

A PASTON LETTER



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PASTON HERITAGE SOCIETY

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A PASTON LETTER

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*The front cover picture is by Rob Knee and shows the Fastolf Arms
on the family tomb at Yarmouth Minster.*

THE PASTON HERITAGE SOCIETY

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From the Chair

I greet you well.

Winter is a time for reflection. I recently came across the list of the aims of the PHS. In the spirit of the Paston family we have always set ourselves big challenges despite being a relatively small society. The Paston Footprints Project may currently be absorbing most of our energies and time, but it is worth remembering why we are so heavily involved.



Our first Society aim is to support St Margaret's Church in Paston as a centre for worship, community and heritage. The project is providing funds which we can use to make a really significant contribution to the current re-ordering plans for the church. There will, at last, be a centre for visitors to experience and learn more about the Paston family.

We aim to have a strong internet presence. A highlight of recent months was the hub meeting we held in November at Bacton where Peter Stibbons presented the latest news on the digital side of the project. The audience was suitably amazed at the 3D reconstruction images of Bromholm Priory and Paston Hall that James Mindham had created.

This was what we had hoped for from the start of the project – revealing to local people the remarkable history of the area and bringing to life the crumbling pillars of flint. Peter is close to completing the herculean and ground-breaking task of presenting over 1000 medieval Paston Letters on the www.thisispaston.co.uk website. Do have a look.

Our third aim requires us to provide educational opportunities. The project is fortunate to have Sue Eagle – a former head teacher and county advisor – leading a very experienced team to produce an innovative package for schools. A successful training event for teachers was held at Blofield Primary School at the beginning of 2020.

The fourth and final aim encourages the PHS to provide speakers and re-enactors to spread the word. We have had two main re-enactor events this year – a presence at the Worstead Weavers week-end and a full turnout to support Lucy Care at an event in

Bowthorpe. Eleven talks have been provided in the last 12 months to history and community groups in Norfolk.

Next year promises a re-enactor event at the Cromer History Fair and at the North Walsham Peasants Revolt weekend on 18th/19th July. The latter event promises an annual opportunity to present PHS insights into the 14th century – with calligraphy, games and weaving being of particular relevance.

Clement Paston (father of the Good Judge) was charged in 1381 for his part in a fracas in North Walsham market place. Servants of the household of the Abbot of St Benet's Abbey were injured as Clement Paston and others raided a wagon containing local documents. The colossal rise in the Poll Tax between 1379 and 1381 had caused great anger locally, and many set out to destroy any official records that were needed for the process of tax collection.

The project is also helping us to break new ground. Our link with Blofield Church has been greatly strengthened by the combined efforts of David and Barbara Pilch, Tim Lenton and the excellent Hexachordia. We have recently struck up a good link with Gresham Church and village.

We have had both an exhibition and a symposium in Great Yarmouth. By explaining the very important part played by Great Yarmouth in the Paston family fortunes, we have laid the foundations to develop our links further. A report on the Yarmouth Symposium is included in this issue.

It was good to see that the launch of the Paston Pathway at Mautby Church featured in the latest Norwich Diocesan magazine. This event took place last summer when we also unveiled a memorial stone in the churchyard to Margaret Paston. We are indebted to June Pratt, Shirley Travis and Jan Howard, with their determination to help their church, for being so supportive of the project and for putting Margaret Paston's home village on the map.

Other exciting links have been further developed with Mannington Hall and the Maids Head Hotel in Norwich. We are currently working with the North Walsham Heritage Action Zone project to bring the Paston connections to the town into focus for attracting visitors.

We would know little of the Pastons without their Letters. Similarly, little would be known of the efforts and achievements of the PHS without our own *Paston Letter* magazine, edited by our own Man of Letters, Tim Lenton. I hope you enjoy reading this edition.

Rob Knee



Jolt of recognition – the Pastons at Yarmouth

*PASTON SYMPOSIUM : 19th OCTOBER 2019:
The Imperial Hotel, Great Yarmouth*

The event was attended by more than 80 people. Henry Cator, The Lord High Steward of Yarmouth, introduced the event.

The first speaker was Rosemary Horrox, from Cambridge University. Rosemary is an authority on the Paston Letters, and we were treated to a sample of the Letters based on major themes that Rosemary introduced: the first “Woman’s Voice” properly witnessed in the 15th century, for instance – the “jolt of recognition” that we get from hearing Margaret or Margery speaking. The vivid news of the day and the insights into the way things were done – the favours granted and the favours returned with the resulting powerful networks that the Pastons built for themselves. The family’s writing skills shine through with each message.

Tom Williamson (UEA) needed no introduction to a Norfolk audience, and we were treated to a colourful journey through the history of garden design. Tom explained that Oxnead is an example of a design

intended to show off a knowledge of the Italian style – for the purposes of gaining prestige and status. This was a style that quickly went out of fashion with the onset of the English Civil War. It was also fascinating to see how the area between the Hall, the Bure and the village of Buxton was originally planned as a parkland extension.

Also highlighted were John Adey Repton's links with the legacy of the Pastons through his (and his father Humphrey's) work at Barningham Hall, and family connections to Oxnead.

James Wright (from the University of Nottingham) explained how Caister Castle, built by Sir John Fastolf, had a very similar history and design to Tattersall Castle in Lincolnshire, which was built by another successful soldier, Ralph Cromwell. Both castle designs became very influential, so that many later castles and fortified houses tended to have a great tower, a gatehouse, window tracery, brick and stone work, courtyards and chimney crenellations.

The first part of the final talk of the day on "The Pastons and Great Yarmouth" is included in this edition of a Paston Letter.

The Symposium was very well received by an appreciative audience.

Rob Knee

Connecting with Bacton and Gresham

Towards the end of 1919 we held meetings at Bacton and Gresham – the former aimed also at Paston villagers and the latter also at East Beckham. The aim was to involve people in these "hubs" to put forward their own ideas of how to promote the Pastons in their area, and to keep them up to date with what was already available – on the thisispaston website, for example.

Rob Knee made the introductions at Bacton, and Tim Lenton at Gresham – with Peter Stibbons' videos opening up the technological achievements so far in terms mainly of 3D modelling. This made a big impression on those who attended.

The details of the Pastons' involvement at Gresham are probably less well known than in their home territory of Paston and Bacton

(Bromholm Priory). Here is the introduction to the Gresham story as given to the meeting on 14th November.

Gresham is a long way from Paston but is nevertheless a key area for the Pastons, who owned a manor and estate here for nearly 200 years.

The first Paston of note, William the Good Judge, bought it in 1426, shortly after marrying Agnes Berry. During the 1440s his son John lived here at least some of the time with his wife Margaret. (The rest of the time they lived in Norwich.)

But there was an obscure legal problem related to ownership of the estate, and it was contested by Lord Moleyns, who lived in Wiltshire but who was egged on by the Pastons' enemy John Heydon, who lived down the road in Baconsthorpe.

Armed men entered the house in February 1448 and started collecting rents from tenants. John was away but petitioned for its return. He eventually lost patience and retook the property in the October.

But when he was away in London, Lord Moleyns attacked it while Margaret Paston was in residence, and she had to go and stay at the house of John Damme at Sustead, writing to her husband about the "company of scoundrels" who had ousted her.

All ended well when John got back into Gresham in 1451, but by then the house had been laid waste, and the Pastons never lived there again.

However, they owned it until 1620, when it was sold by Sir William Paston, who founded Paston School, to the Batt family.

The other strong connection to the Pastons is that James Gresham acted as an agent for them in North Norfolk and London, especially during the years 1450 to 1471. He is mentioned in the long list of expenses at John's funeral.

I should mention that there were ongoing problems for the Pastons at East Beckham in the 15th century, with a great deal of mortgaging and remortgaging involving the Townshend family and many others.

All too complex to go into here, but there is something about it in the Paston timeline on the website thisispaston.co.uk, and more on the web. Researching this might be interesting.

Tim Lenton



Above:
Dot
Lenton
leads an
inquiry
session on
the
Paston
Treasure.



Below:
Tim
Taylor
explains
how to
use role
play and
drama to
find the
real
story.

Teachers delve into local history

Blofield Primary School were the hosts for the Footprints Teachers' conference on 14 January.

PHS trustees Tim Lenton and Peter Stibbons were present, but the main sessions were led by Tim Taylor and Dot Lenton, both experienced in advanced teaching methods - Tim's speciality is Mantle of the Expert, which involves ways of getting into the story through drama and role play; Dot's is Philosophy for Children, which looks at involving the children through a community of inquiry, with emphasis on listening and respect for different views.

Tim looked at how children could become deeply involved through the use of an imaginary manor house and what might be found there. Dot looked at how The Paston Treasure picture could be used to provoke a variety of questions and a deeper understanding of what was involved.

Teachers came from five different schools – Blofield, Brundall, Hemblington, Gresham and Fleggburgh; other schools – North Walsham, Filby, Bacton and Mundesley – have also expressed an interest. They will receive materials made available by the conference co-ordinator, Sue Eagle – a former head teacher and county education advisor.



Advancing into the hinterland

The Pastons and Great Yarmouth in four parts

- 1. 1350-1450 Advancing**
2. 1450-1550 *Developing*
3. 1550-1650 *Consolidating*
4. 1650-1750 *Legacy*

HINTERLAND: The inland area that lies behind a port. The hinterland has the advantage of the lowest transport costs.

Clement Paston may not have been overly surprised if a friend or family member suggested that his descendants would one day ride in triumph into Yarmouth. Clement appears to have been both a capable and an ambitious character, and such an eventuality might be just what he had in mind....

Clement in many ways is the bridge between the Pastons of old and the Pastons with a bright future. However, Clement's ancestry is confused and was somewhat controversial. If we are to believe the genealogy developed by Friar John Brackley in the Paston Book of Arms (ref1450 NRO) the ancestry was likely to have been "established" to persuade Edward IV that the family had sufficient credentials to be considered worthy of the ownership of Caister Castle.

If we are to believe the Remembrance – a lengthy condemnation of the Paston inheritance which probably emerged in the 1450s – then the Pastons were bondsmen.

Either way, Clement's contribution to the family fortunes was pivotal. Born in Paston in around 1360 and on the northern edge of the Yarmouth hinterland, Clement was soon to make a significant advance towards the town itself.

Clement's early years were dominated by a pair of related seismic events. In 1348, The Black Death had visited and decimated the densely populated and prosperous strip of North Norfolk Coast.

The opportunities which flowed from this catastrophe included a swollen market for land, ripe for purchase and use. Additionally, wages rose sharply with the shortage of labour. Clement appears to have taken advantage of this favourable set of circumstances, as is evidenced by the significant amount of land he accrued and the success of his marriage.

However, in 1381 disturbances erupted as a consequence of a huge increase in taxation required of the diminished population. The Peasants Revolt of 1381 was centred on the North Walsham area and we have evidence that Clement was caught up in the lawlessness. In a reference in the records of St Benet's Abbey, a prosecution was brought by the Abbot against Clement Paston and Roger Leech.

It was alleged that on 20 June 1381 at North Walsham they seized goods belonging to the Abbot, including timber and wool as well as court rolls, feodaries and rentals, which they took and carried away. They also assaulted the Abbot's servants there, namely Robert Thurkeld, John Walsingham and Richard Cook, injuring them so that the Abbot lost their service for a month. A later action for trespass brought by the Abbot saw Clement defended by the attorney Henry Lessingham. Neither case was resolved.

Clement was – whatever his status – probably a member of the village elite. The Remembrance provides us with further details:

A remembrance of the worshipful kin and ancestry of Paston, born in Paston in Gemyngham Soken.

First, There was one Clement Paston dwelling in Paston, and he was a good, plain husband (ie husbandman), and lived upon his land that he had in Paston, and kept thereon a plough all times in the year, and sometimes in barlysell two ploughs.

The said Clement yede (ie went) at one plough both winter and summer, and he rode to mill on the bare horseback with his corn under him, and brought home meal again under him, and also drove his cart with divers corns to Wynterton to sell, as a good husband[man] ought to do. Also, he had in Paston a five score or a six score acres of land at the most, and much thereof bond land to Gemyngham Hall, with a little pool water-mill running by a little river there, as it appeareth there of old time. Other livelode nor manors had he none there, nor in none other place.

Clement may well have secured both significant income and influence from his ownership of a mill. Gimingham Soke had been an important part of the hated John of Gaunt's Norfolk empire (the site of his Gimingham Manor House, above the valley of the Mun, appears on maps of the area). Clement Paston may have been able to exploit the opportunity provided by the death of John of Gaunt in 1399 to buy land.

A further dispute arose in the year 1418:

Clement Paston, Esq. John Horningtoft of Paston, merchant, Laurence de Thorp, and John Parson of Edythorp, came to this town, and entered into the pasture, &c. of the abbot, belonging to his manor, with their cattle, fed and trod it down to the damage of 40s. fished his ponds, &c. took 200 roaches, 200 perch, and 300 eels, to the value of 100s. and carried them away. (Blomefield)

The Remembrance continues Clement's story...

And he wedded Geoffrey of Somerton (whose true surname is Goneld)'s sister, which was a bondwoman, to whom it is not unknown (to the prior of Bromholm and Bakton also, as it is said) if that men will inquire.

And as for Geoffrey Somerton, he was bond also, to whom, etc, he was both a pardoner and an attorney; and then was a good world, for he gathered many pence and half-pence, and therewith he made a fair chapel at Somerton, as it appeareth.

These last scurrilous accusations reveal at least that Clement married well – Beatrice, whose mother was from the important Clere family of Ormesby on the Island of Flegg. Beatrice's brother was the attorney Geoffrey de Somerton. Perhaps they had met at the port of Winterton, close to the Somerton 'fair chapel' .

Here we advance significantly into the hinterland. Geoffrey de Somerton practised law in Yarmouth as well as owning land and serving as the town's MP. We have some examples of Geoffrey's commissions:

Commitment to the abbot of St. Benet's of Hulme, by mainprise of Geoffrey Somerton and Richard Roys of the county of Norfolk, of the keeping of 32 acres of land, a certain water, from Weybrigg to Wroxhambrigg, containing 20 water-leagues, and a ferry, called ' Hornyngferye, which have been taken into the king's hand by Edmund Oldhalle, late escheator in the said county; to hold the same, together with the issues from the time of the taking of the

same into the king's hand, until it shall have been decided in the king's court whether the premises should pertain of right to the king or to the said abbot; so that the abbot answer at the Exchequer for the issues and profits if it happen that the land, water and ferry should pertain of right to the king (Calendar of the Fine rolls preserved in the Public Record Office Vol X1111 Henry IV p 55 Archive books).

Geoffrey, again, in the register of the Hospital of St Mary in Yarmouth:

“This indenture witnesses an agreement between Geoffrey de Somerton, Robert Howlyn and John Seford, executors of the testament of William de Stalham of Yarmouth, on one part, and on the other part, William Ive, executor of the same and warden of the hospital of St Mary, and its brethren. In return for the great benevolence shown to the hospital by William de Stalham while he was alive, and by his executors, Ive and the brethren agree to support 7 cottages once of John de Stalham and now called "Goddemenhous", located between a common way (N.), land of Peter Baxter and land once of Thomas Cobald (S. and W.), land once of John de Stalham (E.). The purpose being to support 7 poor townsmen who shall celebrate day and night for the souls of John de Stalham and his brother William. The rents from the cottages are to be kept in a pyx chest.’
(From MedievalYarmouth <http://users.trytel.com/~tristan/towns/yarmout6.html>)



Geoffrey was also involved with the dealings of the Priory of Hickling: The heavy fine of £24 was paid by the priory in July, 1380, to obtain licence for alienation in mortmain by John de Eccles and Geoffrey de Somerton of the reversion of a third part of the manor of Hickling called “le Netherhall”, which was held by trustees during the life of Edward de Berkale, for finding a lamp to be kept burning daily before the high altar in the priory church.

In October of the same year, the further sum of £20 was paid in a hanaper by the prior for the alienation in mortmain by the same donors to the convent of a messuage, 40 acres of land, 30 of pasture,



and 10 of rush bed, and 60s of rent in Palling and Waxham for finding a chaplain to celebrate daily in the priory church for the souls of John de Toucestre, Richard de Pouche, chaplain, and others. (Houses of Austin canons: The priory of Hickling, in *A History of the County of Norfolk: Volume 2*, ed. William Page (London, 1906), pp. 383-386. British History Online <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/norf/vol2/pp383-386> [accessed 26 November 2019].

Geoffrey was not only an important Yarmouth attorney and Justice of the Peace, but also a Member of Parliament in 1378, 1383, 1384. Geoffrey was at times an attorney of John Fastolf the Younger.

Geoffrey died childless in 1416. His legacy significant for our purposes in that his estate, established in Yarmouth, paid for the education of his nephew William, Clement and Beatrice's eldest child. William would also inherit Geoffrey's property in Yarmouth – the foothold had been established.

In 1419, Clement died, his Will an eloquent testimony to his achievements:

His body to be buried in the parish church of St. Margaret at Paston, between the north door and the tomb of his wife Beatrix. Legacies – (1) To the High Altar (sum not named); (2) To the Vicar of Paston for tithes, etc., 3s. 4d.; (3) For the lights 'Beatæ Margaretæ in cancella . . . coram ymagine Beatæ Margaretæ, vj li. cer.'; (4) 'Item,

luminibus super le Rodelofte ejusdem ecclesie, xij d.’; (5) For the reparation, etc of the church, 3s. 4d.; (6) To the Vicar of Bakton (as above), 2s.; (7) For the repair, etc. of the Trunch church, 8d.; (8) For the repair of Monslee church, 6d.; (9) ‘Item, Priori et Conventui de Bromholm, vjs. viijd.’ And five or six score acres of land.

The young William Paston was poised to make further substantial advances. His education included attendance at the Inns of Court, qualification as a lawyer, later as Sergeant at Law and finally as Judge. The Remembrance continues...

Also, the said Clement had a son William, which that he set to school, and often he borrowed money to find him to school; and after that he yede (went) to court with the help of Geoffrey Somerton, his uncle, and learned the law, and there begat he much good; and then he was made a serjeant, and afterwards made a justice, and a right cunning man in the law. And he purchased much land in Paston, and also he purchased the moiety of the fifth part of the manor of Bakton, called either Latymer’s, or Styward’s, or Huntingfield, which moiety stretched into Paston; and so with it, and with another part of the said five parts he hath seignory in Paston, but no manor place; and thereby would John Paston, son to the said William, make himself a lordship there, to the Duke (qu. Duchy?) of Lancaster’s great hurt.

“And the said John would and hath untruly increased him by one tenant, as where that the prior of Bromholm borrowed money of the said William for to pay withal his dismes, the said William would not lend it him unless the said prior would mortgage to the said William one John Albon, the said prior’s bondsman, dwelling in Paston, which was a stiff churl and a thrifty man, and would not obey him unto the said William; and for that cause, and for evil will that the said William had unto him, he desired him of the prior.

William’s mother’s Clere ancestry would have provided important connections in the Isle of Flegg. It may have been through this connection that William came to act as legal advisor for Sir John Pastolf .

William did not escape controversy – the Paston Letters record a number of serious disputes including with Walter Aslak and Juliana Herberd which brought William into contact with Sir Thomas Erpingham, who cuttingly commented that Paston’s pleading was ‘a marvellous asking and unskilful’ (Trevor John, ‘Sir Thomas Erpingham’ Larks Press)

Judge William was also accused in a Petition to the Commons of England by William Dalling of “taking divers fees and rewards of

divers persons within the shires of Norfolk and Suffolk, and is withhold with every matter in the said counties; that is to say Of the Town of Great Yarmouth 1 shilling yearly.”
(quoted in Fenn’s Paston Letters Vol 1&2)

Again, family connections proved to be instrumental in the next stage of the Paston progress on Yarmouth. William succeeded, shortly before his death in 1444, in arranging a marriage between his eldest son John and Margaret de Mautby – heiress and a member of the ancient families of Mautby and Berney. Agnes Paaton reported to her husband:



To my worshepefull housbond, W.
Paston, be this letter takyn
1440(?)

DERE housbond, I recomaunde me
to yow, &c. Blessyd be God I sende
yow gode tydynggs of the comyng,
and the brynggyn hoom, of the
gentylwomman that ye wetyn of fro
Redham, this same nyght,
acordyng to poyntmen
[appointment] that ye made ther
for yowr self.

And as for the furste
aqweyntaunce be twhen John

Paston and the seyde gentylwomman, she made hym gentil cher in
gyntyl wise, and seyde, he was verrayly your son. And so I hope ther
shall nede no gret trete be twyxe hym.

Wretyn at Paston, in hast, the Wednesday next after Deus qui
errantibus, for defaute of a good secretarye.

Yowres, Agn. Paston.

This first phase – from 1378 to 1440 – had seen the determination of
Clement and his son William to advance the family’s fortunes by
moving through the hinterland of Yarmouth towards the rich
potential offered by the fertile soils of Flegg.

There were also great opportunities provided by the influence and
connections of powerful family links with the Cleres and Fastolfs. It
would fall to John and Margaret Paston to take advantage of this
foothold....

Dr Rob Knee

A Paston daughter at Hardres in Kent

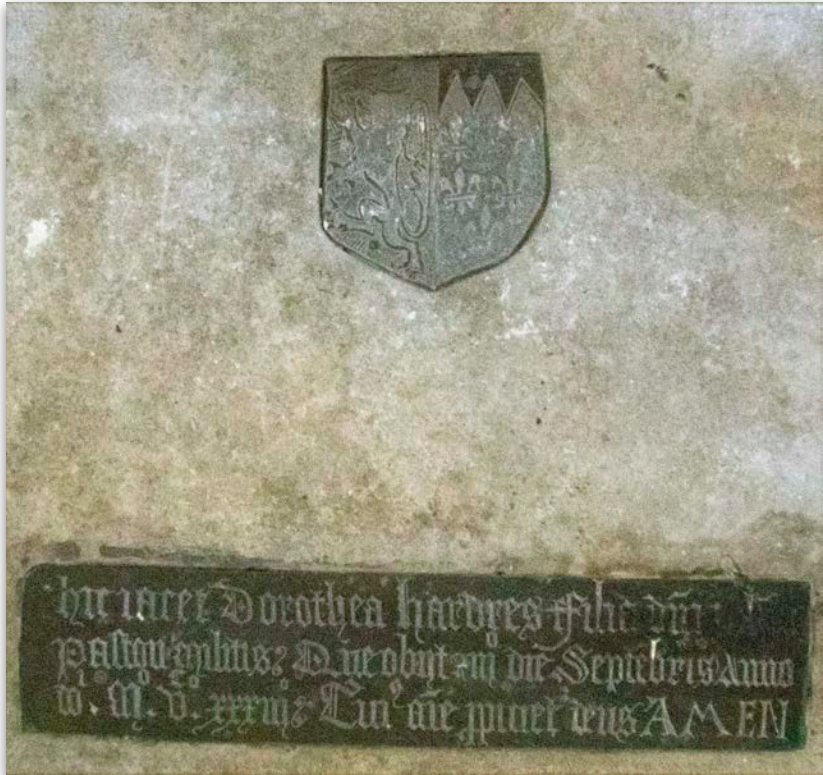
Tucked away in the City of Canterbury district in Kent are the joint villages of Upper and Lower Hardres. Local history suggests that the village name is from the Hardres family; they may have been incoming Norman settlers at the time



of the conquest, or possibly a Saxon family who maintained their position under the Normans.

Following the sat-nav down some interesting narrow lanes, you come to the 12th century church. This building was consecrated in 1160, but inside the door is the splendid Norman font, and it is doubtless the font at which some members of the Paston family through the female line were baptised. One such infant would have been Thomas Hardres, son of Dorothea Paston, his brothers James and Richard and his sister Isabella.

The pride of the church is the John



Strete “Bracket Brass”, not itself now on display but shown off through an actual-size image on the wall. However, it is among the more modest brasses that we find the Paston connection.

Various members of the Hardres family of Hardres Court are commemorated in the small floor brasses – through to the death of William Hardres, the last of the direct line, in 1764.

It takes a little exploration in an area now largely covered by the very new vestry to find the brass of Dorothea Hardres, née Paston, giving the date of her death as 1533 and recording her as a daughter of Sir John Paston. This is actually John III, who was married to Margery Brews.

Dorothea’s older brother William would marry Bridget Heydon and become the ancestor of all the remaining Pastons through the male line.

A careful look at the coat of arms above the plate with the text shows the arms of the Hardres halved with those of Paston. The fleur de lys of the Pastons can be made out on the right-hand side. Son Thomas appears to have been a soldier at the taking of the town of Boulogne in the time of Henry VIII. The one-time local vicar Robert Jenkins records that "the Gates of Boulogne, the gift of King Henry VIII to Sir Thomas Hardres, on the taking of that town in 1544, were still standing between the gardens of the ancient mansion" – the mansion being Hardres Court.



When he was writing the brass had apparently been lost. Perhaps it was hidden under carpeting or pews at the time.

One of the doors of the vestry actually opens across the brass.

Dorothea's husband was Christopher Hardres, who would die three years later, in 1536.

Peter Stibbons

This article can also be accessed on the website www.thisispaston.co.uk, under Paston Places. Peter Stibbons also took the pictures.

Music from Edward's era comes alive



The medieval music group Hexachordia made a welcome visit to Blofield on the weekend of November 15-17, linking with the Footprints project and introducing children and adults to the delights of instruments rarely seen nowadays, ranging from the crumhorn to the rauschpfeife – and beyond.

The three musicians – Tony and Jane Scheuregger and Sarah Doig (right) – visited the primary school on the Friday and fascinated pupils with their instruments and descriptions of what each one was capable of.

On the Saturday they switched to the church for an hour-long introduction for an older audience, combining amazing technique and mixing it with singing and dramatic interludes, all of which were extremely effective.

On the Sunday afternoon, in a rather warmer church, they presented a full-scale concert which demonstrated more fully their range with voice, viols, recorders, lutes, bagpipes and many other instruments. The audience of about 45 was also rewarded with some home-cooked medieval puddings and pies, as well as mulled wine and plenty of

other nibbles provided by the generous Blofield hosts, led by Barbara Pilch.

The group were welcomed by PHS chair Dr Rob Knee on the Saturday and by Dr David Pilch of Blofield on the Sunday.

The Paston link to Blofield is of course through Edward Paston, a musician and composer who knew William Byrd and Thomas Tallis and whose striking monument adorns the chancel of the church. The PHS has provided a leaflet for use in the church which gives a summary of the Paston connection.

It is hoped that the church will host further visits from Hexachordia. Plans are in hand to introduce their music to other Paston-influenced areas of Norfolk.



LOTTERY FUNDED

Volunteers still needed for Letters project

If you've already volunteered to help directly with digitising the Paston Letters, we're going to be writing to you with some further information shortly.

Working on the Letters is proving quite difficult, and we'd like to give some further help and encouragement to tackle the task.

We've been asked, "Why are we digitising the letters?" Once we've a sufficient number finalised, we'll be showing you the sort of searching, sorting, analysing, graphing and mapping that's possible on the public site. It's quite exciting.

For the moment, work continues behind the scenes. In the Admin section of www.thisispaston.co.uk all the medieval letters and the 17th century Katherine letters are now on the database. The later "Whirlpool" letters have all been digitised at the Norfolk Record Office, and we'll add them later in the year.

If you would like to help with the Letters team, do please use the "Volunteers" button on the front page of the site and follow through the instructions to add your help. You'll be very welcome.

If you would like to help specifically with the Letters but can't read medieval script, that's not a problem. There's plenty we can all do to help with what has already been transliterated into modern script.

Or maybe heraldry is your thing?

We're used to spotting our side in football and other competitive sports through their colours and crest - and the same applied in medieval times. The coats of arms distinguished the followers of particular Lords - in tournaments and battles.

Sir William Paston (the fifth of that name) was keen to show his family 'teams' on his tomb at North Walsham, and Norfolk churches are full of tombs and insignia dating back to his times and earlier.

We have a heraldry section in the Forum pages which you might like to join; in 2020 we're planning a heraldry conference to help us understand some of these fascinating devices.

A PASTON LETTER

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