
THE PASTON FAMILY THROUGH HISTORY



TEACHER'S HANDBOOK

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PLANNING

A large Tudor house in Norfolk has been acquired by the Paston Society. The house is in need of restoration and was once the ancestral home of the Paston family. A team of historians has been brought in to investigate the history of the house with the intention of opening it up to the public and telling the story of the people who lived there. Along with the building, there is a large number of historical artefacts including, portraits, letters, suits of armour, tapestries, and other items. The artefacts are scattered about the house and the surrounding buildings. Most have been neglected and are in a poor state of repair. The historians will have their work cut out, investigating the house, locating all the objects - some are hidden or lost - and uncovering their history.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this context is to introduce students to the lives of the Paston family and to place their accomplishments within the wider story of English history. The Tudor house used for this purpose is fictional, but is closely based on Oxnead Hall, which for several centuries was the family home of the Pastons.

In the fiction, this once grand house has fallen on hard times and is now rather run down. Many of the objects that were on display have been stored away in boxes and crates in the attic and cellars and the many paintings that adorn the walls have become dusty and faded.

The history team's job is to investigate the house, research its history and the history of the various artefacts that still remain and to restore the house to something like its former glory. With the aim of opening the house to visitors and telling them about its past and the history of the family.

As the team set to work, they begin to discover all kinds of fascinating and unexpected objects - stuffed crocodiles, packed away in wooden crates; a huge painting, which after being x-rayed, seems to include a ghostly figure - and the slow unveiling of the history of a family who went from rags to

riches and back again, involving besieged castles, piracy, tragedy, heroism, and corruption.

HISTORY

In reality, Oxnead Hall is currently privately owned and now much changed from the grand Tudor House built by Clement Paston in 1580. For the purposes of this unit, however, we have imagined the Hall has remained largely unchanged since it was built by Clement and that it still contains many of the objects that were collected by him and his ancestors.

As the students work through the unit, they will become aware of the real history of Oxnead Hall and how the real objects collected there were scattered all over the world after the Paston family fell in to decline and sold them off to cover their spiralling debts, but, at the beginning of this unit our main concern is to catch their imagination and to develop their interest in the context.

STRUCTURE

The planning for this unit is intended only as a guide. As you work through take as long as you need, changing or adapting activities as much as you like to suit the needs of your students and the requirements of their learning.

We have created an interactive PowerPoint for the first sequence of steps in Part One [see the accompanying materials that came with this unit], which you can use to introduce the context.

The unit is divided into three Sections:

1. Introduction;
2. Consolidation;
3. Appendix.

Section One will develop the context in five sequential Parts:

Part One will introduce the students to the location of Oxnead Hall and the tensions felt by a family involved in the political turmoil of the War of the Roses. The students will be invited to briefly

step into the fiction and to explore the story from the 'inside' as people from the past.

Part Two will bring the story back to the present day and introduce the students to their role as a team of historians.

Part Three is about establishing the role of the team, their responsibilities, and the kinds of equipment they will use.

Part Four will develop their knowledge of the Paston family through the objects they find in the house, in particular the cellar.

Part Five will introduce the Paston Society as the client and the commission letter.

Section Two will consolidate the work of the history team and establish pathways for further development of the context. You can explore the work in this section in any order you choose.

Section Three is a collection of resources and further information.

RESOURCES

At the start of each Part of the planning you will find a list of resources you will need to have ready for the Steps ahead. Some of the resources will need to be prepared in advance, including photocopying plans, texts, and pictures. You will find all these materials referenced in the Resources and available in the Appendix at the end of the Guide and on the website.

As well as the prepared resources you will need to get hold of a number of good topic books on Medieval history, the Tudor period, and the Tudor monarchs. The best book for children on life in a Tudor house is called "Daily Life in a Tudor House" by Laura Wilson. In the appendix you will find links to resources on the web, including the BBC Online Class Clips website where there are some interesting short films, and the Paston Society website which contains information on the Paston family and other teaching materials.

For further reading you might want to purchase the National Trust guidebooks. For research on

this unit we used two in particular - Oxburgh Hall and Cotehele House - you can buy them both online through Amazon.

There is a reading list in the Appendix section at the end of the Guide.

SECTION ONE

Parts One to Five should be followed sequentially.

PART ONE

RESOURCES: Appendix 1

- A picture of the front door
- The PowerPoint slide show – Step 1
- 'A letter for the Pastons'

THE DOOR

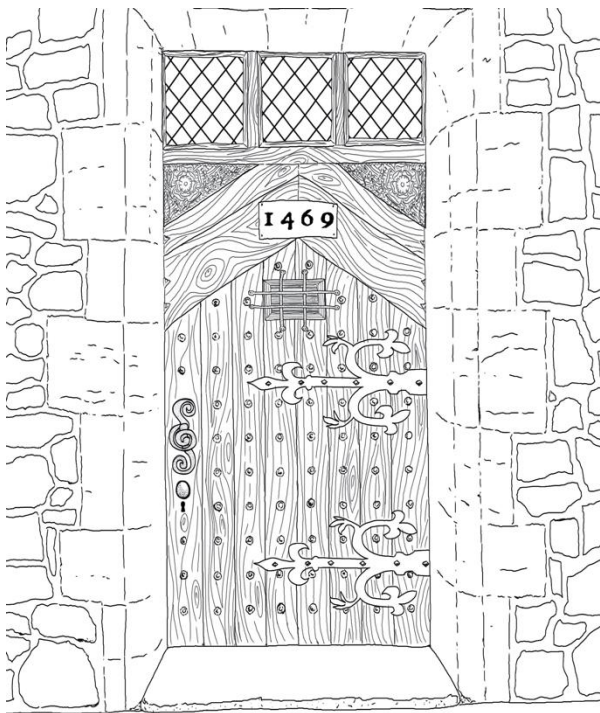
The purpose of this first step is to introduce the students to the context of a medieval house. You'll want to go quite slowly to start with, giving the class plenty of opportunity to read the text, make suggestions, and share their own knowledge.

Gather the class together and get ready to show them the PowerPoint slide show in Appendix 1 called *The Door*.

Go at a slow pace, read the text together and stop when you want to look at things in more detail or discuss ideas.

For example, when you reach slide 4 stop and give the children time to take a long look.

That's quite a door! What do you notice?



This house was built a long time ago. But something must have really worried them, don't you think? I mean this door is built for defence, it's almost like a small castle door... It makes you wonder what could have worried them so much that they went to all this trouble and expense?

After the conversation carry on with the next slide, stopping and talking as you go along.

Once you reach the last slide, showing the picture of the door, stop and continue with the next step...

A VISITOR AT THE DOOR

Q: I wonder what precautions the gatekeeper might take before letting a visitor in. I suppose they would open the door soon enough to people they recognised - members of the family, household servants who worked in the kitchens or gardens, people who regularly delivered provisions, such as flour and wine - but what about strangers - people who might be bringing messages, especially at night - what would they say to them when they opened the 'speakeasy'?

Task - Discussion

To make it more interesting you could take on the role of a messenger bringing a letter for the lord

of the house, while inviting the students to take on the role of the gatekeeper.

It doesn't have to be an aggressive confrontation (although you might expect the gatekeeper to be wary), the tension is in getting the balance right, certainly the Lord of the house wouldn't be happy if the gatekeeper offended someone of importance and wealth, but wouldn't want the gatekeeper opening the door to just anyone without being sure it was safe.

Ask one of the students if they would like to take on the role of the gatekeeper, reassuring them they can ask for help from the others if they get stuck.

Spend a bit of time developing the situation before starting. Something like:

*T: Are we agreed it is night-time?
The students nod in agreement.
T: Okay, so I'm going to be the messenger carrying the letter - I'll approach the door and knock hard.
[The teacher makes the action of knocking].
T: What should happen next?
The students suggest the gatekeeper will open the speakeasy.
T: How should he do it, do you think? Aggressively, slowly? And what should he say?*

There might follow some more discussion until everyone is ready to begin.

The teacher narrates: Out of the darkness came the sound of hooves, followed by the dark shape of a rider approaching the house. Pulling his horse up, he climbed down and walked towards the door, his face shrouded by the heavy hood of his cloak. He lifted his hand and knocked.

From inside the house there was the sound of footsteps, then a pale light appeared as the flap of the speakeasy was opened.

Gatekeeper (represented by the student): "What is it?"

Messenger (represented by the teacher): "I bring an important letter for the lord of the House."

Gatekeeper: "Give it here and I will take it."

Messenger: *"I have been instructed to hand it directly to lord himself and no other."*

There might be a pause while the students talk amongst themselves. You might need to come briefly out of the fiction if you think they need your help, something like:

Perhaps I can help. What are the Gatekeepers options? It seems to me, he has three: Tell the messenger to go away; Open the door; Or ask him more questions. Which do you think is best?

Give time for more discussion. Go back in when they are ready:

Gatekeeper: *"Who has sent you with this letter."*
Messenger: *"It is my master, the King. He is in dire need and my mission is urgent."*

And so on.

DELIVERING THE LETTER

Once the gatekeeper is persuaded it is safe and wise to give access to the traveller, you switch to a storytelling voice:

The gatekeeper pulls back the bolts on the door and gives access to the messenger. Instructing him to follow, he sets off across the wide entrance hall and down a long dark corridor. At the end is a set of double doors. The gatekeeper knocks and, on the sound of a voice from within telling him to enter, he pushes open the doors.

The room on the other side is grand, bedecked with tapestries and ornate carvings of mythical creatures. Flames flicker from a fire at one end of the room, where, behind a long wooden table, sits a woman dressed in fine clothes. She beckons the messenger forward with a wave of her hand.

"I see you bring a letter." She says.

Come out of the fiction to talk to the students:

Q: What do you think the messenger should say in response?

Task

Allow time for a discussion.

Then take on the role of the woman [or, if you have a teacher support ask them to take on the role. Be sure to give them plenty of time before the lesson to prepare] and invite the students to now take on the role of the messenger:

"I see you bring a letter."

"Yes, it is from my master the King. I am to hand it to the lord of the house."

"The lord of the house is in London, on business. While he is away, I am in charge. You can hand it to me, I am lady Margaret Paston, wife of John Paston who is lord of this house¹."

Once again, guide and support the students by coming out of the fiction if need be.

The messenger is in a difficult position and will need to be polite and courteous. This is an important and powerful woman and the letter is urgent.

The woman in this part of the of the planning is Margaret Paston, well known in the county as being someone who is not easily refused. Her husband is often away working in London and she is used to running the household in his stead. She is by now in her forties and has experienced many difficult situations, including holding out against an army that once surrounded her home. [See 'Paston Family Biographies' in the reference section for more information.]

Margaret is likely to use a number of strategies to persuade the messenger to hand over the letter, including:

Persuasion: *"I'm sure you do not want to leave with your mission frustrated, hand over the letter and I will make sure my husband receives it."*

¹ See notes on Margaret Paston in Bio's section of the appendix.

Threats: “Understand this, I am in charge when my husband is away. Now hand over that letter or you will regret it!”

Kindness: “You have travelled a long way and must be tired. Why not rest for the evening, I can have a bed made up for you and in the morning, you can make your decision.”

Adapt and use these as you see fit. The idea is not to get the students to give in, but to challenge them with a dilemma, it is up to them what the messenger decides to do. If they manage to hold-out, then the you can narrate:

Sticking to his purpose, the messenger kept the letter until the lord returned to the house several days later. Opening it in front of his wife, the lord said: “There are no secrets between me and the lady Margaret, but we understand and respect your loyalty to the King. You will wait while I read the letter.

If not, then create some variation.

THE LETTER

The letter is from King Edward IV, the first Yorkist monarch, who has been king of England for a number of years. Much of the country is in turmoil following the latest battles in the War of the Roses and Edward is asking John Paston to quell any rebellion that might arise in Norfolk. He is also demanding fealty and a promise that John’s two eldest sons (also both called, John²) will fight on the King’s side in any battles against the Lancastrians that might follow.

Bring out the letter [Appendix 1] and read:

To my loyal servant, Sir John Paston Esq.

As you know the country continues to suffer under the grievous assault of our enemies - both from within and without – and I look now for loyalty and support from my friends. You I know are one I can trust.

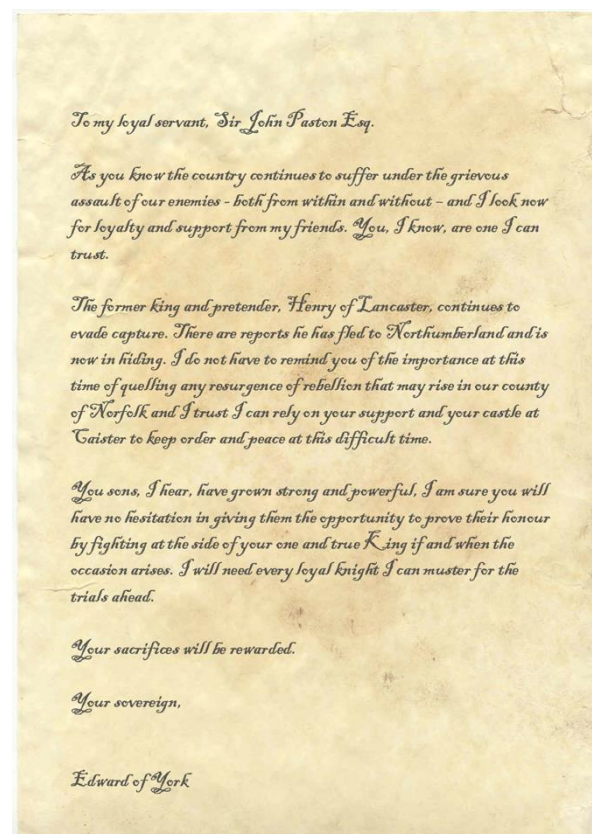
The former king and pretender, Henry of Lancaster, continues to evade capture. There are reports he has fled to Northumberland and is now in hiding. I do not have to remind you of the importance at this time of quelling any resurgence of rebellion that may rise in our county of Norfolk and I trust I can rely on your support and your castle at Caister to keep order and peace at this difficult time.

You sons, I hear, have grown strong and powerful, I am sure you will have no hesitation in giving them the opportunity to prove their honour by fighting at the side of your one and true King if and when the occasion arises. I will need every loyal knight I can muster for the trials ahead.

Your sacrifices will be rewarded.

Your sovereign,

Edward of York



² See notes on Paston family tree: John I had two sons - John II and John III - who both, in their turn, came to lead the Paston family.

John II fought for the Lancastrian side at the battle of Barnet in 1471 and is imprisoned, then pardoned. John III later fought for Henry VII at the battle of Stoke in 1487.

The Teacher Narrates: *After reading the letter, a look passes between John and Margaret, indicating concern: both for the safety of their sons - aged 23 and 18 - and with taking sides in a war between kings.*

Task: Spend some time discussing the meaning of the letter and its possible implications for the Pastons.

PART TWO

RESOURCES – APPENDIX 2

- Pictures of the different rooms of the house
- A supply of Tudor Topic books
- A stack of A5 paper
- A collection of laminated pictures of Tudor objects

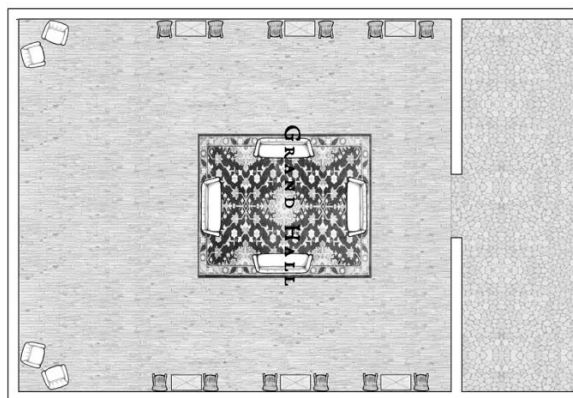
SWITCHING TO THE PRESENT

Before starting this session, you will want to prepare by gathering together the Tudor topic books, laying out on a table the collection of laminated pictures, and having to hand the stack of A5 paper.

Sit the class in a circle.

Narrate: *A lot of time has passed since John and Margaret sat and read their letter. Five hundred years and more, and the house is not the same as it was. Many things have changed: the hallway, the gardens, and much more. But the grand hall still remains...*

Show the class the picture of the Great Hall and place it in the middle of the circle.



One hundred and fifteen years after the messenger, in 1580, Clement Paston - the second of his name and the great grandson of John and Margaret - rebuilt much of the house in a new, grand style. There were rooms of all kinds: kitchens, dining-room, library..."

Lay out in a row the pictures of the rooms as you speak.

LAYING OUT THE HOUSE

Clement wanted to rebuild the house, but he didn't want to forget the past, so he put the Grand Hall in a place of importance and built the rest of the house around it.

Point to the picture of the Grand Hall.

Q: *How do you think he would have arranged the other rooms and buildings?*

Task: Discuss this with the students and then give them time to arrange the rooms as they choose.

INTRODUCING THE TEAM

Once the plan is created, take the label marked, "Plans of Oxnead Hall, 1580" and place it in on the plan.

These are the plans Clement II had drawn up in 1580 and the house, apart from a few minor alterations, has remained much the same ever since. It is, as you know, looking a bit worse for wear nowadays and, since it was sold last year, has been unoccupied. Much of the contents are now stored in boxes and a team of historians has been asked to go in and take a look.

The new owners are called the Paston Society and it is their hope that one day the house can be restored and opened to the public, so that visitors can find out about the Paston family and the part they played in the history of the country.

Q: *If you were the historians, given the job of exploring the house and finding out what remained from the past, where do you think you would start?*

Task - Discussion.

During the discussion try to keep your language 'inside the fiction', that is talk to the students *as-if* they are the historians and look for ways to deepen the fiction. In particular, point out implications. For example:

You want to start in the attic? That makes sense, there are likely to be a great deal of things packed away up there. Some might have been up there for years and totally forgotten. Who knows what we will find?

The Great Hall, I've heard it is in quite a bad state, holes in the roof and such like. Please take a photograph of anything of historical interest.

The cellar. Take care down there, I expect it will be dark and there might be obstacles. Please make a note of whatever you find but leave everything where it is. Once we've recorded everything we find, we can decide what to do next.

[Note: After the session, take the layout of the house the students have just created and make a display on the wall of the classroom. Label it - Plans of Oxnead Hall, 1580. As commissioned by Clement Paston II. These plans will play an important part in the work to come.]

*Plans of Oxnead Hall, 1580.
As commissioned by Clement Paston II*

EXPLORING THE HOUSE

Once the discussion is over, pick up the stack of A5 paper and begin:

Right, let's get going. Please take a piece of paper and draw a picture of anything you think is worth photographing. What we're looking for are items of particular historical interest, this house was famous for its collection of rare items from all over the world, so who knows what we will find.

Please use these books and pictures I have here to help you [Hold up one of the Topic Books and one of the laminated pictures]. All we need at the moment is an idea of what is in the house. Please draw a picture of your photograph and make a note of where you find the object. Remember

leave it where it is for now, we'll decide what to do with all these things later.

Task

The students set to work, using the books and the laminated pictures to help them get an idea of the kinds of objects that might be found in and around the house. Give them the support they need, but don't direct them too much, the point of this activity is to give them the chance to look through the topic books, find out what artefacts from this time looked like, and immerse themselves in the context.

Remind them to take a piece of A5 paper and start drawing the objects the history team are photographing as they explore the house. Ask the students to draw only one object per piece of paper and a size large enough for everyone to see.

Next, ask them to make a note on the paper of what the object is, what condition it is in, and where it has been found. Something like:

'A large two-handed sword - rusty and blunt. Found hanging above the fireplace in the great hall.'

Or:

'A hand mirror - silver-plated, decorated around the edge with scenes from nature. Found in a drawer in the master bedroom.'

While the students are busy working, write on the board - Objects photographed in the house:

When you're finished, can I ask you to attach your photographs to the board over here? Please try to group them with objects found in the same part of the house, that way we can start to get an idea of what we are dealing with here.

As the students start to bring the images over, talk to them about what they have found (try to stay inside the fiction, but come out if they need help). For example:

*"Do you mind if I ask what you've found?"
"A necklace."
"I see, where did you find it?"*

*"In the attic."
 "It looks quite valuable; makes you wonder who owned it. Are there any signs, marks and such like?"
 "Nothing."
 "That's a shame, not to worry. Please add it to the board."*

And so on.

After a time there should be quite a large number of objects appearing on the board. When you are ready, bring everyone together and talk about what is being found, but avoid a 'show and tell'.

Looking at the board there seems to be a great deal of objects, some in better condition than others. Plenty for us to work on...

Note

After the session, create a working-board using the drawings created by the students. Label it - Objects photographed in the house.

PART THREE

Resources

- A display of the layout of the house – labelled: 'Plans of Oxnead Hall, 1580. As commissioned by Clement Paston II.'
- A working-board of the drawings created by the students. Labelled - Objects photographed in the house.
- A4 copies of the plan of the Great Hall [Appendix 2] and outline of the Team's tent [Appendix 3]
- Copies of the Team's office equipment and technical equipment [Appendix 3]

TEAM HEADQUARTERS

This step is about establishing the role of the team, their responsibilities, and the kinds of equipment they will use for a job like this. Sitting where the students can see both, begin the next session:

So [pointing to the displays], here we have a plan of the house and a record of all the objects we have found so far. I was thinking, our next job is to

set up an HQ - a place of operations. Where we can put all our equipment and work on our investigations. Do you think our Headquarters should be inside or outside the house? I mean we could set up a series of tents, like they do on archaeological digs, or we could use one of the rooms in the house. What do you think would be best? The Great Hall might be a good base, it's the biggest room in the house and right at the centre.

Allow some time for discussion, look for implications:

Yes, there is electricity inside the house, but that shouldn't be a deciding factor. We could always hire a generator, they make a bit of noise, but would do the job perfectly well.

That's a good point, the floor is showing signs of wear and tear and some of our equipment is heavy, getting it in and out would be tricky. Not something, however, we haven't managed before.

Encourage the students to talk inside the fiction, but don't worry if they find it hard - this is quite normal - try to remain consistent yourself and after a time they will start to join in. Avoid making jokes though, if they think you're not taking it seriously, they won't either.

Once the students have decided where the team's HQ will be, they can move onto the next step. Don't worry if they can't agree, compromise is necessary - it is perfectly possible for the team to have two (or more) bases.

ARRANGING THE OFFICE

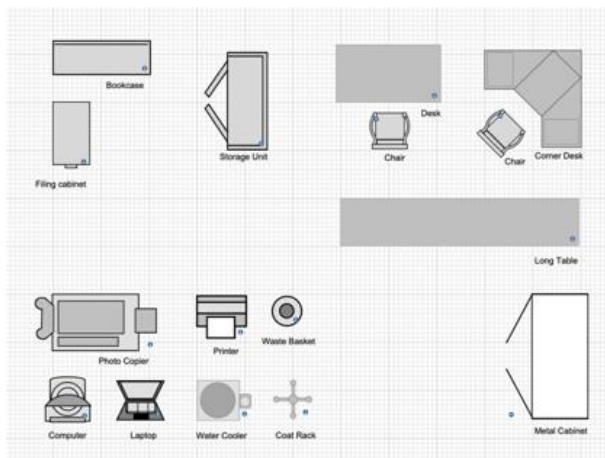
Hand out the plans of the Great Hall and/or the tent, plus the Team's office equipment.

You'll find here some of the office equipment we can made available for this job. Please arrange it as you like within the HQ. There is enough of everything if you need more than one item.

Task

Give the students time to discuss the resources and then work to arrange the equipment – they might want to draw them directly onto the room

plans, or perhaps cut them out and explore different arrangements. If they want more equipment, try to deal with it 'inside' the fiction.



TEAM'S TECHNICAL EQUIPMENT

As a possible extension to the last step, hand out the Team's Technical Equipment list [Appendix 3].

I've brought along some of the equipment I think we are going to need. Can you please take a look - let me know if there is anything else I need to order and I'll do my best to get it here as soon as possible?

History Team Technical Equipment List

	Phoebus Multi Colour LED Light flashlight		Long shot laser pointer – up to 1000 metres
	SLR digital camera		Video Camera
	Heavy duty equipment case		Shoulder bag
	Laptop and armoured case		Combination lock security safe
	Master plug Two Socket Outdoor Weatherproof Case Reel, 20 Metres		Master plug Single Socket RCD Safety Adaptor
	Two-Way Radio – Long Range Walkie Talkie		Digital microscope

PART FOUR

Resources

- Copies of the cellar plans – v.1 and v.2 [Appendix 4]
- Cellar plans – v.3 and v.4 ready for projection on the whiteboard

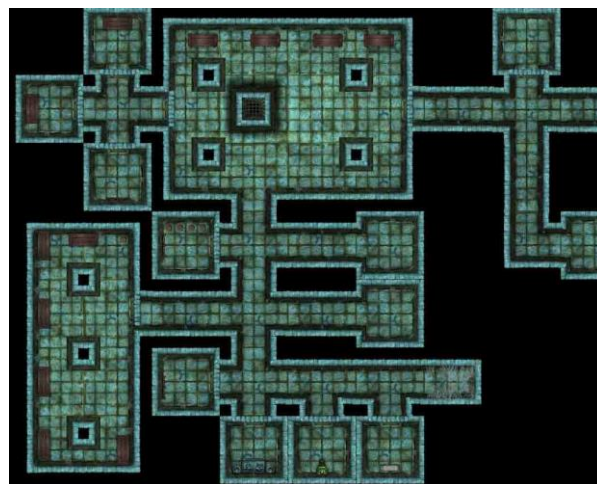
In this Part of the Context the History Team will explore the cellars of the house and make a discovery. The aim is to generate a sense of excitement and danger.

THE CELLARS

Deep, under the foundations of the house, Clement had built a labyrinth of tunnels and small rooms he planned to use as a cellar for storing food, wine, and other products.

Task

Show image – “[Cellar Paston v.1](#)” from Appendix 4 on the whiteboard. Give the students time to examine the picture. Ask them: “What do you notice?” Point out the stairs coming down from the kitchens, the wooden boxes and barrels, and the cobwebs at the end of the last corridor. The image is high resolution so you can ‘zoom in’ and ‘scan around’ for a closer look.



The cellars are now dusty and barely used, cobwebs fill the corners of every room and many of the wooden chests and barrels lie broken and empty. In the house's heyday, every corner would have been stacked with provisions – wine from Europe, salted calf from Scotland, spices and peppers from all around the world, boxes of cloth and ornaments, artworks, and suits of armour –

but now barely anything remains – nothing now but shadows and dust.

At one end of a corridor the roof has collapsed, and rubble fills the space. But it looks like it could be moved, with care and the right equipment.

Task

Discuss (with the students 'inside' the fiction) how the Team are going to go about removing the rubble and securing the roof so they can gain access to the space at the other end of the corridor. Once agreed, continue:

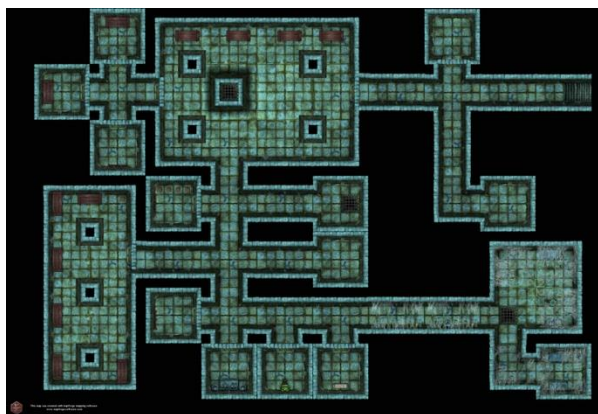
The Team set to work. As the rubble began to clear they noticed the corridor went on for another five metres. Shinning their torches, they could just make out what looked like another room in the darkness.

After ensuring the roof was secure, they walked carefully forward, sweeping away the cobwebs and stepping over the last of the broken stones.

At the end of the corridor a square space opened up - dingy and dank from long neglect. On the floor was a heavy metal grid, brown with rust and to the right another, shorter, corridor, bending to the right.

Task

Show image – "[Cellar Paston v.2](#)" from Appendix 4 on the whiteboard. 'Zoom in' to the new rooms. Give the students time to look at the new image. Ask them what they notice and discuss what they think they should do next – do they trust the metal grid will take the weight of them and their equipment? Do they want to explore what is in the rooms?



Give the students a bit more information:

The larger room: *This is a square room - each wall measuring roughly five metres – scattered around are various objects of different kinds:*

- An empty metal box.
- A stone statue of a knight, measuring 2m. The knight is standing upright, with a rusted metal sword held in its hands.
- An empty clay pot – ornate and painted with a scene of a river and mountains.

The small room: *At the end of the corridor is a smaller room, dust and cobwebs fill every corner.*

Alongside two of the walls are two heavy metal boxes, decorated with geometric shapes. Each of the boxes is bolted and locked shut with a large, rusty, padlock.

Task

Discuss with students 'inside' the fiction what they think the Team should do next? Unless they have a set of keys, they are left with the option of breaking the locks or trying to pick them.

The first of the metal boxes opens with a creak of its rusty hinges. Inside is an indistinct shape, roughly two metres long, wrapped in an old blanket.

Task

Discuss what should the team should do next?

Carefully lifting the object out of the box, the Team pulled aside the blanket, so frail was it now it fell apart in their hands. The first tear revealed a glinting black eye, the second a long row of sharp pointed teeth – as deadly as razors – the third a patch of scally green skin.

Task

Give time for a short discussion.

Pulling back the last of the blanket, the Team stood back and looked at what they had found – an ancient gnarled crocodile, once a terror of its domain, now a cracked and battered shell, bereft of life and dignity.

Task – Discussion.

The other box contained a second of its kind, if anything even more battered and broken. Getting them back up the stairs, undamaged was going to be a difficult job.

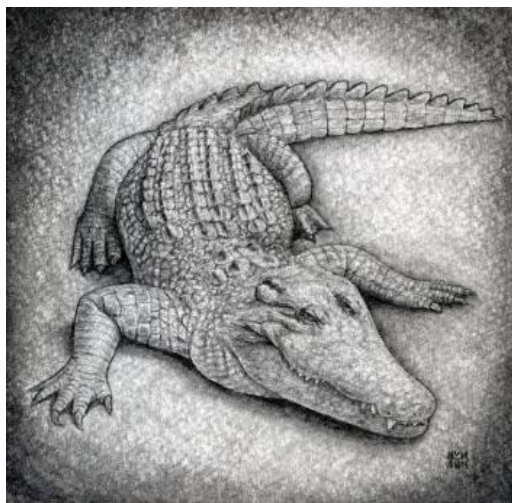
Extension Tasks

Following this episode the students might do a number of tasks:

- They might write an account, written by members of the Team recalling the events of the day: the discovery of the cellar, the shifting of the fallen rubble, the exploration of the 'hidden' rooms, and the uncovering of the crocodiles. Introduce them to the aspects of 'Dramatic Imagination'³ – darkness/light, sound/silence, movement/stillness – possibly share the text written for this part of the planning and examine with them how the different aspects were used.

- Conduct an inquiry into crocodiles: their habits, their diet, the differences between crocodiles and alligators, and where in the world they come from^{4 5}.

- They might draw an artist's sketch of the crocodiles⁶



PART FIVE

Resources

- Print out the 'Commission Letter' [Appendix 5] and place it in an envelope addressed to The History Team – Oxnead Hall, Norfolk, NR10 5HP

THE PASTON SOCIETY COMMISSION LETTER

In this step the students (as the History Team) are introduced to the Client and the Commission.

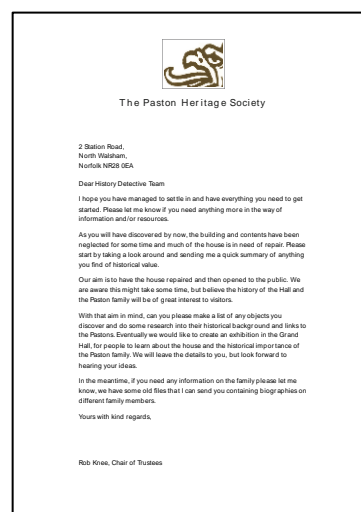
There is no need to pretend the letter is 'real' just gather the class together and start:

Inside the story, do you think we would have an 'inbox' for letters as part of our HQ? Or would letters and parcels be organised in a different way? I guess opening them might be part of a routine at the start of the day, something we do at a meeting to discuss our jobs and workplan. What do you think?

Discussion.

Could we agree this letter arrived this morning? It's addressed to The History Team - Oxnead Hall, Norfolk, NR10 5HP. I'll open it and see what it says.

Read the letter.



³ [Using the dramatic imagination.](#)

⁴ [Difference between crocodile and alligator.](#)

⁵ [WikiHow: How to Tell the Difference Between a Crocodile and an Alligator](#)

⁶ [How to draw a crocodile.](#)

Task

Discuss the contents of the letter and set to work on writing a reply to Rob Knee including a list of the artefacts found so far by the Team and any information they think he might find interesting and useful at this time.

You might want to use the letter template for the History Team found in Appendix 5.

SECTION TWO

Now the Team, the Client, and the Commission are established the following activities in this section can be taught in any order you choose.

Remember to keep in mind that the Paston Society have requested regular updates, and there will be an exhibition in the Grand Hall at the end of the history team's work. These aspects of the Context are designed to give purpose and direction to the children's studies, so use and apply them as you see necessary.

ONE – PORTRAIT OF WILLIAM PASTON

Resources [Appendix 6]

- The portrait of William Paston III – to go on the whiteboard.
- Copies of the 'Paston File' on William

PORTRAIT 1 – SIR WILLIAM PASTON III

Present the portrait of William III on the whiteboard. William



© 2019 Licensed from National Trust

Give the students a little time to examine the painting. Then read:

Hanging above the fireplace in the Grand Hall is a portrait of a man. The frame is gilded gold, which once must have been bright but is now faded and worn. The man is young, possibly in his late twenties, he's dressed in black robes with a white collar and cuffs. His hands are arranged in a rather strange way, appearing to gather up the folds of the robe and grasp them to his midriff.

The man's hair is shoulder length – fashionable for the time – and he has a slight, wispy, goatee beard. His mouth is tightly closed, and he stares out of the canvas his eyes looking directly into the eyes of the viewer. It is not easy to guess what he is thinking, but it doesn't seem to be happy thoughts.

The background of the painting is divided into three equal parts. The first is a red patterned curtain, the second a black strip, which could be material, but seems to 'fray at the edge' where it meets the third part, an outdoor scene of brooding grey skies and what looks like a palm tree and a river.

In the distance there might be the outline of a town. Closer to the viewer, however, is something altogether more disturbing.

Task

Ask the students: "Is there anything you notice?"

Discuss the details - they might find the arrangement of William's hands strange, they might notice the ring, and want to know more about who the man is. At this stage resist telling them about William and his circumstances (they will get this information later). After a while, if they don't notice it immediately, draw their attention to the figures in the bottom left-hand corner. [The portrait of William in Appendix 6 is high resolution so you can pan and zoom in for a better look].

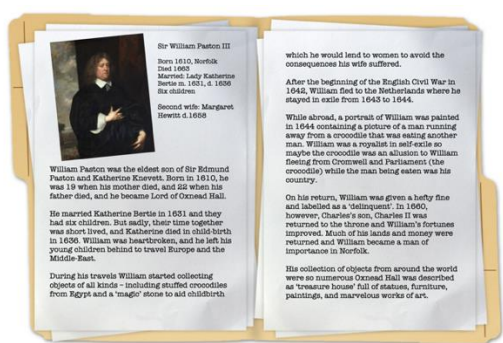


Spend some time discussing what they think is going on.

Task

Hand out copies of the 'Paston File' on William III.

I contacted the Paston Society to see if they had any more information on this painting and this is what they sent. Hopefully it will answer some of our questions.



Spend some time reading the file together and talking about the contents. Encourage the students to underline anything they think important and to make notes – including questions they might have.

There is likely to be some new information for them – in particular the English Civil War – and some unfamiliar vocabulary – 'hefty', 'delinquent', 'exile' – so help them out where needed. There is no need to go into detail about the Civil War, you can return to that later. At the moment the more relevant information is about William, his family, his time spent abroad, and his collection. In particular the link to the crocodiles discovered in the cellar.

Extension Task

If the students have been working on the illustrations of the crocodiles from the last step, they might now work on creating an 'information panel' for visitors to the Hall - including a copy of the painting of William III and explaining how the crocodiles found in the cellar are linked to the images of the crocodiles seen in the painting.

In working on this task and others they will gradually build up the displays that will make up the exhibition in the Grand Hall as requested in the Paston Society 'commission letter'.

TWO – LIFE IN A TUDOR HOUSE

Resources

- A copy of Wilson, L 'Daily Life in a Tudor House'⁷.
- Print, laminate, and cut out several copies of the 'Life in a Tudor House' list found in Appendix 7.

WILLIAM PASTON AND BRIDGET HEYDON 1522

In this part of the unit the students will investigate life at Oxnead Hall in the years before Clement Paston rebuilt the house in 1580.

At this time Sir William Paston (1464-1554) and his wife Bridget Heydon (1478-1554) were living

⁷ Wilson, L 'Daily Life in a Tudor House'

in the Hall much as it had been built by William's Great-Great Grandfather, Clement Paston I.

William and Bridget had nine children and were well connected to the royal family and the newly established Tudor dynasty. Their eldest daughter, Eleanor Paston was to become the Countess of Rutland and Lady-in-Waiting to four of Henry VIII wives⁸.

Tasks

It is recommended you share a copy Laura Wilson's 'Daily Life in a Tudor House' with the students and spend time investigating some of the book's themes. These investigations might develop into 'information sheets' etc, that can be used later in the History Team's Exhibition.

Sit the class in a circle:

Since we last met, I've been digging into the history of the house and discovered the last person to own the house before it was rebuilt by Clement in 1580. His name was Sir William Paston and he lived there until he was 90 years old, which was a great age at this time in history.

In 1522 he had owned the house for 19 years since he inherited it from his father John Paston in 1503.

William was 58 years old and lived with his wife, Lady Bridget Paston and their eight children – Eleanor, Margaret, Erasmus, Elizabeth, John, Thomas, Mary, and Clement.

As you read take the card for each of these people and lay it down so the class can see.

You might want to spend some time discussing the dates, names, and numbers. William (58) and Bridget (44) were already quite old by the time they had Clement (who was to inherit the house in 1554), and were still to have another child, Henry in the following year⁹.

*I also found out the names of their servants, it was all in the archive, in a great big, leather-bound book in the library. They had 8 servants:
- John, 20 and Richard, 25 who were husbandmen,*

that meant they worked on the farm

- Tom, 24 a houseman - someone who worked around the house

- Harry, 25 the ostler and gardener - who worked with the horses and maintained the garden

- Bob, 12 a servant boy

- Margaret, 39 who was the house cook and housekeeper

- And Jane, 17 and Agnes, 19 who were both Margaret's housekeeping assistants.

As you read this list out take the card for each of these people and lay them down so the class can see.

I found all the jobs, tasks and routines they had to do, but didn't have time to match them up with the people and where they did them. I thought that might be something we could do together. I've made enough lists for us to work in groups..."

Task

Working in groups, the students take the four lists (family, staff, jobs and places) and work out how they best go together. Some of the places will be redundant, others used more than once. Some jobs might not have places (taking the food to market), don't worry, let the groups sort them out as best they can.

Thanks, I think we better take photos of each of the possible solutions, I'll email them to Mr. Knee. Do you think there is anything here I need to point out to him? I notice, for example, that most of the outdoor work is done by the men and most of the indoor work by the women. And that while the servant children are very busy, the children of the Lord and Lady do very little. I wonder what they did all day.

⁸ Eleanor Paston – Wikipedia

⁹ See Appendix 7 – 'Sir William Paston (1464-1554) Timeline'.

Family of the house	Sir William Paston Age 58	Lady Bridget Paston, Age 44
Eldest daughter, Eleanor Age 27	Second daughter, Margaret Age 22	First son, Erasmus Age 16
Third daughter, Elizabeth Age 13	Second son, John Age 12	Third son, Thomas Age 7
Fourth daughter, Mary Age 2	Fourth son, Clement Age 1	
Staff of the house	Husbandman John, 20 Works on the farm	Husbandman Richard, 25 Works on the farm
Houseman Tom, 24 Works around the house	Ostler/Gardner Harry, 25 Works with horses & maintains gardens	Servant Boy Bob, 12 Assists in the house, gardens, animals & horses
Cook & Housekeeper Margaret, 39 Prepares/cooks food	Maid Jane, 17 Assists around the house	Maid, Agnes, 19 Assists around the house
Jobs, tasks & routines	Cleaning the house	Cleaning clothes
Preserving food	Taking food to the market	Making soup & candles
Feeding the animals	Tending the garden	Making the beds
Preparing the food	Collecting the eggs	Collecting the honey
Making & Mending clothes	Milking the cows	Making butter & cheese

THREE – THE BATTERED HELMET

Resources

- The plan of the cellar v.2 [Appendix 4]
- Appendix 8 – Tudor helmet picture
- Appendix 8 – Paston Banner Image
- Appendix 8 – Paston Banner Info Folder

In this part of the planning the students will learn about John Paston III (1445-1503) and his role in securing the throne for the first Tudor King of England, Henry VII.

There are a number of good documentaries on the War of the Roses which you might want to share with the students while working on this part of the unit¹⁰.

EXAMINING THE HELMET

Show the plan of the cellar on the whiteboard.

One morning, while searching the cellar, the light from the team's torches caught sight of a metal object wrapped in red material.

At first, they weren't sure what they had found, but on closer inspection, they discovered it was a knight's helmet, buckled and rusty with age.

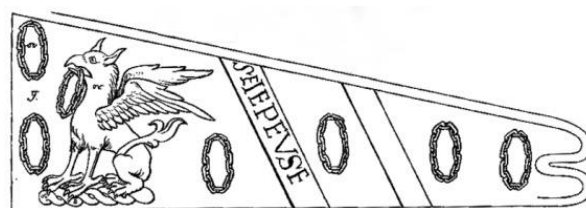
Show the picture of the helmet on the board.

It looked at little like this...



The helmet felt heavy in their hands, and the visor creaked and moaned as they opened it, sending tiny shards of rust onto the cellar floor.

Along with a pattern design, painted in fading gold leaf, on one side of the helmet was a small coat of arms...



Display this image on the whiteboard.

Has anyone seen this, or anything like it, elsewhere in the house?

¹⁰ Search for 'war of the roses documentary' on YouTube. (Remember to check the suitability of the content).

Give time for a discussion. Look closely at the images and symbolism.

The text is in French. This is what it says: Si Je Pense [If I think]

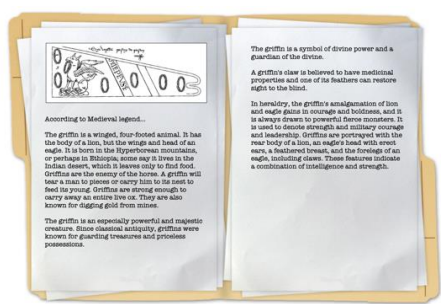
The seven 'circles' are wreaths. Four in the first 'quadrant'; one in the second; two in the third. One of the wreaths is held in the creature's mouth. Between the first two wreaths is the letter, 'J'.

The creature is standing on a twisted rope.

The creature looks familiar, does anyone recognise it?

Using Google images, search: "medieval griffin".

Share the 'Paston Banner Info Folder'.



JOHN III AND THE WAR OF THE ROSES

In this part of the planning you'll be using the old helmet as a 'bridge into the past¹¹' and using the 'convention' of a painting to represent a key moment in history involving a member of the Paston family.

What the historians didn't know at this moment in time, is that the helmet was once owned by John Paston, the third of his name - A renowned and fierce warrior, injured and afterwards imprisoned at the Battle of Barnet, he fought in the War of the Roses and was knighted by Henry Tudor (later known as Henry VII) on the field of the Battle of Stoke Field.

You might want to stop at this point and share some of the following information [please check

the contents to ensure they are suitable for your students]: (links below)

1. A Wars of the Roses documentary¹²
2. Battle of Stoke Field - Wikipedia¹³
3. More information on the Battle¹⁴

You might also want to show a clip from the film 'Henry V' depicting the Battle of Agincourt to give your students an impression of battles during the Middle Ages¹⁵

Once you are ready return to the story of the helmet.

Imagine the helmet on the head of John Paston at the end of the Battle of Stoke Field. He had fought alongside the king and at the end of the battle the king knighted him amongst the bodies of their enemies.

What have you heard about 'knighting'?

Discussion. Invite one of the students to represent John taking off his helmet and kneeling before the king. Invite another to represent the king resting his sword on John's shoulders and speaking the words: "Arise Sir John of Paston."

I wonder what a painting of this scene might have looked like. How do you suppose an artist working for the Paston's would depict such a scene? Shall we have a go at recreating it?

Task

Spend some time recreating what the class imagine a painting of this scene might look like – Who is painted? How are they depicted: heroically, defeated, noble, tired, etc?

Once they are ready, ask them to hold the moment perfectly still...

This was the last battle of the War of the Roses. The end of a war that had raged for more than thirty years, tearing the country apart, killing thousands of England's most noble, and this was the end. Henry had won and there would be peace at last.

¹¹ For more information on 'bridging devices' and 'conventions' see the introduction to this guide.

¹² [War of the Roses documentary](#)

¹³ [Battle of Stoke Field - Wikipedia](#)

¹⁴ [More information on the Battle](#)

¹⁵ [Henry V \(1989\) - Battle of Agincourt](#)

Task - John's letter.

The Paston's were great letter writers. Famous for it. I wonder what John would have written to his wife about this moment. Her name was Margery.

I suppose he would want her to know how the battle had gone and about his own part fighting alongside the king, and I suppose he would have wanted to share his pride in being made a knight.

They were affectionate, so he might have started with something like: "My dearest, Margery, I am writing to tell you about the proudest day of my life..."

Support the students in writing their own versions of the letter, describing the battle and its aftermath. They might think John would want to spare Margery the full horrors, while giving her a sense of his heroism.

Encourage them to use the 'Six Dimensions of Dramatic Imagination' – Light/Darkness; Movement/Stillness; Sound/Silence.¹⁶

FOUR – THE PASTON LETTERS

Resources Appendix 9

- Small wooden box.
- The picture of Margaret Paston (1423-1484)
- The Gresham letter – photocopied and an image ready to go on the whiteboard
- Paston Family Tree
- A letter from the Paston Society
- The 'fact file' on Margaret Paston
- Plan of Caister Castle
- Margaret's letter during the Caister siege

In this part of the planning the students will learn about Margaret Paston¹⁷ and the Paston letters.

A SMALL WOODEN BOX

Amongst the other objects found in the library was a small wooden box.



Plain and rather uninteresting, it had a tiny metal padlock. Which, hard as they looked, the Team could not find the key for.

Stop at this point to give the students time to ask questions – The box is made of heavy, but inexpensive wood; it has metal edges and a metal bracket; there are various signs of wear and tear, including the signs of fire damage; the small padlock is rather ornate and looks more modern than the box, it might be from a foreign country; there are two small holes in the lid and, if a light from a torch is shone inside, it will be seen that the box contains ancient looking paper.

What do you think we should do?

Discussion.

If they ask, the lock could be forced or even unpicked with the right equipment.

Inside the box are various documents:

1. A picture of a young woman, something like this one. But the details are a bit different.



Let me describe them to you:

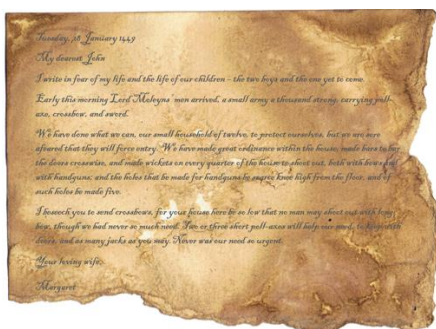
¹⁶ Using dramatic imagination to develop writing.

¹⁷ Information on the life of Margaret Paston

"A young woman sits at her desk, quill in hand, writing a letter. Her head and neck are covered, and she wears a long dress, down below her ankles. She is inside a strong looking building (possibly a castle or a fortified house), through the narrow window and down below, can be seen an army of archers preparing to fire arrows. Beside the woman is a crib, with a small child sleeping, beside the crib stands another, older, child. The woman's face is calm and resolute."

You might need to read this description once or twice more for the students to get all the details.

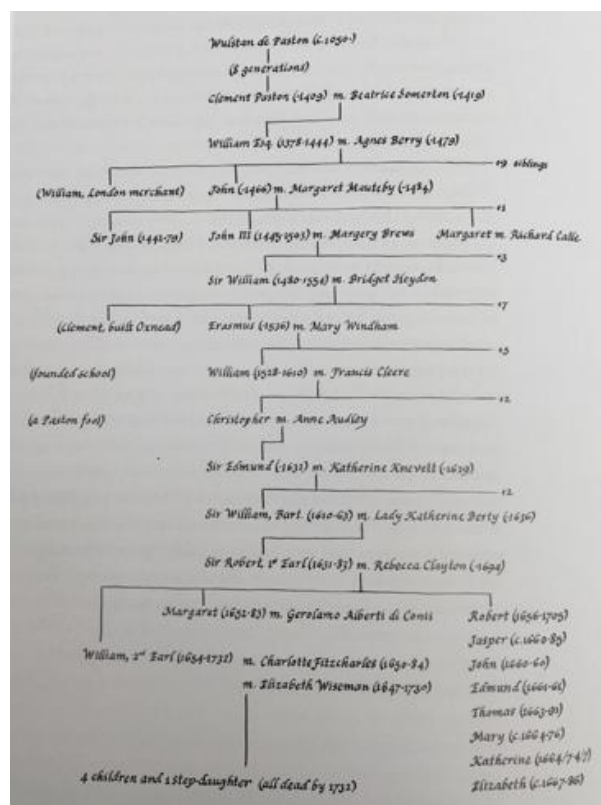
Also, in the box is an ancient damaged letter, worn and soiled by time. The letter is dated 1449 and is written by a woman called Margaret.



Hand out copies of the letter so the students can read it for themselves. Then read it together, helping them with some of the difficult words. Try to stay true to the idea of them being a Team of Historians.

What do you make of this? Not all the words and meanings are clear to me. Perhaps we can work them out together. Let's start at the beginning.

January 1449 - where is that on the family tree?



Help the students to locate John and Margaret.

What does she mean, "the one yet to come?"

Margaret was pregnant at the time of the siege.

Continue in this style until you feel they have discovered as much as they can from the letter.

I wonder what the Paston Society can tell us about this. Shall we write to them and see if they have more information?

Task: There are number of ways you might want to do this activity: Either the students can write their own letters to the Paston Society; You could write a letter together; Or you could write one on their behalf, checking the details with them before sending it off.

MORE INFORMATION ON MARGARET PASTON

This is the reply:



The Paston Heritage Society

2 Station Road,
North Walsham,
Norfolk NR28 0EA

Dear History Detective Team

Thank you for letting us know you have discovered a new 'Paston letter'.
This is very exciting news!

The Paston letters are a large collection of correspondence between members of the Paston family and others connected with them in England between the years 1422 and 1509.

Many of them were written by Margaret Paston (nee. Mautby) to her husband, John and their children, detailing the events of their lives during a very turbulent time in English history.

The letter you have discovered concerns a dispute over a large area of land near the village of Gresham in Norfolk. Lord Moleyns, who was an adversary of John Paston, claimed the land for himself and planned to move in.

At this time, John was spending a great deal of time in London and Margaret was alone with the children. Moleyns' army surrounded the house and threatened to drive her out. Bravely, Margaret stood up to him, even writing a letter (which you seem to have found!) asking John for more weapons to defend the property. But in the end Moleyns' army drove her out and, later, fearing she might be kidnapped, she escaped secretly in the night with her children. Hiding from the soldiers who were trying to hunt her down. Eventually reaching the safety of her mother-in-law's home at Oxnead.

What an adventure!

Rob Knee, Chair of Trustees

help the students imagine what other pictures there could be in a book about those events. You might want to show them other pictures from the period, such as:

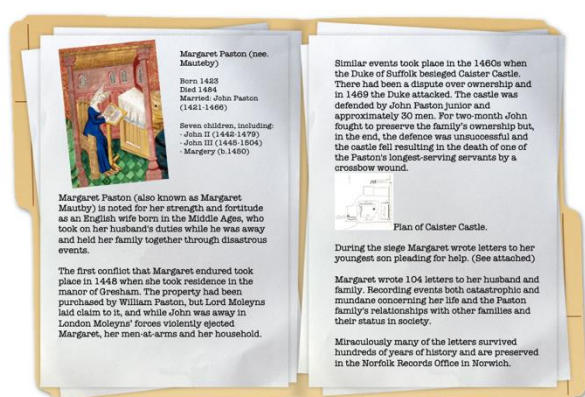


Help them to create the images from various perspectives, discussing what Margaret and her children would have seen and heard that night, and then have a go at writing the letters to her husband after she had successfully escaped.

Share the letter with the students inside the fiction.

It looks like we have a reply from the Paston Society. And they have sent another fact file.

Share the Margaret Paston Fact File.



Task: Writing letters

Margaret sounds like a remarkably resourceful woman. I wonder what her letters to her husband telling him about the siege and her escape in the middle of the night were like.

Use the convention of an illuminated manuscript, like the one of Margaret writing at her desk, to

FIVE – THE PASTON TREASURE

Resources

- Appendix 10 – The Paston Treasure painting
- Appendix 6 – Sir William Paston III Fact File
- Appendix 2 – Objects found in the house

In this section the students will learn about the Paston Treasure, a famous painting created in the later years of the Paston family. To prepare for this part of the planning you will want to do a bit of background research. Here are some links:

- [A historical whodunit that lets you into a forgotten world](#)
- [Lecture | The Paston Treasure: The Lives behind the Picture](#)
- [Stephen Fry: The Paston Treasure, a painting like no other](#)
- [The Paston Treasure: A Painting that Reveals an Entire World while Concealing an Alchemical Secret](#)

Propped up against a wall in the attic is a large rectangular object covered in an old dirty sheet. Behind the sheet is strange painting, full of objects that seem to have come from all over the world.

Present the Paston Treasure on the whiteboard for the students to see:



Give them a bit of time to look.

Is there anything in particular that catches your eye?

The image is high definition, so you can zoom in to take a closer look.



Don't worry about commenting on things that interest you. For example:

There is a real jumble of things, lots of shells, and several time-pieces: a clock, a pocket-watch, and a sand-timer.

I wonder what the little girl is looking at. Her attention seems to be caught by something over to the side.

That candle is a bit odd, don't you think? Amongst all these beautiful and expensive objects, a plain old candle, half burnt. And it doesn't seem to be dark!

See if the students draw parallels to Sir William Paston III's 'Fact File' which includes the quote: "His collection of objects from around the world were so numerous Oxnead Hall was described as 'treasure house' full of statues, furniture, paintings, and marvelous works of art."¹⁸

Also, they might recognise several of the objects in the painting are ones that have been found in places around the house.¹⁹

It is likely the students will notice the sand-timer and the clock. When they do, talk to them about the role of symbolism in paintings of this time:

Nothing in a painting or other works of art is there by mistake. So, a bit like the crocodiles in William's portrait, all these objects are likely to have another meaning. This clock and the sand-timer, for example, what do you suppose they mean?

Give the students some time to talk and discuss their ideas.

Art experts usually ascribe clocks to the passing of time and sometimes death. You see here there is an unlit candle that seems to have burnt down.

Other themes you might discuss in the painting, include: Travel, sea-creatures, shells, music, wine, fruit and flowers. For more information on the themes of this painting refer to the list at the beginning of this section.

There are various ways art experts can find out more information about paintings, one way is to have them x-rayed. Here is what this painting looked like after it was x-rayed.

¹⁸ See, 'ONE – portrait of William Paston' p.14

¹⁹ See the object on the laminated sheets used on p.8 – 'Exploring the House'.

Show the students the x-ray of the painting on the whiteboard.



Followed by the close up:



And the reconstruction:



Despite long hours of research, the Paston Society were unable to discover the identity of the woman in this painting or the reason she was painted out of the final version.

The young girl is thought to be the daughter of Robert Paston who died in childhood. The handsome young African boy has not been identified, but because the identifiable details are so meticulously accurate, the researchers believe he must, like the little girl, have been a real person, possibly living in the Paston household.

Task:

As with other artefacts found in the house, the students create 'fact-files' and information boards to be used in the exhibition to be held in the Great Hall after the house is restored.

SIX – FURTHER ACTIVITIES

The Paston family had a long and fascinating history. As well as the research contained in this pack, if you wished you could create a long list of further activities and stories for your students to study and represent at the exhibition. There are some suggestions on the following two pages.

ROOM	ARTEFACT	SITUATION	PASTON HISTORY	ACTIVITY/PURPOSE	CURRICULUM	RESOURCES
Bedroom	Portrait: Clement II	Framed in gilded gold.	Clement II c.1580	To learn about the activities of the king's sea captain in plundering enemy ships and taking their captain's hostage.	History: The early history of the British navy and their 'pirating'	About the life and exploits of Clement I
Church	Carving: Dance of death	Carved into the stone, near the door to the crypt.	Clement I c.1409, who benefited from the cheap land that became available after the death of large numbers of people due to the Black Death.	To learn about the Black Death and how its devastating effects were depicted in art.	History: The Black Death and its impact on Medieval England Art: Art in churches and its role in making meaning	The legend of the three kings who, when hunting merrily in the forest, suddenly encountered three hanging skeletons, 'Weighing of souls'
Library	A letter written on parchment	Placed inside an ancient bible: Matthew 25:31-46, referring to Judgement Day: "The Sheep and Goats"	William I c.1442 - Written by the Prior of Bromholme to William declaring: "Since you are thus cruel..." ; accusing him of imprisoning a widow for 3yrs; and cursing his line.	To learn about the nefarious dealings of William I, who used his position as a lawyer to increase the wealth of the family.	History: How wealth and power often came to families through the use of power and influence	Modern: Matthew 25:31-46 King James version
Library	Letters written by Margaret	A batch of letters, found in a small wooden box. Letters are soiled and slightly damaged by fire.	John II 1469 Including: The siege of Caister castle; and others	To examine copies of the original letters and transcriptions for information. To tell the stories of the Paston Letters and the siege of Caister Castle.	History: Examining primary & secondary texts for information. Reading for information. Writing:	See the Paston Biographies in the reference section of this handbook for more information.
Kitchens	Instructions from William IV	Written to the kitchen staff to prepare for the visit of the King	Robert 1671 Visit of Charles II and family, marriage of William IV to king's daughter	Study the visit of the King and the cost implications to the family.	History: The role of the monarch after the Restoration and the place played by patronage.	

ROOM	ARTEFACT	SITUATION	PASTON HISTORY	ACTIVITY/PURPOSE	CURRICULUM	RESOURCES
Attic	A plain wooden chest with creaking hinges.	Newspaper report, brown and soiled with age. Found amongst a pile of old papers and other odds and ends.	William IV 1732 A report of the death of William Paston 2 nd Earl of Yarmouth, 78. The last of the Paston family. The house and all its possessions will be sold at auction, the proceeds to pay for debts incurred.	To read the report and interpret its meaning. To investigate what happened to the rest of the Paston family. To tell the story and present the letter in the house/museum.	History: Examining primary & secondary texts for information. Reading for information. Writing: Newspaper report	
Library	Coded letters	Coded letter sent by Robert while in exile promising to support the king during the Civil war.	Robert, a (covert) supporter of Charles II sends the king in exile large amounts of money.	To learn about the Civil War and the factions. To find out about the events of the war and the execution of Charles	History: The English Civil War English: Writing a story about Robert's escape	
Church	The tomb of Mary, aged 10, daughter of Robert	In the church, close by the house, is a memorial to a child who died in London from a common childhood illness.	Robert child mortality hit Robert hard. When Mary died, (the girl in the painting?) he arranged for her heart to be transported to Oxnead.	To learn about child mortality and how people of the past (even the wealthy) were often badly affected.	History: Health, disease and death in early modern England. How people in the past coped with death. English: A poem written on Mary's tomb.	

SECTION THREE

RESOURCES

In this final section of the handbook you will find resources, further information, and planning that you can use to enhance and develop the activities created in Sections One and Two.

CONTENTS

1. Paston Family Biographies
2. Paston Family Timeline
3. Paston Family Tree
4. A curriculum content map of the Paston Family and the history of the period
5. Reading List

INTRODUCING MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY

The letter extracts in the following text are taken mainly from *'Illustrated Letters of the Paston Family'* edited by Roger Virgoe, with a few from *'The Paston Letters'* edited by Norman Davis.

Clement Paston

My name is Clement Paston and the year is 1400, the start of a new century. Good riddance to the old one, for we have had too many bad times these past years with the plague taking the lives of many of our neighbours here in the village. Half the people in our part of Norfolk, up here by the sea, have died and their homes and land lie abandoned.

I live in the village of Paston with my wife, Beatrice, and we have a son called William. I thank God that my family has escaped the terrible illness and we continue to prosper. Over the years, I have bought much land that once belonged to our neighbours who sadly died of the plague. Now I have too much land to farm on my own, so I have many men working for me.

Beatrice is from the Somerton family, who are richer than the Pastons. Since she has inherited

her brother Geoffrey's wealth, our lives are much improved.

Part of an account of the Pastons' ancestry by a rival of the family. About 1450:

And he [Clement] wedded the sister of Geoffrey of Somerton [a village in Norfolk].....she was a bondswoman [servant].....to the Prior of Bromholm [near the village of Paston].....As for Geoffrey of Somerton, he was bond also; he was both a pardoner [a religious money raiser] and an attorney.....he gathered many pence and halfpence, and with them he built a fair chapel at Somerton.

Throughout my life, I have earned my living by working hard on the land for the good of my family. Who would have thought that I would have become a man of such importance in our village?

William, my son, is now a grown man, but he does not farm the land as I do. I want a better and more prosperous life for him and have paid much to have him sent to school and educated in the law. We have borrowed money for William's education, but we do not regret the sacrifices we have made. Beatrice and I are very proud of him, now that he is a lawyer in London. Beatrice's brother, Geoffrey, was well-known as a lawyer in Norfolk and he helped William in the early days, when he began his career in the courts. I am sure one day William will be a very important man and I hope he might even rise to become a judge.

William Paston

I am William Paston. The year is 1442 and I am 64 years old. I married my wife, Agnes, 22 years ago and we have five children: John, Edmund, William, Elizabeth and our youngest, Clement, who was born earlier this year. Clement has been named after my father, his grandfather. My father and my mother have now both passed on, but when I was a child, we lived in Norfolk in the village of Paston, from which we took our family name.

My father, Clement Paston, was a farmer and throughout his life he acquired much land around the village. After so many people had died from the plague, there was much unused land all over

the country. As I have grown richer I, too, have bought many more manors in Norfolk for our family.

Part of an account of the Pastons' ancestry by a rival of the family. About 1450:

(William) learned the law, and by that he obtained much profit; and then he was made a sergeant-at-law, and was afterwards made a justice, being a right cunning [clever] man in the law. And he purchased much land in Paston, but no manor house.

My wife, Agnes, comes from a family who are very wealthy and she has inherited much land from her father. So now we are well-respected landowners and have become an influential family in the county. I have been steward to the Duke of Norfolk and the Bishop of Norwich and, as such, I advised them in matters of the law.

My wife and I have several manor houses in Norfolk, as well as our home in Norwich, but I must spend much of my time in London. I am a Justice of the Common Pleas there and have been a judge in the court at Westminster these past thirteen years. I listen to people who cannot settle their arguments about such things as unpaid debts or the ownership of land and I decide who is in the right according to the law. My work is a very important in upholding the law of the land.

I have been a lawyer all my adult life, after my father sent me to be educated in the law when I was young. I was a sergeant-at-law before becoming a judge. In those days, I had to put the case for my clients when they had disputes with other people. Only the best lawyers are appointed as sergeants-at-law and I have been fortunate, at times, to be instructed to act for the king. Although I say so myself, I am very good in the practice of the law and this is why I was made a judge.

My oldest son, John, is grown up now and he is also a lawyer, like me. A few years ago, John married Margaret Mautby. I will be honest with you now and tell you that it was I who arranged their marriage. It happened like this: I had been the Mautby family's legal adviser for many years

and, when her father died, I knew that Margaret would inherit her father's considerable wealth and become a rich woman. Margaret had no one else to guide her with her financial affairs and it seemed sensible to me that Margaret's family and ours should be joined by marriage. I knew, of course, that we Pastons would become much wealthier and more powerful as a result. But the reasons for their marriage were not only to make us richer. From their very first meeting, John and Margaret took to each other and it soon became clear that they were well-matched and theirs would be a happy partnership.

Part of a letter from Agnes Paston to William Paston. Around April 1436:

And as for the first acquaintance between John Paston and the said gentlewoman [Margaret], she made him gentle cheer in gentle wise [gave him a warm welcome] and said he was verily [truly] your son.

Margaret's family, like ours, comes from East Norfolk and owns much land around the village of Mautby, from which they take their family name. With Margaret's family lands added to our own, the Paston family has become yet more wealthy and I expect my son, John, to become a leading man here in our county of Norfolk.

Agnes Paston

I am Agnes Paston and the year is 1470. Before my marriage to William Paston, I was Agnes Berry. William was a very clever man and he became a well-respected judge. He was much older than me when we married, but our marriage was good for us and for both our families. My family had many lands in Norfolk and Hertfordshire and William was a very successful and wealthy lawyer. As he grew richer from the practice of the law, he acquired more estates to add to the Paston family lands and he progressed in society as a gentleman.

But as we gained more land and status in society, some of our neighbours in the village became jealous of our wealth. They did not like some of the changes we made and we had some nasty quarrels with them. I remember how angry they were when we changed the route of the highway,

so that it ran a different way around our house and the church at Paston. I expect you know that all the highways in England belong to the King, so we had been careful to obtain royal permission for the changes. We had also given some land to the village in exchange for the land where the road had once run. Even so, when we put up a wall to block the old road it was torn down and I was abused in the churchyard, like a common criminal, as I was leaving after evensong.

Part of a letter from Agnes Paston to John Paston. November 1451:

Warin Harmon [a local farmer]said 'though it should cost me twenty nobles [gold coins] it [the wall] shall be put down again. And.....Warin's wife said with a loud voice 'All the devils of hell draw her soul to hell for the way [road] that she has made'

The argument went on for several years, but the villagers eventually had to accept that we were acting lawfully and they could do nothing about the changes we had made.

At that time, Paston could often be a dangerous place. England was in dispute with France and French sailors often raided villages on the Norfolk coast. I heard of pilgrims walking by the sea being robbed and pirates taking boats from the nearby villages of Winterton and Happisburgh. So you will understand, of course, that people who lived in this part of Norfolk were very afraid for their lives and their property. Luckily, we owned a house in Norwich near the cathedral and I spent much of my time there.

William and I were married for 24 years until he died in 1444. We were all so sad at the time of his death, but I was glad to know that he had become well-respected here in the county. He is laid to rest now in the Lady Chapel in Norwich Cathedral. William and I had five children: four boys and a girl. They all grew to be adults, but only two are alive today - Elizabeth and William. Sadly, John, Edmund and Clement died some years ago. All four of my sons were educated in the law at Cambridge and followed in their father's footsteps to become lawyers in London. It was very important that the boys worked hard with their studies so that they would be well educated and

lead prosperous lives. Sometimes we had to be strict with them to make sure they did as they were told.

Part of a letter from Agnes Paston, probably to William Paston. 28 January 1458:

.....pray Greenfield [the schoolmaster] to send me faithfully word by writing how Clement Paston has done his duty in learning. And if he has not done well and will not amend [mend his ways]' pray that he will truly belash [punish] him till he will amend

Our daughter Elizabeth was married to Robert Poynings in 1458. It took us many years to find a suitable husband for Elizabeth but I am glad she was happy with Robert for a few years before she was widowed.

Part of a letter from Elizabeth Poynings to Agnes Paston. 3 January 1459:

.....at the making [writing] of this letter I was in good health of body, thanked be Jesus. And as for my master [husband], my 'best-beloved' as you call him.....he is full kind to me

I am sorry to say that Robert was killed at the Battle of Saint Albans in 1461, fighting for the Yorkists. However, we are all happy that Elizabeth and Robert had a son, born just a few months before his father died.

My father was Sir Edmund Berry and I inherited his estates for my husband's family when he died in 1433. My father's estates were returned to me when my husband died and, in his will, William also left much of his property to me. So now I have control of much of our land and property here in Norfolk. Most of the remainder of William's lands were left to my eldest son, John. But sadly, as I have said, John has since died. Throughout his life, John acquired many more lands which have added greatly to our wealth. But some of these properties have also brought trouble to our family. Powerful people have claimed ownership of our property at Caister, for example, and this has been the cause of much distress for my daughter-in-law, Margaret, and her children. She will be able to tell you more of this.

I love all the manors we own in Norfolk and have been very happy to live in many of them over the years. But now I am grown older, I live in London with my son, William, who was named after his father. Our family has risen further in society with William's marriage to Lady Anne Beaufort. Lady Anne's father was the Duke of Somerset, who was of royal heritage, and we are proud that our two families are joined together. Sadly, Lady Anne's father was also killed at the Battle of Saint Albans although, unlike Elizabeth's husband, Robert, he was fighting for the Lancastrian cause. The great houses of Lancaster and York have long disputed the crown of England and many lives have been lost in the wars fought between them.

Since my husband died, I have tried to look after our family's wealth wisely, so that my children and grandchildren may prosper. When I am gone, my wealth will pass to my children. Most will go to William, as I believe he was not treated well in his father's will, but I will make sure that all my children are all well-provided for.

John Paston (I)

I am John Paston and I will be 45 years of age later this year. It is 1466 and these last few years have been very difficult for me and for my family. We have had much trouble keeping rightful control of our lands. Many of my enemies have attempted to take our manors and our properties from us by force. They have tried to seize what is rightfully ours with violence and false claims in the courts. But before I tell you more of these troubles, let me first tell you about me and my family.

I was born in October 1421 and when I grew up I became a lawyer like my father, Judge William Paston. My mother's name is Agnes. I was just 22 years of age when my father died and I inherited the family estates. I married my wife, Margaret Mautby, 25 years ago. Margaret's family, like mine, has lived in Norfolk for many years. Margaret and I have five sons and two daughters. My two oldest sons are both named John, like me, and the others are Edmund, Walter and William; my daughters are Margery and Anne. I spend much of my time in London, so I rely on Margaret to look after our affairs in Norfolk. In the early years of our marriage, I was often unwell when I

was away in London and Margaret and my mother worried about my health and wanted me back in Norfolk. These were trying times for Margaret, as she had much to deal with in our household and our first two children, the Johns, were very young.

Part of a letter from Margaret Paston to John Paston. 28 September 1443:

I thank you for the letter that you sent me, for my mother [Agnes] and I were not at ease [were worried] from the time that we knew of your sickness till we knew verily of your mending [for sure of your recovery].....

I would rather you were at home now, if it were to your ease [good for your health] and if your sore [illness] might as well be looked after here as it is where you are [in London].

Thankfully, none of my illnesses at that time were serious and I was soon restored to good health.

I am afraid that lately I have not been on very good terms with my eldest son, John, but when I am gone he will be the executor of my will and he will inherit most of my lands and wealth.

For the past 20 years, our family has been caught up in the rivalry between two of the most powerful noblemen in East Anglia: the Duke of Suffolk and the Duke of Norfolk. They have long been fighting for control of the two counties and, in their struggle for power, our lands and homes have been seriously threatened many times. We have enemies in Norfolk who are supporters of the Duke of Suffolk and they claim to have rights to our lands. Although this is not true, my wife and our servants have been cruelly attacked and even turned out of our homes by force. I have also been imprisoned in the Fleet in London because of their malicious claims. In these difficult times, my wife urged me to seek friendship with the Duke of Suffolk, so that our properties and people should remain safe.

Part of a letter from Margaret Paston to John Paston. May 1449:

.....sundry folk have said to me thatunless you have my Lord of Suffolk's good lordship [support].....you can never live in peace. Therefore I pray with all my heart that you will do your part

to have his good lordship and his love [friendship] to the easing [achievement] of all the matters that you have to do

But I was not successful in gaining Suffolk's protection and our family had to endure many hard times. Let me tell you about some of the terrible things that happened to us.

Many years ago, my father bought the manor of Gresham from Thomas Chaucer. Thomas was the son of Geoffrey Chaucer. You may have heard of Geoffrey: he wrote a famous collection of stories about a group of pilgrims called The Canterbury Tales. Gresham was one of our favourite places, but our neighbour, Lord Moleyns, had always wanted the manor for himself and claimed that his family were the rightful owners. About 20 years ago, without warning, he took Gresham from us by force and my wife was driven from our home by Moleyns' ruffians.

We tried to explain in the courts why this was wrong, but Moleyns has powerful friends and we did not win our case. Nevertheless, we returned to Gresham and again set up home there, although this time in another house. Shortly after, I had to return to London, but Margaret was afraid that I would be no safer there than in Norfolk.

Part of a letter from Margaret Paston to John Paston. 15 February 1449:

.....they say that even though you are in London, you shall be met with there just as well as here [you will be no safer there than here]; and therefore I pray you heartily beware how you walk there and have good fellowship [friends] with you when you walk out. The Lord Moleyns has a company of scoundrels with him that care not what they do, and such men are most to be dreaded

While I was away in London, Moleyns' men again attacked our household in Gresham. They assaulted our servants and forced Margaret out of the house before destroying the building so that we could never return. My wife will tell you more of these sorry events.

I am sure that a local landowner named John Heydon was behind all this. Heydon was a follower of the Duke of Suffolk and he and I have never seen eye-to-eye. I suspect that Heydon put Moleyns up to all this. Fortunately for us though, all came right in the end and after three years, when Suffolk fell from power, we took back rightful possession of our manor at Gresham. But we have never rebuilt our house there.

More recently, we have had great problems with lands I inherited from Sir John Fastolf. Sir John was a relative of my wife and had extensive estates in Norfolk and Suffolk. I became a good friend of Fastolf and advised him on all legal matters about his lands and wealth. Sir John was keen to bring our families closer together and so we tried to arrange a marriage between his nephew, Thomas, and one of our daughters.

Part of a letter from Sir John Fastolf to John Paston. 11 November 1454:

.....I have understood of late.....that you desire an alliance [marriage] might be made between a daughter of yours and the said ward [Thomas], I was right glad to hear of this motion [idea] and shall be right willingthat your blood [family] and mine might increase in alliance [grow closer together].

Although this came to nothing in the end, it tells you what good friends Sir John and I had become.

Just before he died in 1459, Sir John changed his will and left most of his property to me. But his other legal advisers believed that they, too, had a right to Sir John's property and accused me of tricking them out of their inheritance. They are trying to take Sir John's lands from me, but I will oppose them in the courts and I am sure I will win my case.

In Fastolf's will, we inherited a lodge and manor at Hellesdon, near Norwich. But a few years ago, our neighbours, the Duke of Suffolk and his mother, Alice, claimed that it did not rightly belong to us. They harassed my tenants and brought a great retinue of armed men to lay siege to Hellesdon Manor. Fortunately, my wife, Margaret, was not in residence when Suffolk's men destroyed the house and took everything of

value that they could lay hands on. I fear that Hellesdon and our lands nearby at Drayton are now lost to us forever.

As you will now understand, my wife, Margaret, has endured many hardships throughout our marriage and she has too often been left on her own, since I have been away from home so much. I am fortunate that she is a strong and capable person and has done well to protect our interests during some very difficult times. I often worried that she would be in danger and I was concerned that this would have a bad effect on her health.

Part of a letter from John Paston to Margaret Paston. 13 July 1465:

I thank you for your labour and diligence against the unruly fellowship [mob] that came before you on Monday last.....you acquit yourself right well.....and to the shame of your adversaries [enemies].....John Hobbs [a friend] tells me you are unwell, which I do not like to hear. I pray you heartily [strongly] that you obtain whatever may help you, and do not spare expense; and do not trouble too much over these matters, nor set them to your heart [take them to heart] that you become more ill as a result.

Thank Heavens she had the strength and courage to stand up to these challenges so well.

Despite our hardships, Margaret and I have enjoyed a happy marriage over many years. I am grateful that she has brought up our children well, while also running our estates and households in Norfolk. Even though we have endured difficult times in our life, Margaret and I have tried to make good use of our wealth for the people of Norfolk. We have a home near the Cathedral in Norwich and paid for the repair of Saint Peter Hungate, the parish church where we worship. We also provided a large sum of money for restoring the roof of Saint Andrew's Hall. I trust that our family will be remembered well for these acts of generosity.

Margaret Paston

I am Margaret Paston and the year is 1475. I was born Margaret Mautby at Reedham, in Norfolk, and I inherited my father's estates in 1433 when I

was barely more than a girl. My father's lawyer was named William Paston and he arranged a marriage between me and his son, John. Both our families were prosperous landowners in Norfolk. Although we had little say in our match, John and I grew to love each other and we were happily married for many years. Together, we had seven children who grew to adulthood. The oldest we named John (II), followed by another also called John (III), then Margery, Edmund, Walter, Anne and, finally, William. You will understand that I was very sad when my much-loved husband died nine years ago.

Throughout our marriage, John and I were often apart as he spent much of his time in London in the practice of the law. Such separations are not unusual for people like us. When John was away, I managed our family's properties on my own and dealt with the many difficulties that came our way, latterly with the help of my sons. Over the years, I always tried to make sure that my husband knew what was happening here in Norfolk when he was away. You may have heard of the letters that went back and forth between us – they have become known as The Paston Letters.

More often than not, my life has brought me many happy times. The family has many properties here in Norfolk and we have grown more wealthy as the years have passed. However, our lives have not always been as peaceful as we would have liked and there have been times when our courage and resilience have been severely tested. Most of our troubles have come from disagreements about the ownership of our properties. Let me explain a little more and tell you about our manor at Gresham.

My father-in-law, William Paston, purchased Gresham Manor many years ago, but our neighbour, Lord Moleyns, claimed it belonged rightfully to him and that we had acquired it illegally. While John was away, Moleyns' men forced me out of our house, together with our men-at-arms and servants. Their attack was very violent and they did so much damage that we were never able to return to live there.

Part of the Petition of John Paston to Parliament
Summer 1449:

*Lord Moleyns sent to the said mansion a riotous
people to the number of a thousand
persons.....arrayed in the manner of war,
with.....guns, pans with fire, long crooks to drag
down houses.....and long trees with which they
broke up the gates and doors, and so came into
the mansion, the wife of your beseecher
[Margaret Paston] at that time being therein, and
twelve persons with her. The which twelve
persons they drove out of the said mansion and
mined down the wall of the chamber wherein the
wife of your beseecher was, and bore her out at
the gates; and cut asunder the posts of the house
and let them fall and broke up all the chambers
and coffers within the said mansion and
rifled.....and bore away.....all the stuff.....to the
value of £200.*

My husband, John, tried his best to have our property restored to us and argued that Moleyns should pay for the repairs. But Moleyns is a powerful man and he ignored our demands. Thankfully, Gresham was ours again three years later, but, as I have said, we have never returned to live there.

Our problems were much the same when the Duke of Suffolk took our land at Hellesdon by force. I was very afraid at the time and did not know what to do, so I wrote to my husband for his advice. But we could not prevent Suffolk from turning us out of our property and I fear now that Hellesdon will never be returned to us.

Part of a letter from Margaret Paston to her husband, John Paston 17 October 1465:

*The lodge [at Hellesdon].....was beaten down on
Tuesday and Wednesday and the Duke [of Suffolk]
rode on Wednesday to Drayton and so forth to
Costessey while the lodge at Hellesdon was being
beaten down. And this night at midnight Thomas
Slyforth.....and others had a cart and fetched away
featherbeds and all our stuff that was left at the
parson's and Thomas Water's house to be kept.....I
pray you send me word how I shall act.*

The loss of Hellesdon caused us much distress, but the most serious of our difficulties has come

over the last few years at Caister. Caister Castle and much of the land that surrounds it was owned by my kinsman, Sir John Fastolf. My husband, John, was a trusted legal counsellor to Sir John Fastolf and they became good friends. Close to his death, Sir John changed his will in favour of my husband and left most of his many properties to him. But Sir John's other advisers thought that they, too, should have had a share of his great wealth and said that we had cheated them out of their inheritance. Before he died, my husband spent much time and money fighting their false claims in the courts of London.

These were very trying times, but worse was to come when the Duke of Norfolk claimed ownership of Caister Castle. The Duke had always admired Fastolf's castle. It was one of the first in England to be built in brick, and Norfolk was determined to have it for himself. In the late summer of 1469, the Duke laid siege to the castle with many thousands of men. My son, the younger John (III), and I did our best to defend our home, but we had only 30 men with few weapons and little food to sustain us. As you can imagine, we were very afraid for our safety.

Part of a letter from Margaret Paston to her son, Sir John Paston (II). 12 September 1469:

*I greet you well, letting you know that your
brother [John Paston (III)] and his fellowship stand
in great jeopardy at Caister and are lacking in
victuals. Daubeney and Berney [two of Margaret's
servants] are dead and others badly hurt, and
gunpowder and arrows are lacking. The place is
badly broken down by the guns of the other party
[the Duke's army], so that, unless they have hasty
help, they are likely to lose both their lives and the
place.*

Many of our loyal servants were injured and some even killed by the Duke's soldiers. After two long months of fighting, we were left with no choice but to surrender the castle in return for a promise of free passage for ourselves and our household. I am sad that there was so much loss of life. Perhaps that could have been avoided if we had reached an agreement with the Duke sooner.

Part of a letter from Margaret Paston to her son, Sir John Paston (II). Late September 1469, after leaving Caister Castle:

As for the yielding of Caister, I suppose that Writtle [sent to mediate between the Pastons and the Duke of Norfolk] has told you of the agreements by which it was surrendered. I wish that this had been done before this time and then there would not have been so much harm done as there has been in various ways. For many of our well-wishers are put to loss for our sake.

The Duke of Norfolk held the castle for five years, but he has since died and it has now been returned to us, the rightful owners. My sons will tell you more about what happened in those troubled times.

With my husband being away from home so often, I have brought up our children largely on my own. Both my sons named John have grown up to be soldiers and have been very successful at the King's court. They have also become important men in the county of Norfolk: both have been Members of Parliament and Justices of the Peace. I regret that the older John (II) did not always get on well with his father. I did my best to restore good relations between them, but they were never on good terms after they fell out when John (II) returned to the King's court without his father's permission. However, John (II) has rightly inherited most of my husband's wealth. I have to say that I am disappointed that he has never married and spends most of his time in London, leaving me and his brother, the younger John (III), to run the family estates in Norfolk. We would like him to spend more of his time with us, but I know he has much to do to protect our interests in the courts of London. The younger John (III) has made a good marriage with Margery Brews and they have three children. It took a long time to find a suitable wife for John (III), but I am pleased to say that Margery is from a good family, although she has little wealth of her own.

I am much less pleased with my older daughter, who is also called Margery. She married our servant, Richard Calle, secretly and without our consent. She is very headstrong and would not

listen to any of us – not to me, her grandmother, her brothers, or her friends. She even refused to take advice from the Bishop of Norwich when he sent for her and explained her errors of judgement.

Part of a letter from Margaret Paston to her son, Sir John Paston (III). September 1469:

On Friday the Bishop sent for her.....and spoke to her right plainly and put her in remembrance of how she was born, what kin [family] and friends she had and that she should have more if she were.....guided by them; and if she did not, what rebuke and shame and loss it should be to her.....And he said that he wished to know the words that she had said to him [Richard Calle], whether they had made a marriage or not. And she repeated what she had said and said boldly that if those words made it not sure [clear] that she would make it surer before she left.....These lewd [disrespectful] words grieve me and her grandmother [Agnes Paston] as much as all the rest.

They say they are in love, but Richard is much beneath her in society and theirs is not an appropriate marriage for someone of Margery's standing. However, there is little we can do now about this sorry state of affairs. I readily admit that Calle has been of great value to us in the past. He has great knowledge of the running of our estates and so, despite this unsuitable marriage, he will continue to serve us. Perhaps, in time, we will come to accept things as they are.

My third son, Edmund, has become a soldier like his older brothers and my younger boys, Walter and William, are both still in education. We expect that Anne, my younger daughter, will soon be suitably married. We will be careful to ensure that she does not repeat the mistakes of her older sister.

My family and I have faced many hardships in my life, but together we have overcome many of our troubles and become much wealthier. We are now the owners of much valuable property in the county and I am thankful that our standing in society has risen. I pray that my children will have long and happy lives and that the Paston family continues to prosper when I have passed.

Richard Calle

I am Richard Calle. The year is 1478 and for many years I have been a loyal servant to the Paston family. My first master was John Paston (I), but he died some twelve years ago and now I am employed by his son, John Paston (II). Because John (II) spends so much of his time in London, I work closely with his mother, Margaret, and his younger brother, also called John (III), to look after their interests here in Norfolk. I am the family's bailiff and together with the other leading servants, John Daubney and Richard Gloys, I look after all aspects of the Pastons' household, their estates and finances. I have worked with the family for so long that I probably know more about the running of their lands and business affairs than they do.

Part of a letter from John Paston to Margaret Paston. 15 January 1465:

I pray you, see to the good governance [management] of my household.....that you, with Daubney [another trusted servant] and Richard Calle, weekly have a serious discussion of such things that are to be done.....that is to say for the providing of stuff for my household and for the gathering of rents and grains, and for setting my servants to work, and for the most sensible means of selling and dispatching my malt, and all other things that need to be done.

I grew up in Framlingham in the nearby county of Suffolk. My family have lived in Framlingham for many years and are well-respected there, although they are not nearly as wealthy as the Pastons. My older brother still lives in Framlingham and is a successful grocery merchant. When I grew up, I decided to make my life elsewhere and came to Norfolk to serve the Pastons, who are important landowners in the county. For many years, I enjoyed my work for the family and did my best to ensure that they grew prosperous. In return, they trusted me and came to rely upon my knowledge and skills in managing their estates. I found tenants for their farms and employees to work for them; I collected rents and other money owed to them; and I sold the crops they grew and the wool from their sheep for the best possible prices. Also,

because I am able to read and write, unlike many servants, I kept the family's accounts and made sure that they did not fall into debt.

I have even put my life in danger in the service of the family. In these turbulent times, the family has had many violent disputes with powerful people, often about the ownership of land they had acquired. I remember, for example, the events of 1465, when the Duke of Suffolk's men were threatening my Mistress and her household at Hellesdon. They came to our manor house and laid in wait for me and the other chief servants, saying they would kill us when we rode out from the house. I wrote to my master, John (I), asking for his advice as to how I should best protect Margaret and her household.

Part of a letter from Richard Calle to John Paston (I). 10 July, 1465:

And now my Lord's of Suffolk men come from Claxton to Norwich, and face us and fray upon (attack) us daily. There fell upon me.....twelve of his men, eight of them in harness (armour), and there they would have mischiefed (injured) me;....and they make their avaunt (boast) where (ever) I may be gotten (found) I shall die....and so I dare not ride out alone without a man with me.

I beseech you to pardon me of my writing, for (because) I have pity to see the tribulation (distress) that my mistress has here, and all your friends.

In the end, we were forced to leave Hellesdon and the manor there has never been returned to the Pastons.

Over the years, I have always done my best for the family. I rose to be one of their leading servants and, during my time in the family's service, I have become quite well-off in my own right.

And so I was very happy for many years as the family's trusted bailiff. But then things went badly wrong. It all started about 10 years ago when I fell in love with John (I) and Margaret's daughter, Margery. Margery was just 20 years of age at the time. I was older, but ours was a true love match and we wanted very much to be married. I knew I

could care for her well and we would have a happy life together, but her family were determined that our marriage should never happen. They did not think that the daughter of a gentry family such as the Pastons could ever marry a man like me from a merchant family.

And all this could not have happened at a worse time as the family had only just lost Caister Castle to the Duke of Norfolk after a terrible siege, in which many of our household were injured and one killed. I believe Margery's mother, Margaret, has already told you all about that difficult time.

But to get back to Margery and me: as I have said, Margery's mother and her two elder brothers were very much against our marriage and did all they could to keep us apart. They thought that I was so far beneath her in society that we could never be husband and wife. But they didn't understand that our love for each other was so strong and that we didn't care what people thought of us being together. The whole family was really angry when we told them that we had secretly promised to be faithful to each other. This meant that we were properly married in the eyes of the law and no one could separate us. Even so, Margaret and her sons claimed that our marriage was unlawful. They tried to get the Bishop of Norwich to support them and demanded that Margery and I should see him at his palace. They hoped he could persuade us to say that we had not spoken the correct words of commitment to each other to make our marriage legal.

Part of a letter from Margaret Paston to Sir John Paston. September 1469:

Then he [the Bishop] said that he would send for her [Margery] himself..... My mother [Agnes – Margery's grandmother] and I informed him [the Bishop] that we could never understand from what she [Margery] said that either was bound to the other by the words she had said to him.

But Margery is a very strong person, just like her mother, and refused to back down despite all the pressure from her family and the Bishop. She told the Bishop that, if she needed to, she would declare our love again in public. I also confirmed

that there was no doubt that we had said the correct words for our betrothal to be lawful.

Part of a letter from Margaret Paston to Sir John Paston. September 1469

And then Calle was examined apart by himself, to see if her words and his were in accord, and the time and place where it was done.

While all this was going on, I was dismissed from the Pastons' service and had to go into hiding. Margery and I were separated by the family and we were unable to see each other. This could very well have destroyed our marriage, but I found ways to write to Margery and we reassured each other of our love and that we would be together again one day.

Part of a letter from Richard Calle to Margery Paston. 1469:

My own lady and mistress and before God very true wife, I with full sorrowful heart recommend me to you, as one that cannot be merry nor shall be, til it be otherwise with us than it is now. For this life that we lead now is no pleasure to God, nor to the world, considering the great bond of matrimony that is made between us.....It seems a thousand years ago since I spoke with you and I had rather be with you than possess all the goods in the world. Alas, alas! Good lady, those that keep us asunder [apart] remember full little [do not realise] what they do.....

Eventually, the Bishop of Norwich had to declare our marriage lawful and the family had to accept that we would live together as husband and wife.

I am happy that we can be together at last, but sad that Margery was disowned by her family and that we have not been allowed to live in the family home. The family has never accepted me as a Paston, but they know how much I am able to help them to run their affairs, so I am once again looking after the family's finances. Margery and I are very happy together. We have three sons - John, William and Richard - and I am treated as a gentleman in society. Although the Pastons do not like what has happened, I hope that one day they will find it in their hearts to accept me and our marriage.

John Paston II

My name is John Paston, the same as my father and younger brother. So, to avoid confusion, I will call my father John I, my younger brother John III and I will be known as John II, or Sir John, as you will find out about later. The year is 1477 and I am 37 years old.

My father was a successful lawyer who lived and worked in London for much of his life and my mother, Margaret, is from a wealthy Norfolk family who live in a small village in the east of the county called Mautby. I am the oldest of their seven children: five boys - me, John III, Edmund, Walter and William; and two girls, Margery and Anne. My parents gave me a good education and as soon as I was old enough, they sent me to the court of King Edward IV. This cost them a great deal of money, but my father thought I could do much to support the family's interests as a courtier in the King's household. When I reached the age of 21, I was made a knight and became Sir John. This was a great honour, but I did not always have the influence I wanted at court and it was difficult to get the important people there to support our family's interests. I needed more money to impress the most influential members of the royal household and my father did not think we could afford that, so I had to return home to Norfolk. Some people – those who did not wish us well – were quick to say that this was a great failure for our family and there was much bad gossip at the time.

Part of a letter from Robert Cutler, Vicar of Caister, to John Paston I. May 1463:

I hear much talking thereof, in Suffolk, Norfolk and Norwich.....and that is about my master, your son, Sir John, why he is at home.....Some say that you and he both stand out of the King's good grace and some say that you keep him at home out of niggardliness and will spend nothing on him, and so each man gives his opinion as it pleases him.

None of this was true, of course, but after a while I became bored at home in Norfolk, so I decided to return secretly to the royal court. The King was in Yorkshire at that time, preparing to fight his Lancastrian rivals. My father was very annoyed with me for leaving without his permission and

this also caused bad feeling between him and my mother. I am sorry to say these events cast a dark shadow over our family for a long time.

Part of a letter from Margaret Paston to Sir John. 15 November 1463:

I have received a letter from you.....whereby I understand that you think you did not do well in departing hence without my knowledge. Wherefore I let you know that I was evilly paid through [badly done by] you. Your father thought and still thinks that I was assenting [agreeing] to your departure and that has caused me to have great heaviness [distress]. I would (like that) you should send me word by some trusty man how you do and how you have shifted [managed] for yourself since you departed hence; and do not let your father know of this. I dared not let him know of the last letter that you wrote to me, because he was so displeased with me at that time.

My father and I were never on good terms after that, but we tried hard to get on with each other for the sake of my mother and the family.

But to turn now to other things: I believe mother has told you something of our troubles at Caister. Let me tell you more of what went on at that troublesome time. Some years ago, my father became a very good friend of Sir John Fastolf, as well as his legal adviser. Sir John was a relative of my mother and a very rich man - as rich as any in Norfolk at that time. When he died in 1459, Sir John had no close family and he decided to leave most of his property and wealth to my father. But some of his other advisers thought this was not fair or legal and were determined to challenge my father's right to inherit Sir John's wealth.

Earlier that year, in June, Sir John had made a written will. The will stated that he wanted his money to be used to set up a college for monks and priests at Caister, where prayers would be said for his soul after his death. Sir John had appointed ten of his closest advisers to carry out his instructions. But just two days before he died, Sir John told my father that he had changed his mind and wanted just him, my father, to set up the college. After this was paid for, Sir John said that the remainder of his property should be passed on to my father. The trouble was that

none of this was written down, so we have had to prove that these were Sir John's true wishes at his death. We have witnesses who will swear that they heard Sir John say these things on his deathbed, but despite this, we have still had to struggle hard over many years to make sure that our family secures what was rightfully left to my father. On many occasions, we did our best to resolve our differences with those who were trying to seize father's inheritance and we provided good evidence for our case.

Deposition of Robert Fitzralph, esquire [a gentleman-servant of Fastolf]. 26 November 1459:

I, being in my Master Fastolf's chamber.....I heard my said Master and the said John Paston appoint [agree] and conclude [decide] that the said John Paston should take upon him the rule [control] of my Master's household and all his livelode [income from property] in Norfolk and Suffolk during his [Fastolf's] life.

But this did not satisfy those who were against us and when my father died in 1466, things had still not been settled. So it was left to me to prove our lawful claim to Fastolf's properties in Norfolk and Suffolk. I fought our case long and hard in the courts and just two months after my father's death, the King confirmed our rightful ownership of Fastolf's lands.

Edward IV to the Bailiffs of Yarmouth. 17 July 1466:

And we have also commanded that full restitution be made of the manor of Caister and of all other lands and tenements, with goods and chattels, that the said John Paston (I), deceased, had (from) Sir John Fastolf....unto our said knight, Sir John Paston.

You would think that would be the finish of the matter, but it was not the end of the story and the disputes continued. I will tell you more of this shortly, but first let me speak of my life in the royal court.

All our problems with father's inheritance were going on while I was establishing myself as a trusted member of King Edward IV's household.

Because of this, I was obliged to spend much of my time in London while my mother and my younger brother, John III, remained in Norfolk to look after the family's interests there. Sometimes, when things became difficult, they wanted me back in Norfolk, but I believed I could do more for the family here in London.

Over those years at the royal court, I freely admit I enjoyed my life as a courtier and a soldier, and I became well-known as a skilled jousting knight at King Edward's tournaments. These tournaments were an important way of training knights to fight. Men fought in three sorts of combat: the fight on foot between two men; the melee between two groups of men; and the joust, where two knights fought on horseback. These events could be dangerous and I remember injuring my hand while jousting at a great tournament at the royal palace of Eltham. Many of the most important members of the King's household took part in the tournament there, that day.

Part of a letter from Sir John Paston to John Paston III. April 1467:

My hand was hurt at a tourney at Eltham on Wednesday last. I would that you had been there to see it, for it was the goodliest sight....that was seen in England this forty years. There was on the one side within: the King, my Lord Scales, myself and (Thomas) St Leger; and without: my Lord Chamberlain, Sir John Woodville, Sir Thomas Montgomery and John Apyrre.

As my reputation in the royal household grew, I became well-acquainted with some of the most powerful men in England. Their support was very helpful when we were in dispute with our neighbours and rivals, so it was important that I stayed close to the King at this time.

In 1468, I was privileged to be chosen by the King to accompany his sister, Margaret, to the city of Bruges, where she married Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy. This was a great honour, as the marriage created a very powerful alliance between King Edward IV and the Duke. It was certainly one of the most important events in Europe for many years and was as grand an occasion as you could ever wish to see. I was pleased that my brother, John III, was able to

come with me to witness the wonderful celebrations. He wrote later to tell my mother about the great spectacle in Bruges.

Part of a letter from John Paston III to Margaret Paston. 8 July 1468:

My Lady Margaret was married on Sunday.....at a town that is called Damme, three miles out of Bruges.....and she was brought the same day to Bruges for her dinner, and there she was received as worshipfully as all the world could devise, with a procession of lords and ladies, the best arrayed [to be seen] of any people that ever I saw or heard of. Many pageants were played to welcome her on her way into Bruges, the best that ever I saw....

And as for the Duke's court, as of lords, ladies and gentlewomen, knights, squires and gentlemen, I heard never of one like it, save King Arthur's court.

My life at that time was exciting and gave me much pleasure, but it was also very busy. As well as my duties at court, I was appointed to serve my county of Norfolk in public service, first as a Member of Parliament and then as a Justice of the Peace.

But now I will get back to our continuing problems with father's inheritance of the Fastolf lands. In 1468, Howes and Yelverton, two of our main opponents, decided to sell their claim to Caister Castle to John Mowbray, the Duke of Norfolk. The Duke was a very powerful man and had always coveted Fastolf's castle. It was newly built in brick and was one of very few like this in England at the time. The Duke demanded that we leave Caister, so that he could take possession of the castle. Of course, we refused to hand it over to him. A year passed peacefully, but then suddenly the Duke lost patience and decided to take the castle by force. My mother and brother, John III, were living at Caister at the time and they will tell you more of the terrible events that came to pass. But let me just say that after two months of violence and many injuries and even killings, John III was forced to surrender to the Duke's men and he and mother left the castle. It was a dark time for us all.

I argued our case in the courts to regain control of Caister and we had some success with one of

those who had previously disputed our claim. In the summer of 1470, William Waynflete, the Bishop of Winchester, agreed that we should have possession of Caister and other lands at Hellesdon and Drayton. In return, we agreed that Waynflete should have Fastolf's other lands to provide payment for a college for priests in Oxford. This was not what we really wanted as the Duke of Norfolk still remained at Caister, but it was the best we could do. In fact, it was not until the Duke died in 1476 that we were finally able to take back possession of the castle and even then, we had to be careful to gain the support of the King before we did anything.

When the Duke was still alive, we had tried our best to get back on good terms with him and his wife, the Duchess of Norfolk, so that we could regain Caister peacefully. But even after his death, things progressed very slowly. I was impatient to have the matter finished, but John III advised me to be take things slowly, so as not to offend the Duchess.

Part of a letter from John Paston III to Sir John Paston. 6 May 1476:

To the best of my power [knowledge] you are welcome again into England [from Calais]. And as for the Castle of Caister there are no others in it but Colley [perhaps a servant of the Duchess] and his mate, and a goose might take it; but I certainly would not take that course of action and my mother thinks the same. Take not that way if there be any other.

Our fight to regain Caister Castle has been long drawn out and has cost us much, but I trust things will soon be settled amicably and we will finally be able to regain what is rightfully ours.

But enough of Caister for now. Let me tell you about other important events in my life. My brother, John III, and I both served as soldiers when we were younger. In 1471, we fought at the Battle of Barnet. It happened like this: Henry VI had seized the throne from King Edward IV, but then Edward returned from exile in France to challenge Henry's right to be king. In 1471, their two armies met at Barnet, near London, and fought each other for the kingdom. John III and I were on the side of King Henry at that time. I

remember that the battle took place in a thick fog. We could hardly see our hands in front of our faces and none of us knew much of what was going on more than a few yards away. There was much confusion and many men were killed and injured on both sides, sometimes when they mistook their own men for the enemy. I was lucky to be unhurt, but John III was injured by an arrow which struck his right arm. Fortunately, he recovered well, and there was no lasting damage.

Part of a letter from Sir John Paston to Margaret Paston. 18 April 1471:

My brother, John, is alive and well and is in no peril of death. Nevertheless, he is hurt with an arrow in his right arm beneath the elbow: I have sent him a surgeon who has dressed it and tells me that he trusts that he shall be all whole in right short time.....As for me, I am in good case [health] blessed be God, and in no jeopardy of my life, I think, for I am at liberty if need be.

When the fighting finally stopped, it was clear that we were on the losing side. This meant that Edward IV would again be king and, of course, this was not good for John III and me, as we had opposed him in the battle. However, I was well-acquainted with many people at the royal court and they spoke up for us. Just a few months later, we were both granted royal pardons and not long after I found myself back in favour with the new King.

Over the past few years, I have spent much of my time in Calais in the King's service with my Lord Hastings, who is in command of the town. Calais is in France, but it is very important to England as a great continental port. It is where English wool is sent so that it can be sold in France and the Netherlands. The King receives great sums of money from the taxes collected on this trade, so my work in Calais is of great importance.

A few months ago, I decided to make my will. Things are very uncertain with so many outbreaks of the plague in London, so it is important that everyone knows what will happen to my wealth should I die. I have a daughter, Constance, but I have never married her mother, so my brother, John III, will be my main heir. If all goes well, John III will soon be married to Margery Brews - that is,

if our two families can reach a financial settlement. John and Margery certainly seem to want this marriage very much, so mother and I will do our best to make this happen.

As you will now understand, I have had a very eventful life. Our family has faced many difficulties and at times our lands and wealth have been seriously threatened. But between us – my father when he was alive, my mother, my brother and me – we have stood firm and overcome those who would like nothing better than to see us ruined. Our standing in the county has greatly improved and I feel sure now that the family's future is secure.

John Paston III

I am John Paston, the year is 1500 and I am 56 years of age. I will call myself John Paston III, because my father and my older brother, who both died some years ago, were also named John Paston. My father will be known as John Paston I and my brother, John Paston II. My mother is Margaret Paston. She and my father had five other children, three boys and two girls, as well as us two Johns.

I was born at Geldeston in Norfolk in 1444 and grew up in the county. Both my father's and my mother's families come from Norfolk, and between them they owned much property there. As such, we have become an important family in Norfolk and we are well-respected as part of the landed gentry here. When I was a young man, most of my time was spent helping my mother to manage our estates. Throughout her life, my mother did most of the work of looking after the family's properties in Norfolk. My father was away in London protecting our family's interests in the courts and making sure we could count on the support of some of the most powerful people in England. Over the years, we have had many disputes with those who would take from us what we have worked so hard to acquire, but thankfully, we have been largely successful in our struggles to keep what is rightfully ours.

One such dispute was with the Duke of Norfolk when he seized Caister Castle by force and my mother and I were thrown out of our home. The Duke remained in possession of the castle up to

his death in 1476, when we regained control of our property. You can learn more of the events at that time from my mother and John II.

We were not always on bad terms with the Duke of Norfolk. When he inherited his family title in 1461 and became the fourth Duke of Norfolk, my father decided that it would be a good idea for me to join the new Duke's household. Although the Duke was very young at the time, father knew that he would soon be a powerful man in Norfolk and he thought I could do much to gain the new Duke's support as a trusted servant. As it turned out, during my time with the Duke I also became well-acquainted with people close to the King and I was able to use my connections at court to help our friends back in Norfolk.

Part of a letter from John Paston III to John Paston II. 11 December 1462:

The King commanded my Lord of Norfolk to conduct [carry] victuals and ordnance [supplies and ammunition] out of Newcastle to my Lord of Warwick at Warkworth Castle. And so my Lord of Norfolk commanded Sir John Howard, Sir William Peche....and me, Calthorpe, Gorges and others to go forth with the victuals and ordnance....

Yelverton and Jenney [rivals of the Pastons] are likely to be greatly punished because they did not come here to the King.....and so are John Billingford and Thomas Playter [friends of the Pastons], for which I am right sorry.....Let them come or send their excuses in writing and I shall arrange that the King shall have knowledge of their excuses; for I am well acquainted with my Lord Hastings and my Lord Dacres, who are now greatest about the King's person.

As an important member of the Duke's household, I went with him to London for the celebrations when he came of age. When a man of noble birth reaches the age of 21, he gains much power and responsibility. It was a very important time for him. As the years passed, our family's ties with the Royal Court continued to improve and a few years later I accompanied my brother, John II, to Bruges for the marriage of the King's sister, Margaret of York, to Charles the Bold, the Duke of Burgundy. You will learn more of our time in Bruges from John II.

Throughout much of my life, I have fought many times in the struggle for the control of the English throne. Many battles have taken place between the rival houses of York and Lancaster. In 1471, John II and I fought on the Lancastrian side for King Henry VI in the Battle of Barnet. The battle was fought in a thick fog and there was so much confusion that, to tell the truth, there were times when we hardly knew who were our enemies and who were our friends. There were many casualties on both sides and many soldiers killed. In fact, I was injured by an arrow which hit my right arm, but I was lucky to recover quickly. After the battle, my brother wrote to mother to tell her about the many people of noble birth killed on that fateful day.

Part of a letter from John Paston II to Margaret Paston. 18 April 1471:

There were killed upon the field, half a mile from Barnet on Easter Day, the Earl of Warwick, the Marquess Montagu, Sir William Tyrrell, Sir Lewis John and divers others from our country [Norfolk].....And on King Edward's party [side], the Lord Cromwell, Lord Say, and Sir Humphrey Bourchier.....with other people of both parties to the number of more than a thousand.

At the end of the day, Edward had won the battle: the House of York had defeated our army. Although we were on the losing side, John II and I were fortunate to be pardoned by the King later that year.

Part of a letter from John Paston III to Margaret Paston. 17 July 1471:

Please you to understand that this Wednesday Sir Thomas Wingfield sent for me and let me know that the King has signed my bill of pardon.....and so by Friday at the latest I trust to have my pardon sealed by the Chancellor, and soon after, if I can equip myself, I trust to see you, if it happen that any of the King's Household come to Norwich.

In the years that followed, power swung between the Yorkists and Lancastrians. Many years later, in 1487, I fought for King Henry VII at the Battle of Stoke against the Yorkist rebels. On that day, I was on the winning side and the King made me a knight right there on the battlefield for my

services to his cause. And now it seems, at last, that the great Houses of York and Lancaster have made peace. The rival Houses have been united by the marriage of the Lancastrian King, Henry VII, to Elizabeth of York. And now they have a son, Arthur, to seal the alliance.

But let us return now to earlier times. After the Battle of Barnet in 1471, I returned to Norfolk to continue our work for the return of Caister Castle and to support my mother in the management of our other properties. You will remember from what my brother and mother have told you that the Duke of Norfolk had seized the castle. However, as time passed, relations between our two families improved greatly. In fact, we were trying to find ways to resolve our differences peacefully when, in 1476, the Duke died unexpectedly.

Shortly after her husband's death, the Duchess of Norfolk was due to give birth to their child. As things had improved between our two families, the Duchess and my mother had become friends and she asked mother to be with her at the time of her baby's birth. I wrote to my mother from the Duchess's household in Norwich just before the baby was due.

Part of a letter from John Paston III to Margaret Paston. March 1476:

The chief cause that I write to you at this time is because I understand that my Lady [the Duchess] would be right glad to have you about her when she gives birth.....and so I think that my Lady will send for you, and if it were your pleasure to be here, I would be right glad.....for I think that.....would do great good to my brother's matters [in regaining Caister].

At long last, soon after the baby was born we finally took back ownership of Caister Castle.

In 1477, I married Margery. Margery is the daughter of Sir Thomas Brews. The Brews are an old-established and well-respected family from Woodbridge in Suffolk. Margery was not an heiress and at the time of our marriage I, too, had little money or property of my own. It took a long time for our two families to agree the marriage settlement, but ours was a love match and we

knew we wanted to be married from our very first meeting.

Part of a letter from Margery Brews to John Paston III. February 1577:

.....my right well beloved valentine.....I am not in good health of body nor heart, nor shall I be till I hear from you.....if you love me, as I trust verily you do, you will not leave me therefore. For, if you had not half the livelode [income] that you have, and I had to work as hard as any woman alive might do, I would not forsake [leave] you.

'My heart me bids ever more to love you Truly over all earthly things.....'

Margery and I had two children who grew to adulthood: William and Elizabeth. We had a happy marriage for many years, but sadly, Margery died five years ago, in 1495. She is buried at the Whitefriars Priory in Norwich. I have since married again, to Agnes Morley, but Agnes and I have had no children together.

My older brother, John II, died many years ago, in November 1479. That was a bad year for our family: first, my younger brother, Walter, died; then my grandmother, Agnes; and finally John. Grandmother and John were living in London at the time and there was a great outbreak of the plague there. Many people were dying and my brother knew very well the dangers of this terrible disease, but he felt he had to stay in London to protect the family's interests. When he died, I believed John wanted to be buried back in Norfolk, so I went to London to bring his body, and my grandmother's, back home to Norfolk. But I was too late. John had been buried already by the time I arrived.

Part of a letter from John Paston III to Margaret Paston. November 1479:

.....my brother is buried in White Friars in London. I did not think this would have been so, for I supposed that he wished to be buried at Bromholm [priory, near the village of Paston] and that caused me to ride so soon to London to have arranged his bringing home; and.....I had intended, as I rode on the way, to have brought home my

grandmother and him together – but that purpose [course of action] is now void [not possible].

So John II is laid to rest in the Chapel of Our Lady at White Friars in London.

I inherited most of my brother's lands and properties when he died and I became even wealthier when my mother also died a few years later. Mother was much loved by us all and we missed her greatly when she passed. Before her death, she thought carefully about what she wanted to do with her estate. She left some of her wealth to my younger brothers and sisters and some to her grandchildren. She even left property to my sister, Margery, and her family. I expect you will remember how upset mother was when Margery married our servant, Richard Calle, all those years ago. Margery was disowned by the family at the time, but she was eventually forgiven and in the end mother accepted that she and Richard had a happy marriage.

I am afraid that things have not worked out so well with my father's brother, my Uncle William. There were many disputes with him after my father died about the ownership of our family's properties, and our problems with Uncle William went on long after my father's death. In fact, our differences were only properly settled a few years ago when I paid him a great sum of money. That settlement cost us a large part of our wealth, but at least we have kept our much-loved home at Oxnead. Now I continue to work for our family's success as a trusted servant of the Earl of Oxford and the King, Henry VII.

As the years have passed, I have risen in status as an important man in the county of Norfolk and have held many great offices there. I have been the Member of Parliament for Norwich, Sheriff of Norfolk and a Justice of the Peace. Also, the Earl of Oxford, who is one of the King's most trusted followers, has chosen me to take charge of his great estate here in the county. The Pastons continue to be one of the leading families in East Anglia and when I am gone I expect my son, William, to carry on my work and ensure that the family continues to prosper and rise further in society.

Sir John Fastolf

I am Sir John Fastolf and it is the summer of the year 1459. I am an old man now and celebrated my 78th birthday last year. I have had an exciting and eventful life, mostly as a soldier, but also as a writer about what I have learnt in the many wars and battles I have fought.

I was born at Caister Hall in 1380. My father was also called John and my mother was Mary. Our family has owned land in Norfolk for many years and my ancestors have held important offices in Great Yarmouth. Many have been bailiffs of the town and, more recently, my relative, Hugh Fastolf, was Sheriff of Norfolk. So, as you'll understand, we are well-known across the county.

When I was young, I was a squire to the Duke of Norfolk, before I entered the service of the King's second son, Thomas of Lancaster, at the age of 20. Thomas's father, Henry IV, had given Thomas the task of keeping order in Ireland and it was in Ireland that I first saw service as a soldier. It was also in Ireland that I met and married my wife, Millicent. We had no children together, but Millicent had been married before and had 3 children with her first husband. My wife was a rich heiress and brought much wealth to the family with our marriage. She owned manors in Wiltshire and Gloucestershire and properties in Somerset and Yorkshire. Together with my own estates, we received a great income from our lands.

Most of my service as a soldier took place in Northern France where I spent much of my time from 1415 to 1439. Throughout these years, I fought against the French for King Henry V, his brother, the Duke of Bedford and, later, the king's son, who became King Henry VI. We won many important battles and, in 1426, I was made a knight for my services to the king and became Sir John Fastolf.

It was in France that I came up against a very famous French soldier known as Joan of Arc. It was very unusual for a woman to command an army at this time, but she believed that God had decided that she should lead the French army to victory over the English. Even though Joan was

from a poor peasant family, she became an exceptional military leader and won many battles.

Before Joan came along, it looked as though we English would take control of the whole of France. We had won a great victory at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415 and in 1420, our king, Henry V, married Catherine, the French king's daughter. It was agreed that when Catherine's father, Charles VI, died, the English king, Henry V, would become king of France as well as king of England.

In the years that followed, the English armies occupied much of Northern France and took over many towns after defeating their French defenders. In 1429, the English army lay siege to the city of Orleans. At the time, I was in command of a large force of men and we were marching towards the city to support our army which was camped outside the city walls. When the French generals heard we were coming, they thought it would be futile to continue fighting and had decided that they had no choice but to abandon the town. However, Joan would hear no talk of surrender. She was convinced that, with God's help, she could defeat our army and lift the siege. To cut a long story short, she was proved right and her forces secured a route into the city so that provisions and weapons could be brought in from the outside. As soon as we realised what had happened, we knew there was no point carrying on with the siege and we marched away to join our armies in other towns nearby.

We did not see this as a defeat, just a setback, and we were convinced that we would soon take control of the whole of France. However, Joan and her army went on to take back control of many of the towns we had occupied, despite our attempts to reinforce them with more troops and the best modern gunpowder weapons.

Lord Talbot was in command of our army at the time and he decided that we should attack the French to put a stop to their successes. But I knew that the French had many more troops than us, so I thought we should wait until our army was stronger. But Talbot was sure that we would win, as we had in the past. On the 18th June 1429, the French and the English armies met at the small village of Patay. Things did not go well for us on

the day. Our archers were not properly prepared for the battle and Joan's soldiers killed or captured more than 2000 of our men. Talbot was also taken prisoner, but I managed to escape on horseback when I realised that we had no chance of winning.

These events led to much trouble for me over many years. Talbot accused me of being a coward and deserting him on the battlefield. Some people believed him and it took many years to clear my name. I had to prove that I escaped from the battlefield only when I realised we had no chance of victory. It would have been foolish for me and my men to stay and get killed or captured.

Despite the lies told about me after our defeat at Patay, I was given many commands in France. At this time, I also began to set out my own ideas about how we could successfully fight the war against the French. I thought it would cost less and be more effective to raid towns and villages, rather than lay siege to fortified cities. But not everyone agreed with me and as I grew older, I knew that I had had my fill of life as a soldier. In 1440, when I was 60 years old, I decided to return to my birthplace at Caister in Norfolk.

During my time in France, I acquired much land in Normandy, which brought me great wealth. Before I left France for home, I decided to sell many of these estates and send the money back to England. I am sorry to say that those I kept were lost when they were recaptured by the French. Even so, my time in France had made me a very rich man.

After returning from France, I decided to replace my manor house at Caister with a grand castle. It cost me much money to build – about £6000 in all – but I am a rich man and could well afford the expense. My castle was one of the first great houses in the country to be built not in stone, but with bricks. There is a great tower which can be seen for miles around and it is surrounded by a deep moat for defence. The castle has more than 25 chambers, where my family, friends and servants can live, and all the rooms are filled with fine furniture. No-one can be in any doubt how rich and powerful I have become. About 5 years

ago, in 1454, I decided to leave my home in London and live in Caister permanently, so that I may spend the last years of my life here in the castle.

Sadly, my wife, Millicent, died almost 10 years ago. She is buried not far from Caister in Saint Benet's Abbey, in an aisle I had specially built in the church there. Since then, I have lived largely on my own and have spent my time writing about the war in France and collecting many books. Many of my books are beautiful manuscripts. Some have been written for me by my stepson, Stephen Scrope, and some by my servant, William Worcestor.

I am not a man who needs many friends but, over the last 10 years, I have become close friends with John Paston. John is married to Margaret Mautby, who is a relative of mine. At one time, we hoped that John's sister, Elizabeth, would marry my stepson, Stephen Scope, but this came to nothing in the end. Some years later, we tried again to make an alliance between our two families. John and I were keen to see my relative, Thomas Fastolf, married to one of his daughters.

Part of a letter from Sir John Fastolf to John Paston. 11 November 1454

.....I have understood of late.....that you desire an alliance [marriage] might be made between a daughter of yours and the said ward [Thomas], I was right glad to hear of this motion [proposal] and shall be right willingthat your blood [family] and mine might increase in alliance [come closer together].

John may have told you that, unfortunately, this did not prove possible, despite our wishes to see the match sealed.

The Pastons are important landowners here in Norfolk and John is also a successful lawyer. He has been of great help to me with legal matters and has given me valuable advice about the running of my many properties and the disputes about my estates. I have also relied on John to let me know what my enemies have been saying about me.

Part of a letter from Sir John Fastolf to John Paston. 7 February 1455

.....I am told that at a dinner in Norwich at which you and other gentlemen were present, there were certain persons, gentlemen, who uttered scornful language of me.....Wherefore, cousin, I pray you, as my trust is in you, that you give me knowledge in writing what gentlemen they were that said this.....At such a time a man should know his friends from his foes.....

As I have no children of my own, I have to decide what I want to happen to my estates and money when I die. When men like me have no children of their own to inherit their wealth, there are often quarrels about who should have what they own after their death. So I have asked John Paston and my other advisers to help me with my will and make my wishes clear. I have decided that a college of priests should be set up here at Caister when I am gone. This is called a chantry and the priests who will live here in the castle will say prayers for my soul for ever, as the founder of a great college. As John is my closest friend and legal adviser, I trust him to make sure that my wishes are carried out.

Part of a letter from Sir John Fastolf to John Paston. 18 November 1456

I late wrote to you for [about] the foundation of my college, I am sore [my mind is] set upon it.....I write now, to remind you again to move [persuade] my Lords of Canterbury and Winchester for the licence [permission to set up the college] to be obtained without a great fine [great expense] in recompense of [as a reward for] my long service to the King [Henry VI] and his noble father [Henry V].

I have lived an eventful life and amassed a great fortune. I hope that my wishes will be respected and there will be no arguments about what happens to my wealth after my death. Perhaps John Paston will be able to tell you more of these things when I am gone.

TIMELINE

A timeline of the Paston family alongside a timeline of the English royal family and key historical events.

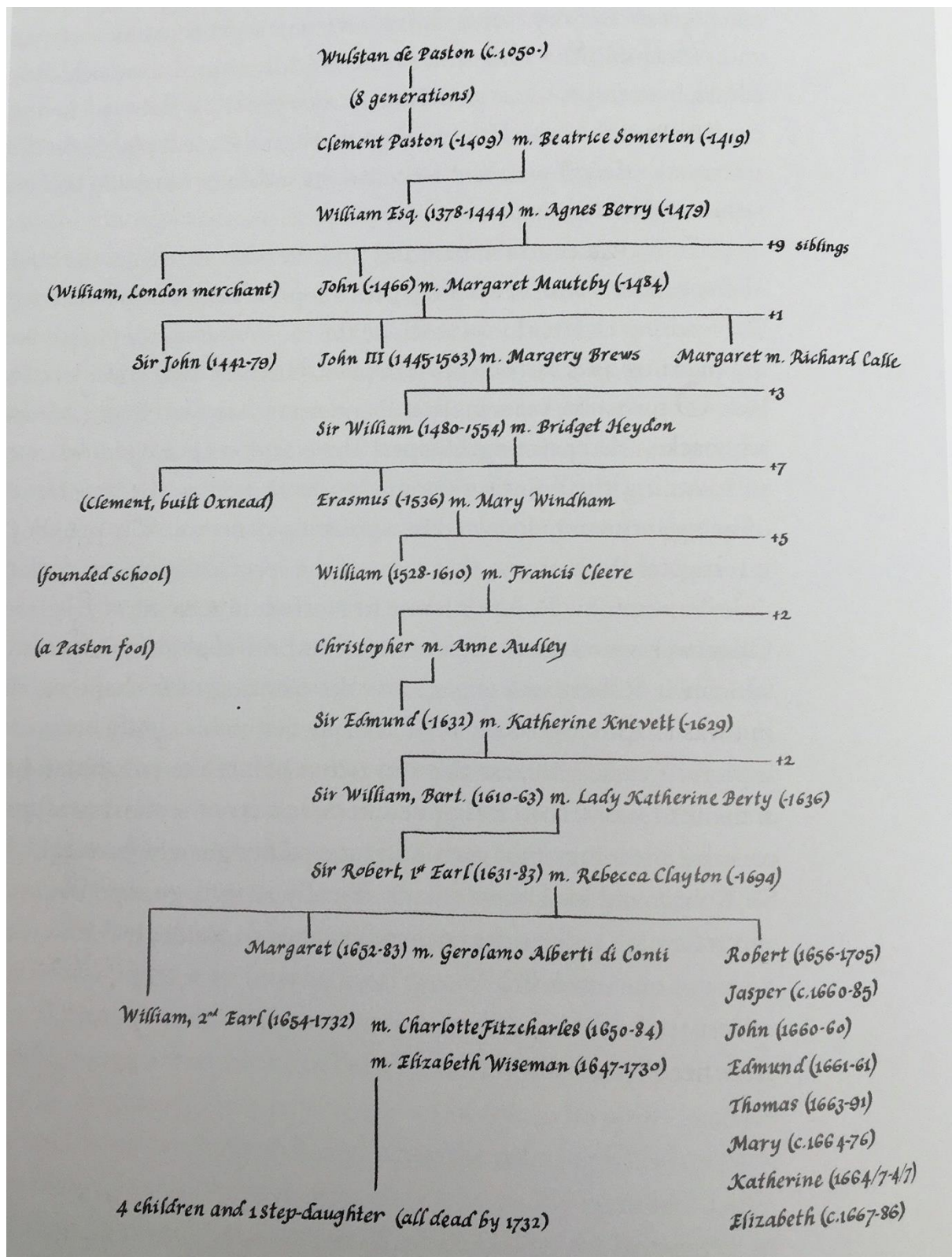
MONARCH	NATIONAL EVENT	DATE	PASTON	PASTON EVENT	DATE
HENRY IV 1399-1413	Henry imprisons Richard II	1399	CLEMENT I -d.1409	Clement buys up land made available by Black Death.	1409
				Clement marries wealthy heiress – Beatrice Somerton	
	Black Death	repeated	WILLIAM I (ESQ) 1378-1444	William becomes lawyer and judge	
HENRY V 1413-1422	Battle of Agincourt	1415		William uses his position to increase the family wealth.	
HENRY VI 1422-1461	Start of the War of the Roses	1455	JOHN I -d.1466	Marries Margaret Mautby 1423-1684	
				Paston letters	1422-1509
				Margaret forced out of home in Gresham by Lord Moleyn	1448

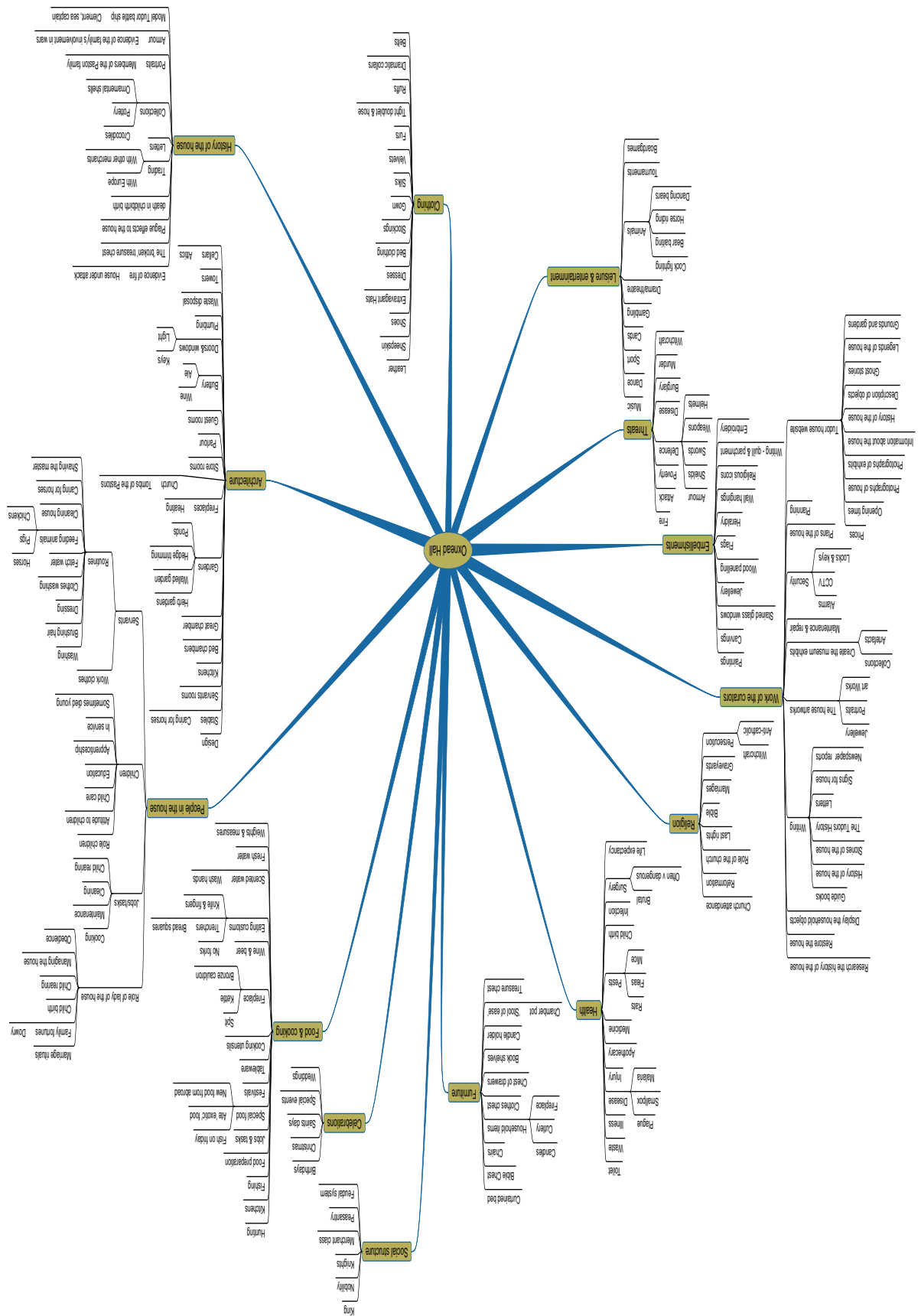
EDWARD IV 1461-1483	Lawlessness, as the king becomes ineffective and the barons take power across the country		(SIR) JOHN II 1441-1479	John II Knighted	1463
				Caister Castle under siege by the Duke of Norfolk	1469
				Fights with Lancastrian side at Barnet under Warwick Imprisoned, Pardoned	1471
RICHARD III 1483-1485	Battle of Bosworth Fields	1485	JOHN III 1445-1503	Pardoned by Richard III	1484
HENRY VII (TUDOR) 1485-1509	Establishment of Tudor dynasty	1485		MP Norfolk	1494-1497
HENRY VIII 1509-1547	Divorce crisis	1527	Sir William 1464-1554	Marries Bridget Heydon	1491
	Dissolution of Monasteries	1536			
EDWARD VI 1547-1553	Book of Common Prayer	1549		Inherits Oxnead Hall	1503
MARY I 1553-1558	Wyatt rebellion	1554	CLEMENT II C.1515-1597	Captures a French Galley and ransoms	1546
				Left for dead at battle of Pinkie	1547
ELIZABETH I 1558-1603	Northern rebellion	1569		Tries and executes traitors as magistrate of Norfolk	1570
		1587			

	Execution of Mary Queen of Scots			Builds Oxnead Hall	1580
	Spanish Armada	1588			
JAMES I 1603-1625	Gunpowder Plot	1605	WILLIAM II 1528-1610	Founds Paston School	1606
			SIR EDMUND 1585-1632		
CHARLES I 1625-1649	English Civil War begins	1642	(SIR) WILLIAM III 1610-1663	William's wife, Katherine dies young	1636
	Execution of Charles I	1649		William, a Royalist leaves England to travel.	
THE COMMONWEALTH 1649-1660				Paston Treasure painting commissioned	c.1665
CHARLES II 1660-1685	Restoration of Monarchy	1660	SIR ROBERT (1 ST EARL) 1631-1683	Robert is made the first Earl of Yarmouth	1679
	Great Plague	1665			
	Great Fire	1666	WILLIAM IV (2 ND EARL) 1654-1732	Charles II and his Queen are	1671
JAMES II 1685-1688					

				guests of the Paston family	
WILLIAM III MARY II 1688-1702	Glorious Revolution	1688		William marries Charles II's (illegitimate) daughter – Charlotte Fitzcharles	1672
ANNE 1702-1714	Union of England and Scotland	1707		Charlotte dies & William remarries – Elizabeth Wiseman (1647-1730)	1684, 1687
GEORGE I 1714-1727				William dies aged 78 leaving no surviving male heir.	1732
GEORGE II 1727-1760			END OF PASTON LINE	Oxnead and its contents are sold by his Executors	1732

PASTON FAMILY TREE





READING LIST

There is a great deal of writing on the Paston Family and their role in British history. The following is some suggested reading and research you might want to do in preparation for teaching this unit.

Highly Recommended

Stephen Fry, Film | The Paston Treasure, a painting like no other <https://britishart.yale.edu/multimedia-video/316/6516>

Spike Bucklow, Lecture | The Paston Treasure: The Lives behind the Picture
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6VpWJjeQg>

Laura Wilson, Book | Daily Life in a Tudor House https://smile.amazon.co.uk/Daily-Tudor-House-Laura-Wilson/dp/0600586383/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=Daily+Life+in+a+Tudor+House&qid=1567081326&s=gateway&sr=8-1

Documentary | The Wars of the Roses: England's bloodiest civil war
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aa5bTRDtQ94>

Further Reading

Martin Gayford, Article | A historical whodunit that lets you into a forgotten world: The Paston Treasure reviewed <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2018/09/a-historical-whodunnit-that-lets-you-into-a-forgotten-world-the-paston-treasure-reviewed/>

Nathan Flis, Article | The Paston Treasure: A Painting that Reveals an Entire World while Concealing an Alchemical Secret <https://yalebooksblog.co.uk/2018/06/20/curator-nathan-flis-unpacks-the-paston-treasure/>

Helen Castor, Book | Blood and Roses: The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century
https://www.amazon.co.uk/Blood-Roses-Paston-Fifteenth-Century/dp/0007162227/ref=sr_1_fkmr0_2?keywords=henry+castor+paston&qid=1577977318&sr=8-2-fkmr0

Spike Bucklow, Book | The Anatomy of Riches: Sir Robert Paston's Treasure
https://www.amazon.co.uk/Anatomy-Riches-Pastons-Treasure-Critical/dp/1780239793/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=bucklow+paston&qid=1577977417&sr=8-1

Roger Virgoe, Book | Illustrated Letters of the Paston Family https://www.amazon.co.uk/Illustrated-Letters-Paston-Family-Virgoe/dp/0333480996/ref=sr_1_fkmr0_1?keywords=roger+virgo+paston&qid=1577977454&sr=8-1-fkmr0

Reading to support the teaching process

Tim Taylor, Book | A Beginner's Guide to Mantle of the Expert https://www.amazon.co.uk/Beginners-Guide-Mantle-Expert-Transformative/dp/0993557201/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=mantle+of+the+expert&qid=1577977587&sr=8-1

Tim Taylor, Article | Using dramatic imagination to develop writing
<https://www.mantleoftheexpert.com/blog-post/using-dramatic-imagination-to-develop-writing/>