

GRESHAM

The Pastons were one of Norfolk's most prominent families from about 1380, until about 1750. They rose from medieval peasants, becoming successful and prominent lawyers in Tudor England, and eventually gaining lands and titles as members of the aristocracy. Today they are perhaps best known as the authors of the Paston Letters- the world's earliest family letter collection.

In 1426 Judge William Paston began his ambitious investment in land in the wealthy Hundred of North Erpingham with the purchase of the port of Cromer. The acquisition of Gresham, from the Chaucer family, followed in 1427. Gresham offered fertile land, water power and close port access.

Gresham's importance as a settlement had earlier been recognised by the building of fortifications, with the most substantial fortified structure built in 1319 by Sir Edmund Bacon.

Judge William Paston gave the Castle to his eldest son John and his wife Margaret. Margaret had inherited the Mautby estates at nearby West Beckham and Matlaske. Shortly after the death of the Judge, the family's enemies moved to dispute the ownership of Gresham.

Lord Moleyns, aided and abetted by John Heydon of nearby Baconsthorpe and a bitter local rival of the Paston family, lodged a claim on Gresham and launched a campaign of intimidation and threats against the Pastons' tenants.

Margaret Paston's letters to her husband John, now fighting their cause in the London Courts, provide from this time some of the most famous and vivid passages of all the Paston Letters.

Margaret described how, in 1449, Moleyn's army of perhaps several hundred, finally ejected the Paston household from the Castle. Margaret was forced to flee to family friend John Damme's house a mile away at Sustead.

In 1450, the then Duke of Suffolk was executed and much of the Duke's protection for the lawless activities of the likes of Moleyns and Heydon, disappeared. John Paston was able to recover Gresham Castle. The Castle was never rebuilt, despite plans for reconstruction being drawn up in the 1470s.

FOOTPRINTS

The Paston Footprints Project aims to provide a permanent legacy at the many sites across Norfolk that were important to the Paston story. The Project aims to encourage local people to become involved and celebrate the rich history of their own area, and allow them to further explore the stories associated with the Paston family and the times they lived through.



Philosophy – A series of walks providing a chance to learn something about the Paston family story, to take some exercise and explore the local landscape

Walk Focus – The siege of Gresham Castle

Features – Varied landscape with attractive views

Natural History – Kestrels, buzzards, red kites.

wayside and churchyard wild flowers, arable land.

Route – Public footpaths or minor roads

Terrain – Mostly even

Parking & Public Transport – Parking by the church.

Toilets – The Roman Camp pub at Aylmerton, Cromer, Sheringham or National Trust at Felbrigg

Refreshments – The Roman Camp pub at Aylmerton, the Wheatsheaf pub at West Beckham, Cromer, Sheringham or the National Trust at Felbrigg Hall

Risk – Some narrow roads with no pavement; single file, face oncoming traffic. Five road crossings, watch for traffic.

Distance/Time – 1.75 miles, 1 hour

Extensions/Cut Short Options – To extend: Follow the Weavers Way across to Sustead Church and return to the route by the lane. Or follow the lane by the Castle out of the village to Bessingham Church and return to Gresham by footpath.

For younger walkers – Can you find the grasshopper, the lion and the bats? Why are castles often built near a stream?

Disclaimer – please be aware that routes are shared with other users (vehicles, pedestrians, cyclists etc). Users of these routes do so at their own risk. We do not accept responsibility for any loss, damage or injury, however caused, arising directly or indirectly from following this leaflet.

Photos: Gresham Castle site, at Gresham Castle & All Saints church

THE MAP CAN ALSO BE ACCESSED FROM THE WEB SITE AS A PDF DOWNLOAD AND AS DIGITAL CONTENT

www.thisispaston.co.uk



paston600



pastonfootprint



PASTON
PATHWAYS

ROUTE

4

GRESHAM WALK

JUDGE WILLIAM PASTON

MARGARET & GRESHAM CASTLE



Paston Pathways explores the historic landscapes of the Paston family

A series of walks and rides aiming to provide a chance to suspend the daily routine, take some exercise, learn something about the Paston family story and explore the local landscape.



500 metres

GRESHAM



East Beckham

The Beck

Village Hall

START

All Saints Church

Gresham Village School

Upper Gresham

Paston Close

Gresham castle

5

1

2

3

4

Park across the road from All Saints Church. ①. The side gateway gives passage into the churchyard. The Manor of Gresham was purchased by Judge William Paston in 1427 from the Chaucer family. William's eldest son John and wife Margaret occupied Gresham from about 1440.

Colin Richmond, in his three detailed books on the Paston story, begins his account with a memorial inside the threshold of the church. Within the building is a memorial to a Rev Robert Smith, a chaplain to a later Paston family. The church also contains one of the finest seven sacrament fonts in Norfolk and a number of tributes to the Batt family. The medieval Pastons would certainly recognise the church, although it has had a number of alterations over the years.

On leaving the church by the main gate you will see the Gresham Village Sign which includes the Paston Coat of Arms (on the left hand side of the sign), the Castle and examples of local wind and water mills. The Grasshopper on the top of the sign is the emblem of the Gresham family and James Gresham was the local agent for the Paston family throughout the 15th century. The Gresham family had much in common with the Pastons and both families founded local schools which still bear their name.

Walk towards and past the sign and follow the footpath which runs beside the road (Church Lane). After about 400m turn sharp left into Chequers Road ②. When John Heydon and Lord Moleyn's men arrived to attack the Castle they may well have followed this route from nearby Baconsthorpe Castle, the seat of the Heydon family.

Shortly before the road junction ③ look towards your right and you will see the mounded remains of Gresham castle, in the middle of a field and surrounded by trees. There is no public access to the site. (A 3D digital reconstruction of the original castle is available on the Footprints web site.)

In 1448 A force led by Lord Moleyns and John Heydon besieged Gresham Castle. One of the most famous Paston Letters was written by Margaret Paston from Gresham at this time asking her husband John for poleaxes and crossbows.

Follow the road out of the village and where it bends sharply to the right, bear left off the road and follow the left hand footpath up a slight incline. The right hand footpath ④ route would likely have been taken by Margaret Paston as she fled from the besiegers of the castle to take refuge with her friend John Damme at Sustead Hall about a mile away.

Turn left where a footpath passes through a hedge and heads north. When you reach the road turn left and after about 150m take the bridleway on your right. Follow the track towards the woodland.

Where the path bends sharp left ⑤, look towards the dip in the land to your right. Here runs a brook which would have been sufficiently fast flowing in the 15th century to drive a water mill to service the productive land nearby. Upstream from here is East Beckham, a Manor purchased around the same time as Gresham by Judge William Paston. The brook later becomes Scarrow Beck which joins the river Bure at Blickling.

Follow the track until it reaches the road, turn left and return to the Church.

Around the time of the siege in 1448, Lord Moleyn's retainers intimidated the Paston tenants in the area. The Paston Letters provide a fascinating and vivid record of this turbulent and lawless few months. The Letters can be found on www.thisispaston.co.uk.



PASTON FOOTPRINTS

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Sustead

