, Loughborough three, and Melton Mowbray four. (*Ibid.*, m. 34.) These twenty-two armed men formed part of a body of 1740 infantry that were supplied by the towns, the counties providing the archers.

The Sheriffs had evidently sent in returns of the landowners liable to provide men-at-arms for the King's service. For on 15 February 1346, a writ was directed to the Sheriff of Warwick and Leicester, to cause all whose names were contained in a roll sent therewith to be warned that each of them, under forfeiture of life and limbs, lands, etc., was to provide the men-at-arms, hobelars,^a and archers as assessed by the said roll, and furnish them with horses and suitable arms with all haste, so that they should be at Portsmouth on Sunday in Mid-Lent at the latest. (*Ibid.*, m. 34d.) We could wish that this roll had been preserved! On 17 February 1346, a mandate was directed to the Arrayers of men-at-arms, hobelars, and archers in the county of Leicester, for the passage abroad, not to compel Sir Roger la Zousch, Sir William Moton, and Sir John Waleys, knights, John Maillore, William de Bredon, John de Lecure, and John de Herdewyk, to set out with the King, nor to provide men-at-arms, hobelars, or archers, because they are of the retinue of the Archbishop of Canterbury, for the defence of England towards the Marches of Scotland. (*French Roll*, 20 Edward III., pars 1, m. 35.) On 5 March, a writ was directed to John de Charneles, Ralph Basset, Sir Thomas de Chaworth the younger, knight, John Levere, and the Sheriff, informing them of the postponement of the passage, because the fleet was scattered far and wide by the storms, from Mid-Lent till the Quindene of Easter, and ordering them to array all able-bodied men-at-arms, and 80 archers in the county of Leicester, between the ages of sixteen and sixty, so that they might be at Portsmouth at the Quindene of Easter. (*Ibid.* m. 29.) On the same day writs were sent to the bailiffs and good men of Leicester, Harborough, Loughborough and Melton, commanding them to bring their armed men to the Port of Portsmouth at the Quindene of Easter. (*Ibid.* m. 30.) Another writ was directed on 15 March, to the bailiffs and good men of Melton Mowbray, commanding them to have two armed men of the four they were

^a The Hobelars were mounted horsemen on small horses. They wore steel caps and coats of mail, and carried a lance and sword. Many of them, however, had bows and arrows instead of the lance, and were styled mounted archers. The name still exists in the "hobby-horse."

ordered to provide, at Portsmouth on the Quindene of Easter. (*Ibid. m. 31d.*)

It seems now to have come to the ears of the King that Philip de Valois was collecting a fleet for the invasion of England, and so Wardens were appointed in the maritime counties to guard all ports and shores, and to resist the invaders; whilst fresh Commissioners of Array were appointed for the midland counties. On 10 March, a writ was directed to Thomas de Chaworth the elder,^a Roger Culey,^b John Waleys,^c Roger de Belgrave,^d William de Bredon,^e and the Sheriff, assigning them jointly and severally to array all able-bodied men, as well knights and esquires as others of the said county of Leicestershire, and when armed to bring them to the Wardens in the county of Lincoln on due warning, for defence against Philip of Valois and his fleet. (*Ibid. m. 25.*)

An important step was now being taken to get the men into order. On 28 March 1346, John de Beauchamp, Robert de Sadyngton,^f Thomas de Holand, William de Byfeld, clerk, and William Bisshop, the King's Serjeant-at-Arms, were appointed to supervise the array of all men-at-arms, hobelars, and archers in the county of Leicester, at Leicester, on the Saturday before Palm Sunday, and to reject those who should not be fit in body and not competently provided with armour, and to substitute others instead of them, as the King had now for certain ordered the passage at the Quindene of Easter next. (*Ibid. m. 21.*) On 31 March, the Supervisors of Array were authorized to receive fines from men-at-arms, hobelars, and archers who wished to make fines for their passage, and with the money to hire others. (*Ibid. m. 21.*) On 1 August, the Sheriff was ordered to supply, for the King's expedition, 120 bows and 200 sheaves of arrows, to be sent to the Tower of London on the Feast of the Assumption, and delivered to Robert de Mildenhole. (*French Roll, 20 Edward III., pars 2.*)

^a Thomas de Chaworth the elder married Joane, daughter of Geoffrey Luttrell, and was father of Thomas the younger. (See note f, *ante*.) He died in 1370.

^b Roger Culey was son of Hugh Culey, of Ratcliffe Culey. He married Margery daughter of Thomas de Erdeswike, and died without issue in 1359. There was another Roger de Culey, his cousin, and son of Sir John de Culey, knight.

^c John Waleys was sheriff of Leicestershire in 1343—4. On 11 May 1344, he had been appointed with three others to choose archers in the county.

^d Roger de Belgrave was son of Roger de Belgrave and Susanna Shipton. He was of Belgrave, and married Margaret, daughter and co-heir of Richard Belgrave, by whom he had a son John.

^e William de Bredon held lands in Bredon, and in 1330 paid a fine for license to enclose a way leading to Swaynton.

^f Robert de Sadyngton was the King's Chancellor. He had a grant of free-warren in his lands of Laughton, Humberstone, and elsewhere, in 1344. In 1346 he was assessed to the aid for knighting Edward of Woodstock. He married Joyce, sister and heiress of Roger Martival, Bishop of Salisbury, and had a daughter, Isabel, married to Sir Ralph Hastings, and ancestress of the Hesilrige family of Noseley.

These writs show the composition of the King's army, and the pains he took to form an efficient force. Leaving Portsmouth, the fleet reached Hogges (La Hogue) in Normandy, on 12 July 1346. On the 18th they marched forwards, and on the 26th arrived at Caen, which they besieged. At the little village of Crecy in Ponthieu, the King resolved to give battle. He divided his army in three divisions. The first division was under the nominal command of the Prince of Wales, but was really commanded by the Sheriff of Leicester (Thomas, Earl of Warwick), the Earl of Oxford, and Godfrey de Harecourt. Amongst the knights who fought in this division were Sir Stephen de Segrave, Sir Peter Mallore, Sir Robert de Farnham, Sir Thomas de Grey, and Sir Ralph Basset of Sapcote. The second division was under the command of the Earls of Northampton and Arundel, and amongst the knights was Sir William Heselrigge (ancestor of the family seated at Nosely). The King himself led the third division; amongst the knights with the King being Sir Thomas de Beaumont, Sir Simon Basset, Sir Gerard Burdet, Sir Stephen Curson, Sir Richard de Harecourt, Sir John Curson, Sir Ralph de Ferrers, Sir Robert de Burton, Sir John Charnels, Sir Hugh le Despencer the younger, Sir Robert de Ros, and Sir Nicholas Charneles. The great French host could not stand against the English bowmen, and the defeat became a rout. The battle of Crecy was fought on 26 August 1346.

Of other prominent men connected with Leicestershire, Henry Plantagenet, the Earl of Lancaster and Leicester, was one of the twelve Earls who accompanied the King to Calais; Hugh lord Despencer and Sir Alan de la Zouche were amongst the great lords who displayed banners; and Sir Ralph Basset of Sapcote, who took a prominent part, was advanced to the rank of Banneret in the course of the war.

The King now resolved to invest Calais, so that he might secure the mastery of the channel, and save English commerce. The English soldiers, as the winter came on, constructed huts for themselves outside Calais, but most of their horses perished from cold and hunger. The army, too, suffered from desertion. In September and October the King issued writs to Mayors and Bailiffs and Sheriffs, and also to private individuals, to array fresh armed men and archers, and send them to Sandwich. On 3 October, a writ was sent to the Sheriff of Warwick and Leicester to array twenty archers, and to send them to Sandwich by the 20th October. Writs, bearing the same date, were also sent to Margery, widow of William de Ros, to send to the King "from your family, or elsewhere," 6 men-at-arms and 12 archers; to Isabella, widow of Henry de Ferars, and to Alice, widow of Henry

de Beaumont, each to send 6 men-at-arms and 12 archers : and to John de Segrave to send 10 men-at-arms and 20 archers, which in his case was afterwards postponed to the Quindene of St. Lucy. By another writ, the Earl of Lancaster and Leicester was to provide 100 men, and Hugh le Despencer 200. (*French Roll, 20 Edward III., pars 2.*) Death and disease so thinned the ranks of Edward's army, that on 16 February 1347, he issued new commissions of array in all the English counties (except the northern counties), and appointed Commissioners to array all able-bodied knights and esquires and others according to their status. On 18 February, Commissioners of Array for Leicestershire were appointed to select 100 archers in Leicestershire. (*French Roll, 21 Edward III., pars 1; Rymer's Fœdera.*) On 14 May, a writ was sent to Henry, Earl of Lancaster, directing him to hasten to the King's assistance with as powerful a force as possible, and without waiting for shipping for his horses, the King's adversary of France having commanded a great army to be collected at the feast of Pentecost. Like writs were sent to Hugh le Despencer, John de Verdon, Robert de Ferars, John de Segrave, and many others. (*Ibid.*) On 13 September a precept was sent to the Sheriff to purchase and procure from the issues of his bailiwick, and cause to be conveyed to the town of Calais 100 quarters of corn and 100 quarters of malt. (*French Roll, 21 Edward III., pars 2, m. 17; Rymer's Fœdera V. 587.*) The siege of Calais lasted a year, and it was not till Philip failed to relieve it, that the town was starved into surrender 4 August 1347. Ralph, lord Basset of Sapcote, was one of the messengers sent by the King to treat with the Captain of Calais for its surrender. On 21 September a writ was sent to the Sheriffs, directing them to proclaim that all men-at-arms who had left Calais for any cause, being of the retinue of the King or his magnates, also all archers of the county, should set out to rejoin the King immediately, in order to resist the hostile aggression of his adversary, and to accompany the King on an expedition of war. (*French Roll, 21 Edward III., pars 2.*) On 14 October the King returned to England. Three Leicestershire tenants in capite died during this expedition,—Sir Alan la Zouch of Ashby, Sir John Latymer, and John Maureward. (*Inquis. p.m. for 1346 and 1347.*) Of the knights and esquires who took part in this expedition, Lord Grey de Ruthin, Sir William Heselrigge, Sir John Curzon, and Sir Robert Farnham, have left descendants in the male line who are connected with Leicestershire ; and of these the Farnhams alone still hold lands for which their ancestor performed service at Crecy.

Those persons who served in this expedition were expressly exonerated from assessments made on their lands for finding men-at-arms and archers ; and from these writs of exoneration,

as well as from letters of protection and letters of attorney, and from general pardons granted to many of those who fought in this war, it is possible to ascertain the names of a great many of the knights, esquires, and others who took part in it. Some of the principal knights and men-at-arms have already been mentioned. Amongst other landowners or residents in the county of Leicester who were engaged in this expedition were these:—

Sir John de Berkelee, Sir John le Botiller, Sir James de Stafford of Sondon, Sir Alan la Zouche, Sir Maurice de Berkele, Sir William de Burton, Sir Robert Pembrugge, Sir John Bard, John Brabazon of Garthorp, Robert de Swylyngton, Hugh le Despencer, Hugh son of Hugh le Despencer (all in the King's retinue).

Sir John de Burton, Sir Robert de Farnham, Sir Stephen de Segrave, John Hacluit, Richard de Thorp, Walter de Thorp, Richard de Stafford, Peter Mallore (of the retinue of Edward, Prince of Wales).

Sir Robert Burdet, Sir Andrew Lutteral, Sir Thomas de Chandos, Sir William la Zouche of Lubbesthorp, Sir John de Seyton, Theobald Trussel, Christofer Mallore, Ralph son of Sir Ralph Hastings, Roger Beler, Roger son of Roger Beler, Robert Burdet, Thomas de Verdoun, Stephen de Cosynton, Thomas de Reygate of Istock (of the retinue of Henry Plantagenet, Earl of Lancaster and Leicester).

Sir Ralph Basset of Sapcote, Richard de Stonleye late Sheriff of Warwick and Leicester, Sir John de Folville the younger, John de Lynleye, John de Stapelton (of the retinue of Thomas Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, and Sheriff of Leicester).

Sir John de Segrave, Sir William de Heselrigge (of the retinue of William Bohun, Earl of Northampton).

John Paynel (of the retinue of Robert de Ufford, Earl of Suffolk).

Sir Thomas de Astleye, Sir William de Astleye, Sir Nicholas Charneles, Sir John de Langeton, Sir William Marmyoun, Sir Robert de Bereford, John de Verdoun, William Flamville, Walter de Hulot of Great Glen (all of the retinue of Thomas, Bishop of Durham).

Roger de la Warde, Edmund Hacluit (of the retinue of Hugh le Despencer).

Sir John Walshe (of the retinue of Hugh de Hastings).

Sir Giles de Erdyngton (of the retinue of Sir John de Monte Gomeri).

John son of Peter de Lodyngton (of the retinue of Alan la Zouche).

William Cursoun (of the retinue of Thomas de Bourne, and afterwards of William Deyncourt).

John Maureward (of the retinue of John Charneles).

Gerard Burdet (of the retinue of Maurice de Berkele).
Anketine de Houby (of the retinue of John de Thoresby).

The following Leicestershire men received a general pardon for their good service in France :—

Robert Farnham of Queryndon, Alan Gaude of Groby, Robert Henry of Stretton, William son of Nicholas son of Robert Segrave, William Hunte of Groby called "Roulondesman," John Colleye of Stonton Wyvill (all on the testimony of the Prince of Wales, 16 November 1346),

Thomas de Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, and John de Grey of Rotherfeld (16 November 1346).

Gamaliel de Salden of Rotheleye, John Puppe of Sapcote, Thomas Cadenev of Appelby, John de Merston of Hynkeley, Thomas de Hothom of Broughton (on the testimony of Thomas, Earl of Warwick, 16 November 1346).

Richard son of Richard Calf of Loughborough (on the testimony of John Broun, 20 November 1346).

Henry Elyot of Knyghton (on the testimony of Adam de Swynbourn, sub-constable of the army, 16 November 1346).

Richard son of Richard Loret of Chirche Sheyle (on the testimony of Walter de Wetewang, 16 November 1346).

Sir James de Stafford, knight (on the testimony of Robert de Ferrers, 16 November 1346).

Richard de Sheynton, Nicholas son of Henry son of Geoffrey de Sheynton (on the testimony of Hugh le Despencer, 16 November 1346).

Robert son of Robert Ward of Croft (on the testimony of Aylmer de Acheless).

Richard son of Henry le Flechere of Arnale (on the testimony of John de Verdon, 16 November 1346).

John Seterday of Lutherworth (on the testimony of John de Grey of Rotherfeld, 16 November 1346).

Simon son of Roger le Chamberlein of Keggeworth (on the testimony of master John de Thoresby, 16 November 1346).

William Rakedale of Burton on the Wold, for the death of William de Chestreshire, at the request of John Darcy le fitz, 20 November 1346.

Hugh le Despencer, for good service in France, 30 October 1346.

Richard Flescher of Arnal (on the testimony of Thomas de Rolleston, 4 September 1346).

Robert Mason of Berghby, for the death of Robert de Lughtburgh, 5 August 1347.

Sir Thomas de Charneles, knight, granted at the request of Henry, Earl of Lancaster, 8 June 1347.

Robert son of Robert le Clerc of Chirche Sheyle, for the death

of Ralph Wychard (on the testimony of John de Beauchamp, 3 September 1347).

Thomas son of Thomas de Berteville of Loughtburgh, for the death of Richard son of Richard Calf of Loughtburgh, at the request of Henry, Earl of Lancaster, 23 September 1347.

Roger de Langwath of Donyngton, for the death of Richard del Grene of Donyngton, 27 September 1347.

Robert de Trystorfeld of co. Leicester, late servant of Adam Barbour, for the death of Simon Dilke of Swanynghon, 8 October 1347.

Roger Fisher, for the death of Ralph Bishop of Bredon, at the request of John de Bredon, 1 October 1347.

Robert de Farnham of Quorndon, for breaking out of the Marshalsea, where he had been detained, for the death of Thomas le Chamberlein of co. Essex, 4 October 1347.

John de Lek of Walton, for the death of John le Brun of Burton, 6 October 1347.

The following had grants of free warren in their demesne lands, presumably for their good service in the war, all dated near Calais :—

Sir William Marmyon, knight, in his lands of Neuton and Galeby, 23 December 1347.

Thomas de Asteley, in his lands of Broghton, Sutton, Leyre, Thorp, Lyneleye, Higham, and Wylughby, 30 December 1347.

John Paynell, in his demesne lands of Sproxton, 26 October 1347.

Anketine de Houby, for lands in co. Leicester, 25 July 1347.

From entries on these Rolls, we can glean some interesting facts connected with Leicestershire landowners and their lands. Thus the lands of Sir Thomas de Chaworth were distrained on for an archer, but a writ was sent to the Sheriff of Leicester, 20 January 1347, to supersede the distraint, he having found one William de Credenhull (or Bredenhulle), who had served the King as an archer during the whole expedition. (*French Roll*, 20 *Edward III. pars 2, m.3d.*, and *Memoranda Roll*, 21 *Edward III.*) A similar writ was sent to the Sheriff, 15 January 1347, to supersede any distraint on the lands or goods of Sir Gyles de Erdington, who was now serving in the retinue of Sir John de Mont Gomery. A like writ was sent to the Sheriff, 20 October 1346, to supersede all demands on Sir John de Folville the elder for finding men-at-arms, etc., as he had enfeoffed his son Sir John, who was serving in the retinue of Thomas, Earl of Warwick, in all his lands. (*Ibid.*) Similar writs were sent in favour of Sir Henry Lescrope, 5 June 1347, and of Sir John de Seyton who was serving in the retinue of Henry, Earl of Lancaster, 12 August 1347. (*French Roll*, 21 *Edward III. pars 2.*)

John de Charneles, who is styled "dilectus Clericus Regis," for his good service was to be exonerated from all demands for two men-at-arms and three hobelars, assessed upon his lands in the county, 9 July 1347. (*Memoranda Roll*, 21 *Edward III.*)

Sir Gerard Burdet was pardoned for his contempt in not taking the order of knighthood according to the King's proclamation, he having been subsequently knighted. (*Ibid.* 22 *Edward III.*) Richard de Thorp had been assessed at an archer for his lands in the county, and had found Walter de Thorp his son, who had served in the retinue of Edward, Prince of Wales, from the King's passage to Hogges until his return to England; therefore he was exonerated, 20 May 1355. (*Ibid.* 29 *Edward III.*)

These Rolls therefore yield a good deal of information as to the part taken by Leicestershire men in this stirring expedition to France, and give us the names of very many of them. Probably a diligent search in the Public Records would yield as much fruit relative to other important historical events.
