



# PASTON FOOTPRINTS



*A speculative digital reconstruction of the Pastons' medieval home at Gresham Castle*

[pastonfootprints.co.uk](http://pastonfootprints.co.uk)



*Digital reconstruction of Bromholm Priory*

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# THE PASTON STORY

The Pastons were one of Norfolk's most prominent families during the 15th to 17th centuries. Using education, good business sense and entrepreneurial spirit, they broke through the social barriers of the day, rising from humble country origins to become a great landowning family in Norfolk.

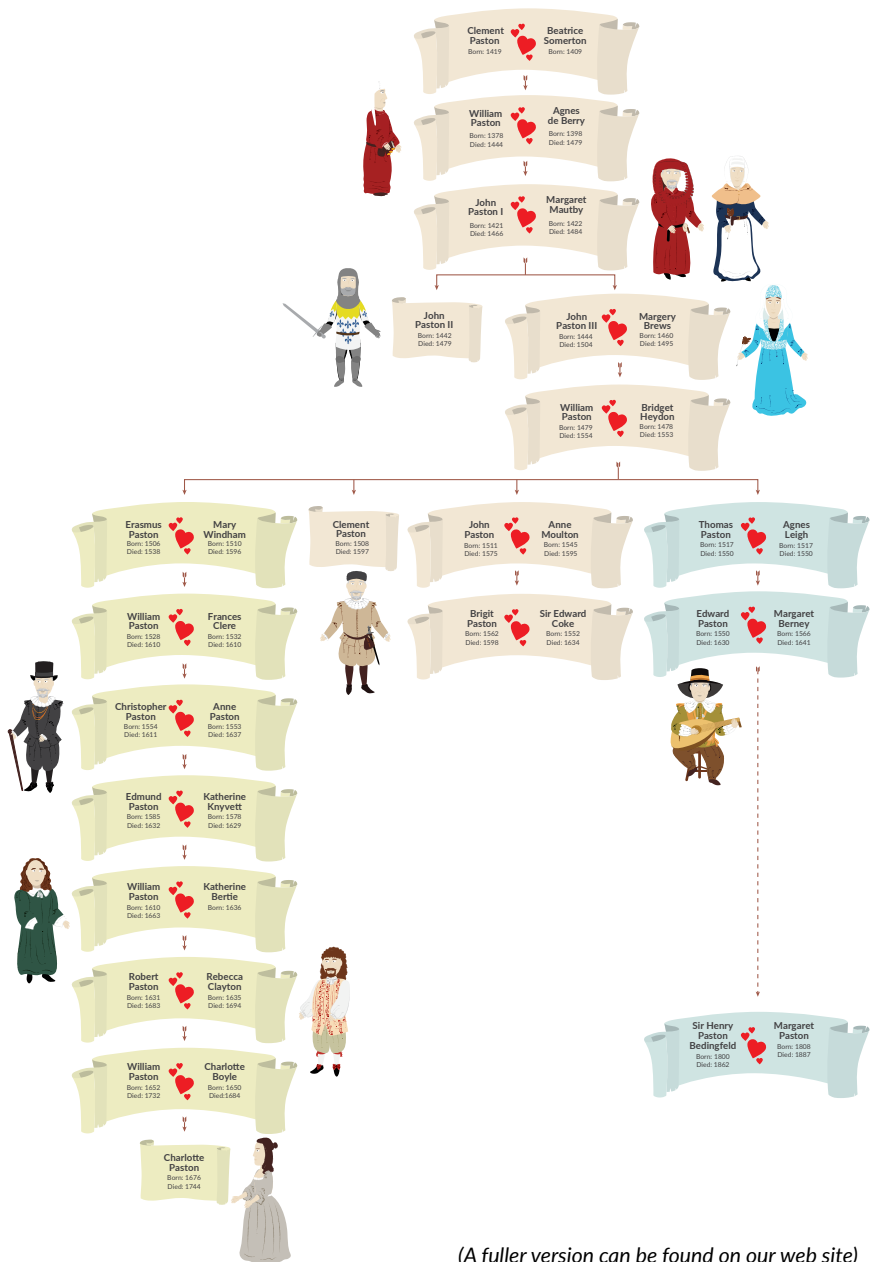
Their status was secured when they became courtiers of King Henry VIII. However, the reason the Pastons are truly unique is that they provide first-hand testimonies of the turbulent times they lived in. Their story is captured in the world's earliest and largest surviving family letter collection, dating back to 1418.

The most well-known document is the country's earliest Valentine letter, from Margery Brews to John Paston III in 1477. With this Norfolk family we share in gossip, business dealings, wily political negotiations and networking with the gentry and nobles. It also gets personal, with love letters, scandalous marriages, parental nurturing and sibling rivalries. These famous letters take us around the villages of Norfolk, and often through a plague-ridden Norwich. We go behind the scenes of a siege at Caister Castle, witness the power of recusant music and the folly of alchemy experiments. The bubonic plague, Wars of the Roses and English Civil War are chronicled by Paston men and women from the perspective of a family desperately trying to preserve their hard-won status and wealth.

*Image oppsite: the Paston pedigree. NRO, MC 662/23.*



# PASTON FAMILY TREE



(A fuller version can be found on our web site)

# PASTON FOOTPRINTS

The Paston Footprints project began with a celebration of the 600th anniversary, in 2018, of the first Paston communication. The project mission is to enable the public to explore and connect with, for the first time, the entire four-century long Paston story.

A lasting legacy is the community research portal at [www.thisispaston.co.uk](http://www.thisispaston.co.uk) where you can dig deeper into the story, exploring:

**Paston Places:** read more about the dramatic history of Paston sites in Norfolk and beyond.

**Characters:** meet the colourful animated Paston characters and read biographies.

**The Archives:** see the digitised 15th, 16th and 17th-century original letters yourself, read edited versions and modern translations. There are also newly acquired John Fenn archives and more related Paston documents to examine.

**3D Landmarks:** interact with intriguing 3D digital reconstructions of landmark Paston buildings.

**Children's Activities:** discover engaging Key Stage 1 – 3 activities, from heraldry to castle sieges, the plague to the Wars of the Roses.

*Detail from The Paston Treasure painting.*

*Courtesy of Norfolk Museums Service (Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery) NWHCM : 1947.170.*



# PASTON HUBS

Each Paston hub reveals a different chapter of the story. Numbering of Paston hubs below relates to their geographical location on the map on pages 12 & 13.

## 1. Paston

The village, which provided the name for this famous family, witnessed their early struggles to rise from medieval farmers to Lords of the Manor. Judge William Paston (1378 – 1444) built a manor house, which served as one of the family's principal homes and headquarters for over 200 years.

In the Tudor period another William Paston (1528 – 1610), developed Paston Hall into a substantial manor house, together with a magnificent barn and a set of almshouses.

When William moved into what was then the family's grandest house at Oxnead, his grandson Sir Edmund (1585 – 1632) lived at Paston Hall with his wife Katherine. Lady Katherine (1578 – 1629) was the author of a second substantive set of family letters, many of which concerned the progress of her young son William, who was studying at the University of Cambridge. The magnificence of Katherine's tomb, sculpted by Nicholas Stone (master-mason to King Charles I) with an epitaph by the poet John Donne, can still be seen in the church at Paston. It bears testimony to the status and achievements of the family.

*A 3D reconstruction of Paston Hall is on the first page.*

## 2. Bacton and Bromholm Priory

Long before the 'first' Paston, Clement Paston (1355 – 1419), sent his son to school, thus founding the family fortunes, Bromholm Priory was a famous centre of pilgrimage all over the kingdom, second only to Canterbury, and is mentioned in Chaucer's poem, *The Canterbury Tales*. Once a king came riding through the streets of Bacton; now it is a sleepy little seaside village.

'Good Judge William' Paston (as he was known), son of Clement who built the Paston manor house and did a lot of business with the Priory. He purchased all of the manors between Paston and the Priory. William's son and heir, John Paston, died in 1466 and with a lavish funeral procession and was buried at Bromholm.

*A 3D reconstruction of the Priory is on the inner cover.*

## 3. North Walsham

North Walsham would have been the most important local settlement for the Paston family. It is equidistant between the Paston and Oxnead estates, as well as being on the route into Norwich. Records show that Clement Paston had been involved in

the town during the revolt of 1381. It is no surprise that when Sir William Paston became the main inheritor of the family's considerable wealth, he chose to make his mark in the town. In 1600 he purchased land to establish a school. Sir William had his tomb built in North Walsham Church to record heraldically the families that the Pastons had married into. Both tomb and school survive to this day as the most visible elements of the Paston family heritage. The Paston College Foundation also owns a number of important family artefacts and paintings.

*Below: The tomb of Sir William Paston in North Walsham Church.*



## 4. Gresham

When Gresham manor and castle were bought in 1426 from the Chaucer family by Judge William Paston, there was some obscurity in the title deed. In 1448 Lord Moleyns, inspired by John Heydon of nearby Baconsthorpe and an enemy of the Pastons, laid claim to it. He forcibly entered the castle, collecting rents with menaces from the tenants. However, John Paston in 1448 re-entered the property and sent petitions to Parliament for title to the land. Lord Moleyns besieged the castle again, carrying out the defiant Margaret Paston forcibly and destroying its fabric. This attack prompted Margaret to write the famous shopping list to her husband, requesting poleaxes and crossbows alongside sugar and almonds.

The Pastons won the manor and its title back and owned it for the next three centuries. They never rebuilt the castle, however, and it still lies sleeping and forgotten within its moat, covered in brambles.

*There is a 3D reconstruction of Gresham Castle on the front cover.*



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## 5. Mannington

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century William Lumnor of Mannington Hall was a good friend and supporter of John and Margaret Paston. In return, John Paston supplied timbers from his Saxthorpe estate for the building of Mannington Hall in the 1460s. The Paston Letters contain many warm references to William Lumnor, who often provided the family with advice and helpful lobbying on their behalf.

One of John Paston's sons, Edmund, married William Lumnor's widow, Margaret. Margaret is buried in nearby Itteringham Church.

In the 18th century, Horace Walpole, new owner of Mannington and son of Robert Walpole, the first British Prime minister, encouraged John Fenn of Dereham to publish the Paston Letters. Such was Horace Walpole's enthusiasm that he declared that the Paston Letters "makes all other letters not worth reading".

*Paston Footprints' digital reconstruction of the Tudor Oxnead Hall*

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## 6. Oxnead

Oxnead was one of the first estate purchases made by Judge William Paston in the early part of the 15th century. In the 16th century, Sea Captain Clement Paston (c.1508 – 1597), with the help of his wife's inheritance, built a much grander house.

The early part of the 17th century witnessed the golden years of Oxnead. Nicholas Stone, a leading sculptor and architect, helped to create a magnificent estate and a house fit for the treasures that Sir William collected from all over Europe.

Alas, with both royalist and Roman Catholic sympathies, the Civil War proved costly for Sir William. In 1671, William's son Robert hosted a visit from King Charles II, however, the family's fortunes were by now in irreversible decline. Robert, now Earl



of Yarmouth, consoled himself with his scientific, archaeological, and alchemical interests, all described in hundreds of his letters. Robert saw to the production of the famous 'Paston Treasure' painting, today on show in Norwich Castle Museum.

In the following century, the Paston Letters were rescued from among the ruins of the great house. All of the Paston treasures and possessions had finally been dispersed.

## 7. Mautby and Caister Castle

Margaret of Mautby married John Paston I in c.1436. As self-coined 'Captainess', she is one of the most powerful of the Paston characters and wrote more letters than any other family member (or any other medieval woman). As heiress to the fine Mautby estates she was higher in the echelons of society than John. Through her, John was invited to become family lawyer of Sir John Fastolf of Caister Castle.

When in 1459 Fastolf left Caister and the bulk of his possessions to John Paston, a struggle for possession with other executors followed. This climaxed in the only battle of the Wars of the Roses to be fought on Norfolk soil: the successful siege of Caister Castle by the Duke of Norfolk and his troops in 1469. Caister was eventually recovered and for the next 100 years became the foundation for the Paston family fortunes. Margaret Paston

retired to Mautby. Paston Footprints laid a memorial stone to mark her burial place in the churchyard, to commemorate the 'first woman of letters'.



*Roof corbels in St Peter's Church Hungate, reputed to be of John and Margaret Paston, courtesy of Hungate trustees. Photo by Paul Harley.*

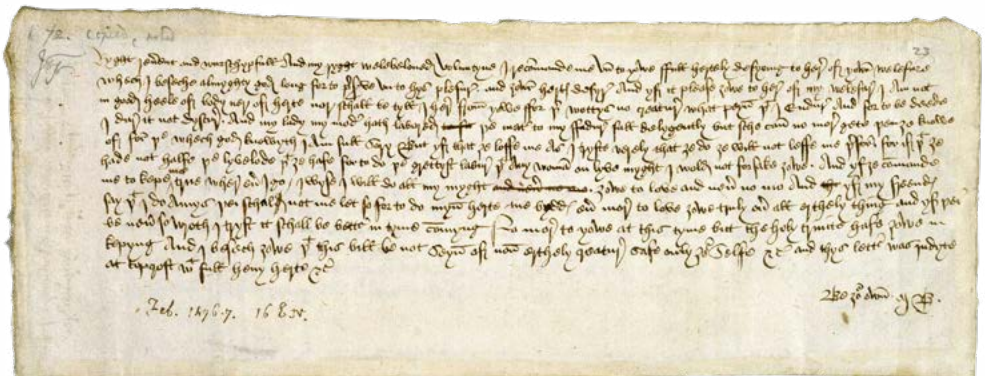
## 8. Blofield

Thomas Paston was the youngest of the three sons of William Paston. Thomas went to court and became one of the gentlemen of the bedchamber for Henry VIII. He did well and Henry granted him Binham Priory, Thorpe St Andrew, and Blofield at the Reformation. He built large houses at both Thorpe St Andrew where part of the old hall remains, and at Blofield, where it has vanished.

Blofield is important because this younger branch of the Paston family chose to make their home there and there are several Paston tombs in the chancel of Blofield church. The most notable is that of Edward Paston who, although a godson of Edward VI, became a Roman Catholic and part of the recusant society of England, living on their wits on the edges of society. Edward was a lute player and patron of music, drawing into his circle both Thomas Tallis and William Byrd.

*The Valentine letter from Margery Brews*

© BL, MS 43490, f.24



## 9. Norwich

Judge William Paston worked initially for the Bishop of Norwich and established the family home in the Elm Hill area, handy for the stables at the Maid's Head and the road to London. Paston Footprints provided a framed facsimile of the 1472 Paston letter naming the hotel, now to be seen in the hotel lobby.

William's son John Paston I and his wife Margaret Mautby worshipped at the nearby church of St Peter Hungate. They provided funds for its repair as well as paying for a new roof at St Andrew's Hall.

Many of Margaret Paston's letters to her husband, who was often at the London courts or occasionally serving his own time in the Fleet Prison, were written from Norwich and tell us much about life in the city in the mid-15th century. John was assaulted in the Cathedral Close on one occasion and the family did not escape the frequent plague visitations.

Elm Hill marks the spot where the earliest surviving extant Valentine's letter was delivered, by Margery Brews to the younger son, John Paston III. He later purchased a house in King Street and served as Sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk. The family fortunes increased, no doubt enhanced by shrewd dealings in the local wool trade. Both Sir Thomas Paston and his cousin William, of North Walsham fame, stood by to defend Norwich during Kett's rebellion in 1549.

## 10. Dereham

The Pastons owned land near Dereham, but the main link with the Paston story is the man who brought the Paston Letters to the world.

Francis Blomefield discovered the "innumerable letters of good consequence" in the decayed muniment room at Oxnead Hall, when

the hall was in disrepair and in danger of destruction, after the demise of the last Earl of Yarmouth in 1732. Many, though had perished and later, many of the Letters were dispersed.

John Fenn, who lived at Hill House in Dereham, managed to collect the majority of the letters and he painstakingly transcribed the difficult English over several years, finally publishing them in January 1787. The edition of 500 copies sold out in a week.

Fenn's wife, Ellenor, became a successful author and publisher in her own right.

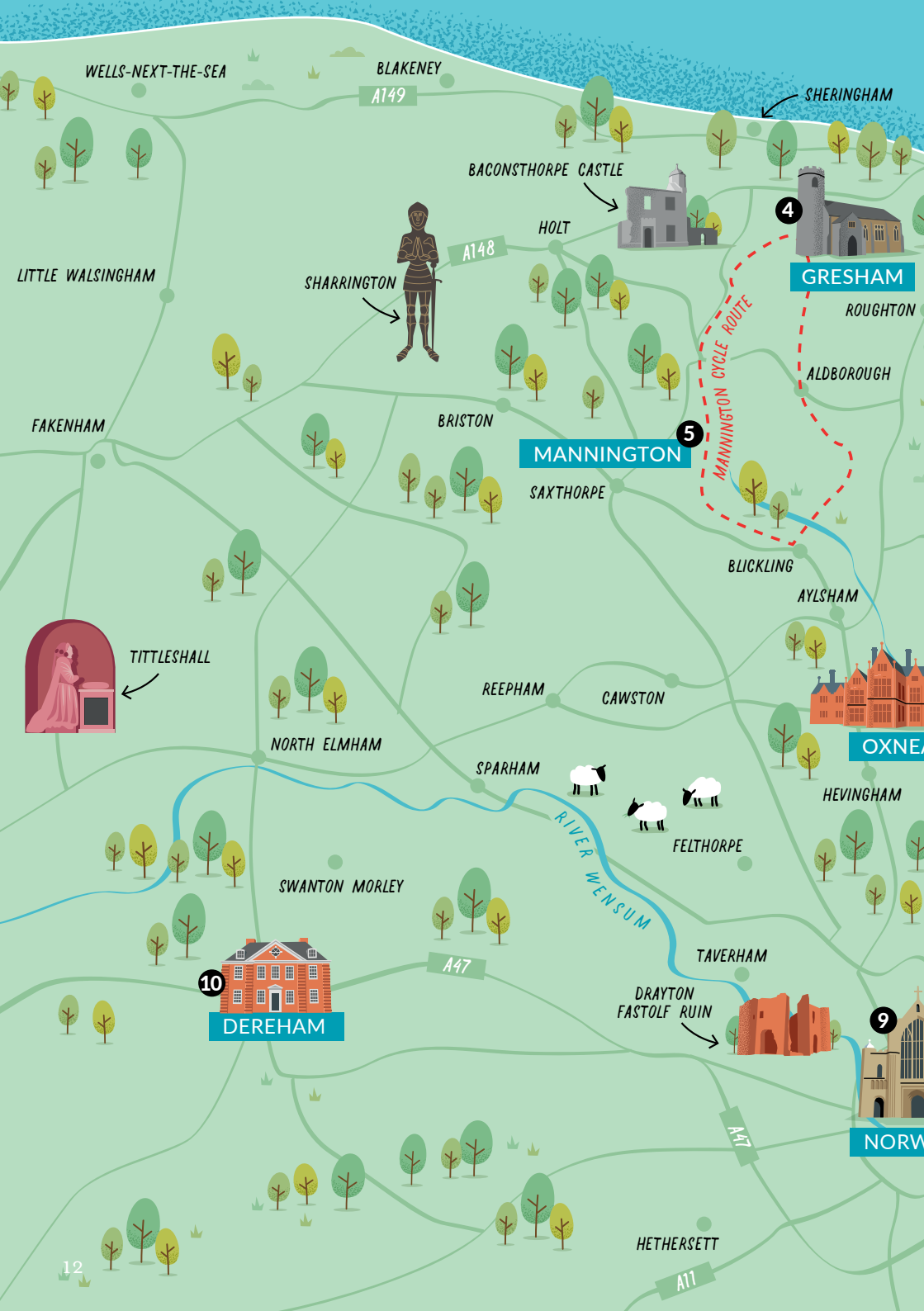
The Paston Footprints' project has secured from private ownership, the engagement diaries of Fenn and his application to the Society of Antiquaries'. These can be viewed online at: [thisispaston.co.uk](http://thisispaston.co.uk).

## READING THE PASTON LETTERS TODAY.

A modern English translation of around 200 of the medieval Paston Letters is available from Penguin classics. The most reliable edition is the EETS series edited by Norman Davies, and for later letters *The Whirlpool of Misdventures* edited by Jean Agnew. Or view the letters online at: [thisispaston.co.uk](http://thisispaston.co.uk)







WELLS-NEXT-THE-SEA

BLAKENEY

A149

SHERINGHAM

BACONSTHORPE CASTLE

HOLT

4

GRESHAM

ROUGHTON

LITTLE WALSHINGHAM

SHARRINGTON

A148

MANNINGTON CYCLE ROUTE

ALDBOROUGH

FAKENHAM

BRISTON

MANNINGTON

5

SAXTHORPE

BLICKLING

AYLSHAM



TITTLESHALL

REEPHAM

CAWSTON

OXNEAD

NORTH ELMHAM

SPARHAM

HEVINGHAM



FELTHORPE



SWANTON MORLEY

RIVER WENSUM

TAVERHAM

10

DEREHAM

A47

DRAYTON FASTOLF RUIN

9

NORWICH

HETHERSETT

A11

12



CROMER

OVERSTRAND

PASTON

1



2



HAPPISBURGH

3



NORTH WALSHAM

BACTON

SWANTON ABBOTT

STALHAM

HICKLING

HORSEY

THE BROADS

POTTER HEIGHAM

MARTHAM

HORNING

LUDHAM

HEMSBY

A140

WROXHAM

COLTISHALL

SALHOUSE

SOUTH WALSHAM

RIVER BURE

MAUTBY CYCLE ROUTE

7

CAISTER-ON-SEA

MAUTBY

A47

ACLE

A47

THE BROADS

GREAT YARMOUTH

8

BLOFIELD



RIVER YARE

A146

WICH

AD HALL

6



# ADDITIONAL PASTON HUBS

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## 11. Cromer

William Paston (1378-1444) owned a large proportion of Cromer (then known as Shipden and Ropers), including the rights to hold a market.

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## 12. Great Yarmouth

From the middle of the 15th to the early part of the 18th century, the Paston family exerted significant influence on Great Yarmouth and derived great benefit from owning much land to the north of the town, including the dominant Caister Castle.

Sir Robert Paston became the first Earl of Yarmouth in 1679.

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## 13. Sharrington

All Saints Church, Sharrington, contains a brass memorial for John Daubeney who was killed at the Siege of Caister Castle in 1469. John Daubney was a key member of the Paston household during the turbulent years of the 1460's

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## 14. Baconsthorpe Castle

Home of the Heydon family. In 1448, John Heydon, orchestrated an attack on the nearby Gresham Castle in a successful bid to oust Margaret Paston from the home that had been given to her and her husband John by Judge William Paston. The Pastons eventually regained Gresham.

However, in 1495, Bridget Heydon

married William Paston, the eldest son of John Paston III (who had been a small child in arms at the time of the flight from Gresham Castle). This union was responsible for securing both a main Paston family line and a second cadet line. The Heydons also married into the Boleyn family of Blickling Hall.

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## 15. Drayton and Hellesdon

The manors of Drayton and Hellesdon belonged to Sir John Fastolf and were inherited by John Paston in 1459. The ruins of a fortified warren can still be seen at Drayton. The area was also important for the pasturing of large flocks of sheep. Fastolf built, at the same time as Caister Castle, a fine brick manor house, close to Hellesdon Mill.

In 1465, after a period of intimidation and phoney war, the manor house at Hellesdon was attacked and sacked by the Duke of Suffolk. Margaret Paston and her household were driven out. The Paston Letters describe the episode in detail and also how the local area was looted by Suffolk's men.

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## 16. Tittleshall

St Mary's Church, Tittleshall contains the tombs of the Coke family. In 1583 Sir Edward Coke, who was born at Mileham, married Bridget Paston, daughter of John Paston and Anne Moulton of Huntingfield, Suffolk.

Bridget, who bore Edward 10 children and supported her husband's career, has her own fine tomb in Tittleshall church. The Cokes later built a house at nearby Godwick before establishing themselves at Holkham Hall. Sir Edward Coke is regarded as England's finest lawyer, courageously defending common liberties against the hostile power of the Crown.



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## 17. Appleton and Oxburgh

Edward Paston built Appleton Hall near Kings Lynn towards the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Appleton was a centre for Edward's twin passions of Roman Catholicism and musical performance and composition. A descendant of Edward, Margaret Paston, married Sir Henry Paston-Bedingfeld of Oxburgh Hall in 1826, a marriage that ensured the survival of the Paston name.

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## 18. Barningham Hall

Edward Paston built Barningham Hall near Holt in 1612 and the building survives as the sole remaining Paston property.

*Left: Map of Appleton Hall. NRO BRA2524.*

*Below: Barningham Winter Church. Photograph courtesy Nick Stone.*





# THE PASTON HERITAGE WALK EXPERIENCE

Pastonfootprints.co.uk



Imagine the stories in the Paston landscapes and buildings where they happened.

- Maps, GPX codes, and accessibility audits available on the mobile friendly website.
- All the countryside walks are circular and waymarked by the Paston griffin.
- Display information boards, often at the church sites, reveal more of the Paston story.
- The 3D reconstructions come to life as you overlay them on the ruins of Paston buildings.
- Let a Paston character be your audio tour guide.
- Explore the website to discover character animations, children's activities and creative, wellbeing experiences for adults.
- Heritage lovers can dig deeper into the Paston story and creative adults engage in activities via the website.

## CYCLE RIDES

### North Norfolk Route

A quiet circular 18-mile cycle route through unspoilt countryside, with bike-friendly cafés. Includes views of three great country houses, with Paston connections.

### Caister Castle Cycle Route

Follow the 22-mile path of Paston influence on Great Yarmouth. Travel from the Minster Church, north out of the town and into the ancient Isle of Flegg and the birthplace of Margaret Paston.



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## Explorer Hunts: Family walks

Become history hunters in the Norfolk countryside and medieval quarter of Norwich. All family-friendly walks have free activities to keep children engaged and to spark their curiosity about, and develop wellbeing benefits from, connecting with the Paston story and the natural world. The walks are a good length for little legs. We've recommended family-friendly things to do nearby to help you plan a fun day out on the Paston Walks website: [pastonfootprints.co.uk](http://pastonfootprints.co.uk)



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### Paston Walk 4 miles

A countryside walk starting at Paston church and hall and taking in the village, which has a playpark. This walk is walking distance from the sandy Blue Flag beach of Mundesley. Agnes Paston is the narrator of the audio tour, sharing how her husband, Good Judge William Paston, contributed to the family's rise from simple farmers to Tudor aristocracy. There are sensory writing and photographic wellbeing activities.



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### Oxnead Paston Walk 2.5 miles

A countryside walk through the magical Broadlands and past the grand home of the Pastons. It has lovely picnic spots by the river and at certain times of the year can be reached by steam train. Let Rebecca Paston entertain you with stories of her husband Robert's alchemy experiments, as well as family dramas during the perilous English Restoration period and Royal visits.



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### Norwich Paston Walk 2.5 miles

Enjoy a buggy- and family-friendly Explorer Hunt, exploring the medieval City of Stories. The route takes you to Norwich Castle and to the iconic Norwich market, with its tempting street food stalls. Margery Brews shares with you family dramas and the Queen's visit, while advising you how to avoid the plague. John Paston III will also reveal his enterprising life in the city during the Wars of the Roses.



# QUIET WALKS

Get off the beaten track with our hidden Norfolk gems. Escape the crowds or explore somewhere new on Paston Walks that take you deep into the outstandingly beautiful Norfolk countryside.

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## Gresham Paston Walk 1.7 miles

Nestled between the popular seaside resorts of Sheringham and Cromer, this short walk at Gresham has shady wooded paths. See if you can spot kestrels, red kites and buzzards in the big Norfolk skies. With the audio tour, let Margaret Paston tell you the story of how she survived the 1449 siege of Gresham Castle.



## Bacton Paston Walk 3.5 miles

Enjoy a peaceful walk along an old pilgrim route to find the ruins of Bromholm Priory. Finish with a wander on the beautiful sands of Bacton beach. Meditation activities for creative and mindful connections with the environment are offered. Or listen to Agnes Paston's account of Paston devotions and marauding French pirates!



## Mautby Paston Walk 5 miles

A refreshing walk in a rural area along the north bank of the River Bure. Find out all about Margaret Paston's life using the audio guide. Experiment with creative expression ideas, being inspired by the 'first woman of letters'.



## Blofield Paston Walk 1.5 miles

Musical memories feature on this walk. Edward Paston tells you how the Pastons' relationship with Henry VIII helped them secure Blofield. Edward was a fine musician, who played a major part in preserving the sacred music of great Tudor composers such as William Byrd and Thomas Tallis.

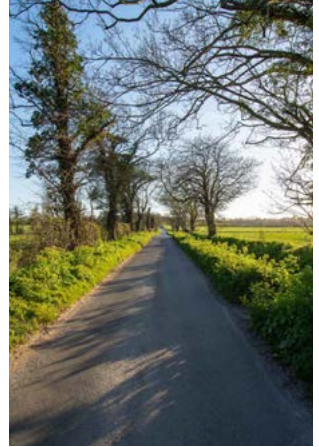


# LONG DISTANCE WALKS

All the Paston Footprints' walks have GPX codes available for download, for those wanting to programme fitness or health watches. For those more adventurous there are longer routes to walk in Paston footprints.

## Paston County (West) North Walsham to Oxnead loop (18 Miles)

On the route from North Walsham to Oxnead you pass through the beautiful reserve at Bryants Heath, which was once a Paston-owned manor. Fine churches at Felmingham, Tuttington and Burgh can be visited before a delightful path beside the River Bure takes you on to Oxnead. On the return route you pass through the Paston-owned lands in Skeyton and Swanton Abbott before returning to North Walsham, passing through the battlefield site from the 1381 uprising.



## North Walsham

(part of a 22 mile route)

The NCC Paston Way Walk extends between Cromer and North Walsham, discovering 14 medieval churches. The trail ambles down quiet lanes, through picturesque towns and villages, across vast arable fields, disused railway lines and quiet grazing pastures with views of the North Sea. Keep a lookout for seals on the stretches of beach



walk too. North Walsham, where Sir William's majestic tomb and Paston College stands, is a portal to the Paston Way, at its south-eastern end.





*Tudor Paston Hall digital reconstruction*

*'Kepe wysly youre wrytyngys'* - Margaret Paston

**Paston Footprints is a collaboration between the University of East Anglia, Paston Heritage Society, Norfolk Record Office and Norfolk County Council.**

We are grateful to our many heritage, educational, wellbeing and tourism partners, and to the church and history groups in the Norfolk hubs. Many individual volunteers have ensured the history of the people remains for the people.

#pastonfootprints

Community Research Portal:

[thisispaston.co.uk](https://thisispaston.co.uk)

Paston Heritage Walks:

[pastonfootprints.co.uk](https://pastonfootprints.co.uk)



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Fund**



**Norfolk  
County Council**