

William and Agnes Paston block the old village street

Draw in detail the gate that used to be the main entrance to the churchyard from the village street. William and Agnes Paston decided to block this old village street with a wall to stop people walking too close to their house. Instead the street was moved to the front of the church when the main entrance is today.



Read the following two extracts from Agnes Paston's letters to her son John Paston about the building of the wall. They show the anger of the local villagers, about how the wall stopped them from walking along the old village street, a historic right of way to the church and through the village.

1451:

On Thursday the wall was made a yard high... And on Friday, after the Mass, someone came from the church and shoved down all that was there, and trod on the wall and broke some, and went over it; but I cannot yet know who it was...

November 1451:

I greet you well and let you know that Warin Harman on Sunday after All Hallows day after evensong, said openly in the churchyard that he knew well that if the wall were put down, even though he were a hundred miles away from Paston, I would say that he did it and he should bear the blame; and said 'tell it here who so will, though it should cost me 20 nobles it shall be put down again'. And the said Warin's wife said with a loud voice 'All the devils of hell draw her soul to hell for the way that she has made...' And John Marchall said that there was a respectable woman came by for watering and found the way stopped and asked him who had stopped the way, and he said 'those that had power to give it', and asked her what was freer than a gift; and she said she had seen the day when the men of Paston would not have suffered it...

(Source: R. Virgoe, *Illustrated Letters of the Paston Family* pg 70)

In groups imagine you are the villagers discussing Agnes Paston's decision to build the wall. Have a chat about it and make sure you include the following in your conversation:

- How you feel about the blocking of the path?
- What you think of Agnes Paston?
- How the blocking of the path will affect you?
- What you think should happen now?

Take turns to be Agnes. Hotseat Agnes and ask her questions about her actions.

How would you feel if your route to school was blocked and you had to go a long way round that took twice as long? Write a description of how you feel about this.

