

# The Family History of the Counts of Lalaing

## Zandbergen Castle History

The Castle of Zandbergen is today the home of the 16th Count and Countess of Lalaing and their family. The Estate has been in the family's possession since the 13th Century, and the first records of when the castle was built date back to 1360, when William of Oisy, Lord of Zandbergen, moved into the castle. He received it from his wife Maria van Outer, a descendant of the van Aa family, the original Lords of Zandbergen.



The peasants revolt in 1580 left the castle badly damaged and as a result the North wing had to be reconstructed. The tower as a symbol of power and a look out point for hunting along the Dender valley, was eventually later rebuilt in 1630.



A Century later in 1708, the Duke of Marlborough's army caused extensive damage to the property which lead to the castle being rebuilt in the classical style. A smallholding later known as Hof van Lier farm, was reconstructed in 1752.



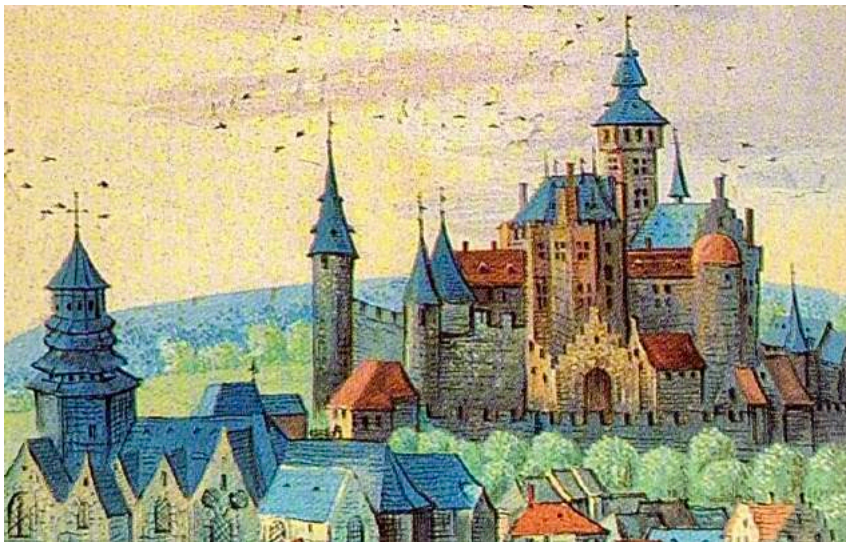
In 1911 Charles de Lalaing the great grandfather of the current Count, ordered a thorough restoration of the entire castle together with the renowned architect Paul Saintenoy. Glass double doors were placed under the arches, thereby creating a new hall and protecting the main entrance.

It is rumoured that a tunnel was dug leading from the castle's cellar to the village convent, as a means of escape in the 15th Century. Treasure to this day has not yet been recovered, believed to have been hidden in the castle walls as the English troops advanced under Marlborough. The British army returned once again at a later date, but this time as an ally under the Duke of Wellington prior to the famous battle of Waterloo in 1815. He joined Field Marshall Blücher behind the castle in the meadows along the Dender valley, along with 40,000 horses which were put out to graze in order to build up strength for the coming campaign.

## Lalaing Family History

The first mention of the locality of Lalaing dates back to the Celtic times when it was known as 'Laech Lenn' meaning 'shallow lake'. In 1095 Gerard de Forest inherited the lands of Lalaing from his mother and the Forest estate from his father. He was then addressed as Lord of Lalaing or Lord of Forest. At his death the two estates were divided among his sons, with the younger one establishing himself on the Lalaing estate. It was then that the original Castle of Lalaing was built as a motte-and-bailey.

The original building was later transformed into a fortress by Charles I of Lalaing, in order to secure the border between Hainaut and Flanders. During the War of Succession of Spain, Louis the XIV gave the orders to



destroy all Flemish strongholds on his borders, in order to secure France's dominance over Flanders. The Castle of Lalaing was levelled to the ground and with the senior branch's extinction, the Hoogstraten line assumed seniority and

the family seat was transferred to the Gelmel Fortress in Hoogstraten, now on the border between Belgium and the Netherlands. Other branches of the family acquired new estates including at Oudenaarde, and when the Hoogstraten senior line eventually died out in 1709, it was the Oudenaarde line that assumed seniority and transferred the family seat to Zandbergen in East Flanders where it remains today.

Another family branch established itself in the Hainaut under Simon V of Lalaing, Lord of Quiévrain and Hordain, who married Jeanne of Roeulx, Lady of Écaussinnes, and was Grand Bailiff of Hainaut. He acquired the fortress of Écaussinnes-Lalaing by marriage and extended it considerably during his lifetime. The fortress is now open to the public and has become one of the most popular historic sites in Wallonia.

History records that numerous family ancestors fought battles on behalf of the Dukes of Burgundy and were generously rewarded for their loyalty with estates and titles. From the 1400s onwards they were regularly Grand Bailiffs of Hainaut and Governors of Holland as well as Chamberlains to the Emperor Charles V. Loyal service by the family throughout its generations has enabled it to play a substantial role in the shaping of Belgium's history and this tradition has been maintained to modern times with recent family members appointed as Belgian ambassadors.

Prominent Family members.

## Jacques de Lalaing (1420-1452)

Knight of the Golden Fleece



Jacques de Lalaing, the “Good Knight”, is today remembered as an iconic transitional figure between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. A renowned jousting and military commander, he was considered to be the last and the greatest of the European knights, whose supremacy on the battlefield was ended forever by the arrival of gunpowder.

After his death the celebrated “*Livre des faits de Jacques de Lalaing*”, was commissioned in order to record his deeds. Only three fully illuminated manuscripts of the *Livre des faits* have survived, of which one was purchased by the Paul Getty Museum in 2016, another is in the French National museum, and the third one remains in the private collection of the family.

Born in the castle of Lalaing, Jacques arrived at the court of Philip the Good as a young squire and was soon to show exceptional promise on the battlefield. It was because of his close friendship with Jean de Clèves, nephew of Philip the Good, and his renown as a tough and agile jousting that he was selected to participate in The Great Tournament of 1440, which pitted the champions of Burgundy and France against each other. Jacques accomplished the unique feat of defeating all sixteen of his older and more experienced French opponents over the course of two days of intense jousting.

**H**is reputation firmly established, he then travelled across Europe as a knight errant, leading embassies of the Duke of Burgundy to Spain, Portugal and all the way to Scotland, where he fought and defeated the mighty Douglas clan at Sterling castle. He was still undefeated at the siege of the castle of Pouques when he was mortally wounded by a cannonball and died at the age of thirty two. His death signalled the end of the era of chivalry throughout Europe. His life was recalled in a book written a few years after his death by the most famous Burgundian chroniclers.

### **Charles de Lalaing, Governor of Oudenaarde (1466-1525)**

Knights of the Golden Fleece

Charles, Baron of Lalaing was elevated to the title of Count of Lalaing by Emperor Charles V. He had been a faithful servant to the House of Burgundy and its Hapsburg successors throughout his life and had served under three generations of monarchs: Maximilian of Austria, Philip the Fair and Charles V.

**W**hen Charles V spent six weeks at Charles of Lalaing's estates during the Siege of Tournai in 1521, the emperor met and fell in love with Charles' maid Johanna van der Gheynst. Their passionate affair resulted in the future regent Margaret Duchess of Parma who was born in the family castle. She was later recognised by her father Charles V and subsequently educated at court. She later consented to two arranged marriages with allies of Charles V, thereby helping him secure key alliances across Europe.

## Antoine de Lalaing, Count of Hoogstraten (1480-1540)

Knight of the Golden Fleece

A brother of Charles, Antoine was a key advisor to Charles V. He played a crucial role in keeping the Netherlands united and was made acting governor of the Netherlands after Charles V abdicated. Antoine was granted the title of Count of Hoogstraten, and the county of Hoogstraten was established as an essential territorial link between the protestant north and the catholic south. The impressive tombstone and stained glass portraits of Antoine and his wife Elisabeth can be seen in the cathedral of Hoogstraten.



## The Distinguished Order of the Golden Fleece

The Golden Fleece, is generally recognised as the most prestigious and historic of the world's orders of chivalry, and its splendour has been preserved to the present day. The order was originally founded by Duke Philip the Good of Burgundy in Bruges in 1430 to celebrate his marriage to Isabella of Portugal, and it later passed on to the House of Hapsburg. The Golden Fleece has been awarded to twelve Counts of Lalaing for their loyalty and chivalry.

Today, two branches of the order exist, Spanish and Austrian; the current grand masters are Felipe VI, King of Spain and Archduke Karl, head of the House of Habsburg-Lorraine.

The separation of the two existing branches took place as a result of the Spanish War of Succession. The grand master of the order, Charles II of Spain (a Habsburg) had died childless in 1700, and so the succession to the

throne of Spain and the Golden Fleece initiated a global conflict. On one hand Charles VI, the Holy Roman Emperor, claimed the throne as the new head of the House of Habsburg which had held the throne for almost two centuries. On the other side stood Philip of Bourbon, Charles II's sister's grandchild, who he had named as his successor in his will. After the defeat of the Habsburgs in 1714, Philip was recognised as King of Spain and the fate of the order was never clarified. The two dynasties, the kings of Spain and the Emperors of Austria, have jointly continued to award the Golden Fleece in the spirit of peace.

Each Fleece collar is fully coated in gold, making it the most expensive chivalrous order to date. Current knights of the Spanish order include Queen Elisabeth II, Emperor Akihito of Japan, the former Tsar Simeon of Bulgaria, and Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands, amongst 13 others. Knights of the Austrian branch include 33 noblemen and princes of small territories in central Europe, most of them of German or Austrian decent.

### **Christine de Lalaing, Princess of Epinoy (1545 - 1582)**

Christine was the grand-daughter of Count Charles I of Lalaing, and was married to Pierre de Melun, Prince of Epinoy, and governor of Tournai.

In the absence of her husband, she defended the city of Tournai against Alexander Farnese, the Duke of Parma in 1581. Christine de Lalaing rallied the troops in a speech announcing:





*"It is me, the wife of your governor who is now marching into war, risking her own life, in service of his country. Follow my example: I would rather give up my life than abandon my country."*

She was injured in the resistance and forced to surrender the city to the Spaniards. However, the latter were so impressed by her courage and tenacity that they allowed the armed troops to leave the city with honours and the protestant population to escape torture and plundering. Due to an unusual twist of faith, Alexander Farnese and Christine were not strangers to each other as Alexander was the grandson of the maid of Christine's grandfather, the later regent of Parma. Her bravery and sense of honour caused her to be compared to Joan of Arc.

**Sir Peter Paul Rubens (1577 - 1640)** who was a classically educated human scholar and diplomat, spent his early years as page to his godmother Countess Marguerite of Lalaing (1574 - 1650) and is seen here 15 years of age in the Lalaing-Hoogstraten uniform. (See picture below.)



He was knighted by both Philip IV of Spain and Charles I of England.



### **Charles de Lalaing (1857 - 1919).**

Knight Grand Cross in the Order of the Crown.

Knight Grand Cross in the Royal Victorian Order.

Son of the Belgian Ambassador to the United-Kingdom, Charles himself was ambassador to Switzerland, Romania and Brazil. He attended the coronation of King George V and eventually moved back to Belgium where he extensively renovated the castle of Zandbergen between 1911 and 1917.

### **Jacques de Lalaing (1858 1917)**



Jacques, a brother of Charles (above) was born and raised in London where his father was the Belgian ambassador. He moved to Brussels when he was 17 years old and enrolled as a painter and sculptor at the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts, of which he later became director. Seen here in the courtyard of his townhouse which still stands today, outside his atelier where he kept a tiger.

As a renowned painter he worked in a realistic naturalistic style, and his works are famous for producing historical scenes which can be viewed in the Brussels Town Hall and Senate. His dynamic depiction of the Battle of Waterloo painted on the underside of the dome is particularly impressive. Jacques also became a successful sculptor and produced many allegorical bronzes and memorials such as the Electric Mast and the Monument To The Fallen of The Battle of Waterloo. He was also famous for his beautifully

realistic rendering of tigers and lions and kept a tiger at his family's town house on the Rue Ducale in central Brussels, in order to study the animals more closely, only a stone's throw away from the royal Palace. Jacques helped establish a distinctively Belgian tradition of animal art, for which the flourishing Antwerp Zoo was an additional inspiration. His wonderful sculptures and paintings can be found around Brussels and other cities in Belgium.



**The son of Charles, Jacques III de Lalaing (1889 - 1969)** continued his father's calling as ambassador to the King and married Baroness Susanne Allard. Jacques was posted in Cairo at the time of the discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamun by Lord Carnarvon and Howard Carter in 1922.



**The Belgian Queen Elisabeth** had an intense fascination with Egyptian history and Jacques was responsible for organising her visit to the official opening of the tomb. All rights to official photography were exclusively granted to the BBC, and therefore the private photographs he brought back were precious recordings of a unique historic event.

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Having retired in Zandbergen, Jacques III gave new life to the property with his extraordinary international guests and also the wild animals brought back from abroad by his wife and children. After visits to their property in South America, they would return with chimpanzees and ocelots, the latter living in the attic of the castle and regularly climbing on the roof to hunt unsuspecting pigeons. Brown bears were a gift from Romania to Baron Allard, the grandfather of the countess, for his services to the country, and they found a new home at the Palace Allard in the centre of Brussels, where Jacques III and his wife would often spend time. Today there is a twist to that tale as one of those bear cages now stands in Zandbergen's courtyard and is home to the families' guard dog; a Kangal sheepdog. This courageous breed is renowned for its fierceness and bred to fight off the very same bears and wolves in the Anatolian mountains of Turkey, in order to protect sheep.

The late **Count Josse de Lalaing (1927-2019)** spent much of his youth travelling the world with his parents. As the second World War broke out they were forced to leave Budapest where his father was ambassador, and together with the Belgian ambassador to Austria embarked on an epic journey across Russia to the United States. It was during this time that Josse fell ill and was operated on in Siberia. With the train car parked on an abandoned railway track, a doctor was found who was a prisoner of war from a nearby camp. Once safely in America the family had a specialist check the wound and it transpired that the prisoner had been a famous surgeon well known for developing a new stitching technique, but had disappeared on the front line. The Trans-Siberian Railway took them from Moscow to Vladivostok where they caught a boat to Tokyo and onwards to Hawaii, finally arriving in Los Angeles, and settling in Hollywood. There were to be many fond memories of friendships with stars such as Cary Grant and Humphrey Bogart, and Josse, who was very athletic, achieved considerable renown for challenging Johnny Weissmüller (the original Tarzan) to a race in the pool at the Beverly-Hills hotel. He was a great personality and first lived in the Belgian Congo and then the Middle and the Far East, before returning back to Zandbergen with a young wife Elisabeth Silfverstolpe.

## The Family Today

**Jacques IV, 16th Count of Lalaing (1970)**, is an MIT graduate, and acting President of the Belgian MIT Alumnae Association and the Royal Belgo-German Association. Together with his German wife, Countess Lavinia von Waldburg zu Wolfegg und Wolfegg, a Landscape Architect, they strive to renovate the castle and preserve and enhance the property. Historical events held around the property have also been inspired by the Castle of Waldburg, the family seat of the Countess's family, dating back to the 12th Century (See Links). The current Count and Countess have a keen interest in conservation projects and have been awarded the European Wildlife Estate Label for sustainable wildlife management and land use. Today the property is part of the Flemish Ecological Network and European NATURA 2000 program, and is home to rare fauna and flora which flourish under their protection.

**Both** like to participate in the traditional event of the Ommegang, regarded as one of the most important events in Brussel's history and culture. Derived from the Flemish phrase 'to walk around,' the procession leads around the city and ends on the Grand Place where today's members of the Belgian aristocracy reenact their ancestors from the royal court of Charles V in 1549.

**Their two sons Count Louis George (2008)**, and **Count Henri Nicolas (2011)**, have a keen interest in the estate and all its animals, and like to be involved in the day-to-day management. Already from a young age they have shown great interest in family history and understand the need to continue family traditions for future generations to come. They have been raised with the understanding that the role as guardian of a historic property, comes with a commitment to preserving an estate, while integrating and getting involved with the community that surrounds it.