

A WOMAN OF LETTERS
AN EXAMINATION OF THE CHARACTER OF MARGARET PASTON
THROUGH A SELECTIVE READING OF
PASTON LETTERS AND PAPERS OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the character of Margaret Paston through a selective reading of Paston Letters and Papers of the fifteenth century.

Consideration is given to the problems posed by the letter form, to the identification of an authentic "voice" in the letters of a woman who was probably unable to write, and to the constraints of an incomplete historical record.

Margaret is viewed by means of her own words and her relationships with her immediate and extended family, and in the light of the social and political circumstances of the time.

It is concluded that by examining Margaret in this way, there is sufficient material in the epistolary record to make an assessment of her character.

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	...	i
<i>Caister Castle : July 1993</i>	...	ii
<i>Paston Family Tree</i>	...	iii
ONE	... THE FAMILY AND THE LETTERS	1
TWO	... THE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW	6
THREE	... THE WIFE	11
FOUR	... THE DEFENDER	26
FIVE	... THE WIDOW	35
SIX	... THE EXTENDED FAMILY	57
SEVEN	... THE INDIVIDUAL	62
<i>Mautby Church : July 1993</i>	...	66
BIBLIOGRAPHY	...	67
<i>Map of part of Norfolk and Suffolk</i>	...	69
<i>Letters and Documents referred to in the text</i>	...	70

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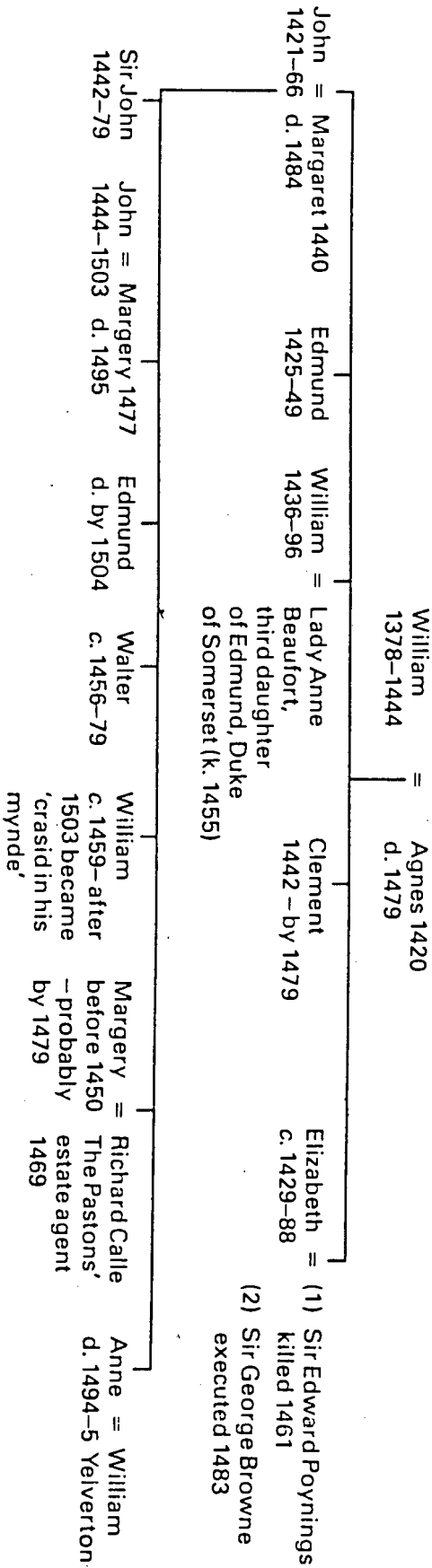
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The Pastons



Source: C. Richmond. The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century

ONE

THE FAMILY AND THE LETTERS

I'm called away by particular business,
- but I leave my character behind me.¹

The life of Margaret Paston, fifteenth-century Norfolk gentlewoman, was full of business and busyness, lived as it was during a turbulent period of English history and made more complicated by the litigation engaged in by the Paston men. This study will attempt to examine that life through a selective reading of *The Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*,² in particular the letters from Margaret herself to see what indications of her character she has left behind.

"A well-born woman was always defined and identified by her relation to [the] men [of a family]: daughter to her father, wife to her husband, widowed mother (dowager) to her son."³ With few exceptions Margaret's letters were to members of her immediate family and thus attention will be given to her familial relationships and the roles she played as wife, mother and widow. External influences and circumstances which may have been instrumental in shaping her character will also be considered.

1. R. Sheridan, *The School for Scandal*. II,ii.199.

2. All references to the *Letters* are from N. Davis (ed), Vol. I 1971 and Vol II 1976.

3. B.S. Anderson & J.P Zinsser, *A History of Their Own. Women in Europe from Prehistory to the present*. Vol 1, p.279.

"Character" is a concept perhaps more familiar when studying a work of fiction than when reading an historical text, and due consideration must be given to possible problems which might be encountered when examining the *Letters* in this way. In this regard, some observations about epistolary fiction may be of help.

In her introduction to *The Novel in Letters*, Natascha Würzbach comments:

Epistolary fiction has much in common with *genuine* letters describing personal feelings and events. The letter-writing heroes and heroines record their troubles in letters which differ little from non-fictional ones, and of course a succession of letters results in a story.⁴

Letters from members of the Paston family were for the most part practical pieces of communication, written to convey information on such diverse matters as the price of barley or the defence of a castle, with no deliberate intention of telling a story or revealing the characters of the writers. Thus the letter form - an exploitable tool and technique for the novelist - is problematic and at times frustrating as a means through which to understand Margaret Paston's actions, thoughts and feelings.

Altman remarks "Epistolary discourse is a discourse marked by hiatuses of all sorts: time lags between event and recording, between message transmission and reception; spatial separation between writer and addressee; blank

4. N. Würzbach, *The Novel in Letters. Epistolary Fiction in the Early English Novel 1678-1740*. p.x.

spaces and lacunae in the manuscript."⁵ Such problems are encountered when attempting to read the Paston discourse. The chronology of the *Letters* is not complete; gaps occur either because individual letters have gone astray or were destroyed, or because there was no need for a letter, as correspondents were together. Reading the letters is at times like listening to one side of a telephone conversation, with no convenient authorial voice to help one read between the lines or the letters.

Würzbach reminds us that "A collection of genuine letters [differs] from an epistolary novel in one important respect: no matter how detailed such letters may be, they are never quite self-explanatory."⁶ The uncertainty in dating some of the *Letters* adds to the difficulty of interpretation. Although the words have been preserved, the meaning, presumably clear to the addressee, often depends on when and in what circumstances the letter was written.

In the medieval society in which Margaret Paston lived, land, property and status were all important for the exercise of power, and to the social-climbing Pastons one of the quickest ways to acquire land was through advantageous marriages. Thus throughout the *Letters* the concerns of marriage, property and status are intertwined. Manors and farms, acquired by fair and perhaps dubious

5. J.G. Altman, *Epistolarity. Approaches to a Form* p.140.

6. Würzbach, p.x.

means, had to be nurtured and protected quite as much as members of the family.

The circumstances and lives of most medieval land-owning families required their women to be strong, hardworking and capable. Whilst the head of a household was away on business, in attendance at court, or at war, the responsibility for maintaining the manorial lands and property fell upon his wife. It is against this background that Margaret's words and actions must be considered.

Letters from Margaret are written in twenty-nine different hands. Davis concludes that "The natural interpretation of this multiplicity of hands in one person's work ... is that the women could not write, or wrote only with difficulty."⁷ This raises the question of how far the sentiments expressed are those of Margaret herself or of her amanuenses; all presumably male. In an examination of the Findern Manuscript, Sarah McNamer suggests that many of the poems were written by women.⁸ Several of the poems appear to express feelings of loneliness and desertion experienced by women left at home to cope whilst their husbands were absent, and these same feelings are articulated many times in the letters of Margaret. On a happier note a Findern lady writes

7. Davis I, p.xxxvii.

8. S. McNamer, *Female Authors, Provincial Setting: The Re-Versing of Courtly Love in the Findern Manuscript*, pp.279-310.

Whanne I haue of you sume tiding,
Gret ioye I haue, withoute failing.⁹

In like manner, Margaret writes to her husband "I thank yow hertly for yowyr lettyr, for it was to me gret comfort to her fro yow"(165/20-21).¹⁰ Thus the similarities of tone and experience which can be found in the Findern poems and in Margaret's letters, suggest that the sentiments are her own genuine and sincere personal expressions.

"Unlike a novel a group of genuine letters is not a world complete in itself."¹¹ However, the *Letters* provide an entrance to the world of the Pastons that enables the reader to examine the words of Margaret Paston, her tones and phrases, and her reaction to the particular circumstances of her life, and by this means to make an assessment of her character.

9. Quoted in McNamer, p.306.

10. Quotations will be referenced thus: (Letter number/line number(s)) and editorial bracketing will be excluded.

11. Würzbach, p.x.

TWO

THE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW

The marriage in 1440 of John I to Margaret Mautby was "a local alliance of unmistakable moment".¹² Margaret was an heiress who brought into the marriage money, strategic manorial lands and increased status in Norfolk society.¹³ Although the *Letters* give no indication of her life as a child, if her upbringing followed the normal pattern of any other young girl of her station she would have been sent away from quite an early age to be trained in the management of a large household. This training could no doubt have been received in the parental home, but by sending their daughters to other establishments, medieval parents increased their opportunities of negotiating good marriages. However, the experience was not always a happy one for many young girls¹⁴ who, like modern children sent to boarding-school, could suffer from homesickness. Nevertheless it might perhaps prepare a girl for the day when, upon her marriage, she left her childhood home to live with her husband's family.

The first glimpse of Margaret in the *Letters* is given in the letter written by her future mother-in-law, Agnes, to her husband Judge William Paston (P.L. 13).¹⁵ Agnes is

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12. C. Richmond, *The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century* p.120.
 13. Richmond, p.134.
 14. H. S. Bennett, *The Pastons and their England*. p.84.
 15. General reference to a letter is in the form (P.L....).

obviously pleased that the marriage negotiations have been successfully concluded, and that Margaret has made a favourable impression on her first acquaintance with her future husband. No doubt the wealth and status she was bringing into the family would in themselves have won the approval of Agnes, but Margaret exhibited to John I "gentil chere in gyntyl wyse"(13/5-6), with what seems an additional and charming compliment to William, having said that John "was verrayly [his] son"(13/6).

It was as well that Margaret got off to a good start in her relationship with her mother-in-law, as a large part of her early married life seems to have been spent either in Agnes' household or close by in the same town. John I was still a student at Cambridge at the time of their marriage, and later in the marriage circumstances forced Margaret to accept the help and hospitality of his mother. Thus Agnes would have had considerable influence on the young bride, and a brief examination of her character might be of help in understanding Margaret.

There are parallels in their lives and experiences as Paston women. Agnes, too, was an heiress, daughter of Sir Edmund Barry, and on her marriage to William in 1420 she too brought lands and status to the Paston family. The *Letters* do not reveal whether this was a love match. There was considerable disparity in their ages, William being forty-two and Agnes about eighteen at the time of the

marriage.¹⁶ Whilst such an age gap is no bar to love, the fact that she did not choose to be buried with William in Norwich Cathedral, but rather with her parents in the Dominican Church at Norwich, may, as Richmond suggests, indicate a loveless marriage.¹⁷ If so, her consolation could have been the status her inheritance gave her, and the power bestowed by ownership of land would have become increasingly important. That power is reflected in the hard and determined way in which she handled family and business responsibilities.

Living with such a strong character could not have been easy, and for Margaret there was the added strain of a poor relationship between John I and his mother, which seems to have arisen from that Paston speciality - a quarrel over land ownership. In a draft of her will the unforgiving Agnes relates the drama which arose after her own husband's death some twenty-four years before. John I would not accede to his father's dying wish that the manors of Sporle, Sweynsthorpe and Beckham should go to his younger brothers, saying that "by the lawe the seyde manerys xulde be hijs" as William had "made no wyll of hem in wrytyn"(32/25-26). "After that", Agnes records, "my sonne John Paston had neuer ryght kynde wordys to me"(33/16-17). This dispute seems to have festered on until Agnes herself died, and is perhaps not untypical of many a family after the reading of a will. To be fair to Agnes, she was newly

16. Richmond, p.119.

17. Richmond, p.119.

widowed with a two-year-old son to bring up, a son the same age as her eldest grandson, (Clement II having been born in 1442, the same year as John II), and her eldest son, who might have been expected to be a comfort to his mother, was seemingly looking to his own advantage. So, from early in her marriage, Paston properties were making life difficult for Margaret and calling upon her skills as mediator and peace-maker.

In her years of widowhood (1444-1479) Agnes continued with the administration of her lands, and an example of her unyielding determination can be seen in the way she became embroiled in a dispute over a right of way. Her letters to her son, John I, show that she was not to be intimidated by the strong opinions of her neighbours. Warin Harman might declare "pou it xuld cost me xx nobyllys it [the wall] xall be puddoun a3en"(23/5-6), and his wife might curse "All þe deuyllys of hell drawe here sowle to hell for þe waye þat she hat mad!"(23/7-8), but one week later Agnes reports that she "lete hym wete he þat putte it downe chull pay þere-fore"(24/15). In the same letter, referring to a different dispute, Agnes declares what could be taken as the Paston motto - "I told hym it was myn owyn grownde, and for myn owyn I wold holde it"(24/19-20).

With examples like these before her Margaret would have rapidly become aware of the roles Paston women might be called upon to play, although Agnes' altercations with

neighbours seem insignificant when compared with the violence Margaret was to experience in the future.

THREE
THE WIFE

During her marriage to John Paston, Margaret was called upon to fulfil two major roles; the traditional wife and mother, and the quasi-masculine defender of manor-house and manorial lands. These roles are interwoven in the fabric of the marriage, but will be considered separately for the purpose of this study.

The letters written by Margaret during the period of her marriage reflect these roles, and chronicle periods of fairly ordinary family life interspersed with extraordinary periods of violence, when family had to take second place to the demands of property and the status it represented. There are sixty-nine letters extant from Margaret to John I, but only eleven from John I to Margaret, including three addressed to his bailiffs as well as his wife. No doubt John I's legal training led him to preserve documents, and indeed in later years Margaret advises her son John II to "kepe wysly youre wrytyngys... Youre fadere...set more by hys wrytyngys and evydens than he dede by any of his moveabell godys"(198/4-7). Margaret on the other hand may have thrown away letters no longer required, or any letters in her possession may have been lost in the looting of the Gresham and Hellesdon properties.

With gaps in the correspondence there is a danger of misinterpreting the balance of the marriage, as the

"together" times - one hopes the better times - needed no letters; the existence of a letter emphasises separation. The evidence of the letters indicates separations of various lengths during seventeen of the twenty-five or so years of the marriage. John I was at first completing his university education, then at his chambers in the Inner Temple, and in the last few years imprisoned on occasion in the Fleet. The feelings of loneliness, the burdens of responsibility, and the need to see him again are constantly expressed by Margaret.

One of the earliest letters from Margaret to John I is written when, as a young wife in her first pregnancy, she wishes to share her experiences with her absent husband. Her sense of humour is apparent in her ironic little joke that she is "waxse so fetys þat [she] may not be gyrte in no barre of no gyrdyl ...but of on"(125/15-16). She may complain that she has nothing to wear that winter, and that her pregnancy is now obvious, but these protestations conceal a pride in her condition. She is at least five to six months pregnant, perhaps even more, as there is some anxiety about the midwife, Elizabeth Peverl, being available, and a hint of forced bravado in the statement that the woman will "come hedyr wanne God sent tyme, poovsche xuld be crod in a barwe"(125/18-19). The letter reflects a happy loving relationship; she thanks John I for the token he has sent her, and reminds him to wear the ring, engraved with her namesake saint, which she has sent to him. In a coy reference to perhaps the conception of

the now active child in her womb, she concludes "Ye haue lefte me sweche a rememravnse pat makyth me to thynke vppe- on yow bothe day and nyth wanne I wold sclepe"(125/29-31).

Less than two years later, writing to John I at the Inner Temple, from the home of her parents-in-law at Oxnead, Margaret is extremely concerned at the state of his health. It seems as though he had been very ill as prayers had been offered at the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, and by the four orders of friars at Norwich. It is a tender and loving wife who writes

Be my trowth, I had neuer so hevy a sesyn as I
had fro þe tyme pat I woste of your sekenesse tyl
I woste of your a-mending, and 3yth myn hert is
in no grete esse, ne nowth xal be tyl I wott þat
3e ben very hol.

(126/9-12)

McNamer points to a striking resemblance between this letter and one of the Findern lyrics.¹⁸ The same feelings of separation and of helplessness at having to wait for news is expressed by the poet

Myne hert hanggyng þus in balaunce
Tyl I have knowledge and verely sure
pat God in yow hath lyst done thys
cure.

Margaret's anxiety is emphasised by her decision to remain at Oxnead, where news will more readily be known, than to pay a visit to her own mother. She begs him to write as soon as he can, and tells him in an unsophisticated and

18. McNamer, p.292.

touching phrase that she wishes he were home "lever dan a new gounne, bow it were of scarlette"(126/29-30).

Margaret evidently managed a visit to her mother and stepfather at Geldeston in 1444 for the birth of her second son, John III, as in July she wrote from that manor a gossipy little letter in which she asks for caps for the children, and does not forget a message to Agnes and William (P.L. 127).

The normal family concerns of these early years were soon to be pushed aside by the violent disturbances at Gresham in 1449. Margaret's role at this time will be considered later, but the losses incurred meant that the family had to live with Agnes for what seems a considerable period. Knowing of the bad feelings between them, Margaret reassures John I that his mother will make the family welcome. "Sche wold wyth ryt; a good will þat we xul abyde in here place"(132/20-21).

A year later the family appear to be still living with Agnes, who informs John I "as for my doughtyr your wyfe, che faryt well, blyssyd be God, as a woman in hyr plyte may do"(20/1-3). "Plyte" may well mean that Margaret was pregnant, but Agnes could also be expressing a barely concealed criticism of her son for allowing his family to remain homeless for so long.

Margaret does not reproach John I, at least not in writing, but her letters to him at this time do reveal shortages. "I prey 3ou" she writes "if 3e haue any old gownys for lynyngys and old schetys and old schertis pat may non lengere seruen 3ou, I prey 3ou send hem hom in hast"(134/1-2).

Although money "cometh slauly jn"(144/20), Margaret is busy during 1452 and 1453 setting up house again. The burdens and responsibilities seem too much for her, as in an understandable grumble from a busy wife to an absent husband she tells him that she had not been able to finish his inventory as she had not been "well at ease". The "opher place" needs preparing "for þer is noþer bordys ne oþer stuff þat must nedys be had or we come there"(147/18-21).

Despite endemic violence and the responsibilities of the estates, Margaret has to pay attention to their growing family, and John I is requested to "remembre yowr fayre dowgteris gyrdyl"(140/18-19), and to "bey ij gode hattis for yowr sonys, for I can none getyn in þis town"(138/33). Then as now, shopping in the capital offered more choice than the provinces. Margaret also exhibits a little feminine vanity in reminding John I "to purvey a thing for my nekke and to do make my gyrdill"(145/23). The jewelry seems important to her, as she again writes "I pray yow þat ye woll do yowr cost on me... þat I may haue somme thyng for my nekke"(146/22-23). In order to impress upon John I

the need to maintain their position in local society, she continues "When þe Quene was here I borowd my cosyng Elysabet Cleris devys, for I durst not for shame go wyth my bedys among so many fresch jantylwomman as here were at þat tym"(146/23-26). This kind of gentle chivvying indicates a reasonably happy and stable period in the marriage with John I perhaps being able to indulge the family in some luxuries.

However, there is a decided change of tone in a letter written in October of possibly the same year. Margaret's distress is apparent in her opening paragraph, with its quadruple emphasis on John I's displeasure:

Right wurchipfull hosbond, I recommaund me to yow, beseching yow that ye be not displeasid wyth me thow my symplenesse causid yow for to be displeasid wyth me. Be my trowth it is not my will noþer to do ne sey that shuld cause yow for to be displeasid, and if I haue do I am sory þerof and will amend itt; wherefore I beseche yow to forgeve me and þat ye bere none hevynesse in yowr hert ayens me, for yowr displeasans shuld be to hevynesse to me to indure wyth.

(148/1-7)

Nowhere else in her correspondence are problems between husband and wife so apparent. As the date is doubtful it is impossible to even speculate on what events had preceded such an abject apology, but there can be no doubt of Margaret's sincerity and desire to make amends. Medieval women were expected to be obedient to their husbands, and disobedience could be corrected by force; indeed canon law specifically allowed wife-beating.¹⁹ However, given that

19. E. Power, *Medieval Women*, p.16.

Margaret is constantly wishing for John I's company it is unlikely that her words are prompted by an underlying fear of physical punishment, but rather that her love for him intensifies the pain she feels at his displeasure. There is an urgency in her need to win his forgiveness, which cannot wait until they are together again. Privacy must be abandoned and her feelings expressed through the agency of her scribe. The letter must straddle "the gulf between presence and absence"²⁰ and attempt a reconciliation.

Margaret continues to express how much she misses John I; early in 1454 she writes "I pray you pat ye be not strange of wryting of letterys to me...if I myght I wold haue euery day on from yow"(150/33-35). She would appear to be in particular need of his support at this time as a letter written three days later reveals that she is pregnant - "I pray yow if ye haue an othere sone that ye woll lete it be named Herry"(151/13). Margaret signs herself "youre gronyng wyff", but one can hardly suppose that she was actually in labour, or surely there would have been a reference to that in the letter. Possibly it is a private joke between them, or a wry comment on her condition by a woman close to confinement. It is however one of those moments of intimacy in which Margaret seeks to bridge the distance which separates her from her husband, and draw him back into her everyday experience.

20. Altman, p.43.

There are no letters extant from Margaret between early 1454 and late 1459. It appears that Margaret and John I were living at home in Norwich, and during this time Anne, Walter and William were born. However, as his man of business, John I was to become increasingly involved in the affairs of Sir John Fastolf. As early as December 1455 Fastolf had written to John I

Worshipfull ser and right trusty cosyn, I
 comaunde me to yow and hertilie thank yowe as I
 can or maye for the gret labour and peyn þat ye
 daylie take vpon yow for the goode spede and
 auancement of my chargeable maters...

(536/1-4)

Margaret's share of that great labour and pain was to increase dramatically after Fastolf's death on 5 November 1459. As one of the executors of Fastolf's will, John I's involvement in the claims and counterclaims to the Fastolf properties meant that once more he was away for long periods of time, leaving Margaret at home in Norwich to cope with family and estate matters, during a period of increasing anxiety and violence.

The festival of Christmas was, and is still, traditionally the time when families try to be together, and Margaret would naturally have looked forward to sharing with John I that period of light and warmth in the middle of the long, dark East Anglian winter. Her disappointment is clear as she writes "I am sory that ye xall not at hom be for Crystemes...I xhall thynke my-selfe halfe a wedowe be-cause ye xal not be at home"(153/19-21). This touching

expression from a loving wife was to prove prophetic, as the years until John I's death saw Margaret increasingly isolated from his support and company.

Local violence made the year 1461 particularly stressful. Caister was seized in mid-year by the Duke of Norfolk (P.L. 632), and the coroner of Norfolk, Thomas Denys, was murdered early in July (P.L. 159 headnote). Margaret is understandably fearful as she confesses to her husband "I am put en fere dayly for myn a-bydyng here, and counsellyd be my moder and be other good frendys þat I shuld not a-beyd here"(160/31-33). She cannot, however, remove to the comparative safety of Norwich, but has to play her part in maintaining the Paston presence at Hellesdon; a retreat would appear an admission of weakness to their enemies. Even when admitting her own fears, she expresses her anxiety for John I, bidding him "be ware howe ye ryd or go"(160/30), advice re-iterated in another letter written some nine days later (P.L. 162). November saw the first of John I's imprisonments, and it is with great relief that Margaret hears from the mayor that "for very trowthe...ye wer delyueryd owt of the Flet"(163/8). She had hoped that John I would be home that Christmas, bringing some household necessities with him (P.L. 166) but once again she is disappointed. With the Christmas message promising glad tidings and peace on earth, her disappointment is sharpened by anxiety about his welfare. "I thynk ryth longe tyll I haue some god tydyngys fro yow. I fer me þat it is not well wyth you þat ye be fro home at thys good

tyme"(167/13-15). Early in the following New Year she is quite distraught with apprehension.

I had no tydyngys nor lettyr of yow sene the weke befor Crystmas, wher-of I mervayle sore. I fere me it is not well with yow be-cawse ye came not home or sent er thys tyme...my hert schall nevyr be in ese tyll I haue tydyngys fro yow.

(168/3-9)

Her words reflect the frustrations and fears aroused by the slowness and unreliability of communication, coupled with the unstable political situation and heightened local violence. She reports to her husband "I herd nevyr sey of so myche robry and manslawt in thys contré as is now wythin a lytyll tyme"(168/33-34).

For John I difficulties were intensifying. By mid-1464 Margaret writes "arme yowre-selue as myghtyly as ye kan ageyn yowre enmyes, fore I know verrayly þat they wyl do ageyn yow as myghtyly as they kan wyth all there powere"(177/27-29). She is obviously very concerned about his health and no doubt wishes he were at home so that she could treat him herself, as she warns "be ware what medesynys ye take of any fysissyanyys of London. I schal neuer trust to hem be-cause of yowre fadre and myn onkyl"(177/31-32).

Worse was yet to come. Between August and November of 1464 writs of outlawry were issued against John I by the King. The escheator of Norfolk was bidden to confiscate all John I's goods and cattle and the Prior of Norwich

ordered to hand over "all such goddes as ye haue in youre keping of the said John Paston"(687/91-92). With the family in royal disfavour, the time appeared ripe for Paston enemies to make another attempt against the disputed Fastolf properties.

The year 1465 brought increasing strain to John I and Margaret. John I was in London for the greater part of the year, either attempting to establish his claim to Fastolf properties, or imprisoned in the Fleet. With his health deteriorating he needed all the support he could get from his wife, who was herself under great pressure.

As if threats against the Norfolk and Suffolk properties were not enough for her to bear, Margaret was also in the unenviable position of having to mediate between John I and his mother over the right and title to Clere property. "I wold ryght fayn", she writes, "...that it were other-wyse by-twene you then it ys"(180/131-133). After twenty-five years of loyal and devoted support to the Pastons she seems near breaking point as she concludes. "thys ys to wryry a lyffe to a-byde for you and all youre"(180/136-137).

Although a great proportion of Margaret's letters to John I were of necessity concerned with business affairs, they also show the extent of her concern to keep him in touch with the everyday family matters which he was missing as an absentee father and husband. Her predominant emotions were sadness at the frequent separations, and fear for the

well-being of her husband. Her love, although not overtly expressed, was apparent in her constant devotion to him, and her longing to hear from him.

There is, however, little evidence in the correspondence of John I as an affectionate husband, as the man able to inspire such love and loyalty. On the contrary, he had appeared a grasping son at his own father's deathbed; as a father he was often on bad terms with his eldest son, and his dealings with Fastolf's nuncupative will were, if not suspect, at the very least selfish.²¹

Perhaps John I could be charming on social occasions. "I was at Toppys att dynere on Seynt Peterys Day.", writes Margaret. "There my Lady Felbrygg and oþer jantyll-women desyryd to have hadde yow there; they seyde they shuld all a be þe meryere if ye hadde ben there"(141/20-22).

One can appreciate that John had more worrying things on his mind than social chit-chat, and perhaps it was also not in his nature to express his emotions in writing, but under equally difficult circumstances Margaret offered support and concern, almost without exception, in her letters. She is particularly solicitous of John I's well-being when he is in prison, and writes in terms reminiscent of the pulpit:

21. Richmond, p.260.

I...pray you hertely at þe reverence of God...
 that ye shall ouercome your enemys and your
 trobelows maters ryght welle, yf ye wolle be of
 good comfort and not take your maters to heuely,
 þat ye apeyr not your-self, and thynk veryly that
 ye be strong j-nowe for all your enemys, be þe
 grace of God.

(191/1-6)

In late 1465, despite her recent poor health and the critical situation in Norfolk, it was decided that Margaret should visit John I in prison. The visit inspired the only instance in the *Letters* where John I appears as a loving husband.

The opening of his letter written to Margaret on her return to Norfolk is startling, coming as it does from the normally unromantic John I.

Myn owne dere souereyn lady, I recomaund me to
 yow and thank yow of the gret chere þat ye mad me
 here, to my gret cost and charge and labour.

(77/1-2)

Richmond interprets "the mode of the final phrase to be ironical-financial, not ironical-sexual".²² One would like to think he was wrong, for if correct his interpretation means that John I's attempt at courtly love was smothered by his counting-house mentality. One cannot determine whether any sexual innuendo was intended, and this must remain one of those times when "underlying the epistolary dialogue are common memories and often common experiences that take place between the letters".²³ Most

22. Richmond, p.17. n.73.

23. Altman, p.119.

of the remainder of John I's letter concerns business matters, but he concludes with some lines of verse (77/171-190). Even in this lighthearted mode he is unable to omit reference to money and the income from his "livelod". The references to "dogge, catte and mowse" are in the style of the political satire current at the time, such as a short poem written towards the close of 1449,²⁴ or the yet to be composed couplet,

The Cat, the Rat and Lovel our dog
Rule all England under a hog²⁵

Poetry from a prison cell was fashionable in the fifteenth-century, and although John I could hardly claim to be another Charles d'Orleans, or William de la Pole, his verses were obviously intended to be an amusing reminder to Margaret of their time together.

The immediate effect of the letter and of her visit was to give her renewed strength to face the problems back in Norfolk. Her first letter to him on her return is appreciative of the "grett chere that ye made me and of the cost that ye dede on me" (192/2-3).

Conditions in prison could be ameliorated by the payment of money, with the jailer regarding the prisoners as a type of paying guest.²⁶ Nevertheless Margaret was not happy at

24. J. Gairdner, *The Paston Letters 1422-1509*. Introduction p.lxxvii.

25. V.J. Scattergood, *Politics and Poetry in the Fifteenth Century*. p.211.

26. Bennett, p.176.

John I's continued incarceration, and she hopes that "ye maye coume owte of that loggyng that ye are in as hastely as ye maye, for I haue non fansey wyth soume of þe felechipp"(193/11-12). John I's release, probably sometime early in 1465, came too late for him to assist Margaret when the attack on Hellesdon occurred and once more she had thrust upon her the role of defender of her family's interests.

FOUR
THE DEFENDER

In the complex issue of land litigation, "entry" to a disputed property was vital for a claimant wishing to assert his right to land occupied by another person.

"Entry" as such was a legitimate move, but "forcible entry" was not. However, an attempt at entry, resisted by those *in situ* would more likely than not escalate into force, and "violence grew almost naturally out of the complex web of family ambitions, lawful claims and interests..."²⁷

Marriage to John Paston drew Margaret into that web, and meant far more than fulfilling the role of devoted wife and mother. On an increasing basis it meant the management of lands and dependents, and on two momentous occasions it meant the defence of those lands, leading to physical danger and overwhelming stress.

Margaret's courage was to be tested in the Gresham affair and its aftermath, the first of those episodes of violence brought about by the determination of the Pastons to acquire and retain lands, and the equal determination of others to seize the properties, with or without justification.

On 17 February 1448 Lord Moleyns expelled Paston from the manor of Gresham (P.L. 36). In April, Margaret writes

27. M. Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages. 1348-1500*. p.208. I am indebted to Keen for the above information.

was born during the first half of 1449.

28. Richmond, p.53.

from Norwich, asking John I to "send me wurd hw 3e spede in 3wr mater twchying Gressam"(128/79-80), and letting him know that she is still collecting rental from the manor. By May of 1448 the rentals of Gresham are falling into Moleyns' hands (P.L. 129).

Despite John I's petition to Henry VI (P.L.36), no restitution was forthcoming and by October 1448 Margaret is resident in another "mansion with-in the seid town"(36/19) to establish the Paston presence and right to the manor. With John I attending to the legal side of things, Margaret is left to defend "as it were, her own, for Gresham was her jointure".²⁸ In preparation for the attack she is coolly ordering crossbows, windlasses and arrows, and displaying an essential grasp of military strategy, for as she writes to John I, "3wr hwsis here ben so low þat þere may non man schete owt wyth no long bowe"(130/2-3). The preparations of Partridge, Moleyn's agent, in the seized manor house of Gresham, are scornfully dismissed; although he and his men have firearms "þo holys þat ben made forre hand gunnyss þey ben scarce kne hey...þere can non man schete owt at þem wyth no hand bowys"(130/11-14). Only the final paragraph of the letter, with its request for sugar, almonds and cloth to make clothes for the children, reminds us that these warlike preparations are being carried out by a young woman in her mid-twenties, with three small children to look after, and possibly pregnant with a fourth, if Margery was born during the first half of 1449.

28. Richmond, p.53.

Her courage in the face of intimidation by Gunnor, an associate of Partridge, is reported to John I by John Damme, a loyal friend of the family. Margaret will not advise her men to disarm because "thei purposed to hurte noman of here own sykyng, but for it was seid that she shuld be plukkyd out of here howse, she were loth to suffre pat, and ther-fore she seyde thei shuld goo soo til ye come hom"(444/29-31). Margaret would prefer not to resort to violence, but is sensible of her own danger and exhibits a touching, if perhaps misplaced, faith in John I's ability to defuse the situation.

Her efforts were to no avail, however, as on 28 January 1449 Molyne's men attacked the house in which Margaret was staying. It must have been a terrifying experience. The attackers "mynded down the walle of the chambre" in which she was sheltering and "bare here oute at the yates"(36/29-31).

John I evidently came to Norfolk between this event and the following February as Margaret writes from John Damme's house in Sustead, informing him of developments since "3e departyd hens"(131/25). Molyne is still terrorising the district, yet Margaret exhibits bravery and shrewdness when confronting Barow, one of the men involved in the destruction of Gresham. She will not be persuaded that he and his fellow rioters have repented of their acts. "I

trest not to here promese in as meche as I fend hem on-trew in oper thyngys"(131/62-63).

The presence of Margaret only one mile from Gresham is still a challenge to Moleyns, and she is aware of the threat that "I xuld not longe dwell so nere hem as I do"(131/83). Despite her own danger she is worried about her husband and John Damme as they are at risk in London, and she warns John I "be ware hw 3e walk pere"(131/88). Her courage crumbles as she admits to him "be my trowth I kan not ben wel att ese in my hert, ner not xal ben, tyl I here tydyngys hw 3e don"(131/99-100).

During the following fortnight things become so dangerous at Sustead that Margaret "durst no lengere abyd there"(132/5), and she takes the decision to move to Norwich. Her anguish and fear are obvious as she tells John I that

dyuerys of þe Lord Moleynys men saydyn jf þei myt gete me þey xuld stele me and kepe me wyth-jnne þe kastell and þan þey seyð þei wold þat 3e xuld feche me owth. An þei seydyn it xuld ben but a lytyll hert-brennyng to 3ou.

(132/6-9)

She surely cannot believe by this taunt that her husband would be indifferent to her fate as a hostage, yet the opening of the letter begs that he "be not displeyd þow I be com fro þat place þat 3e left me in"(132/2-3). Can John I be so intent on winning that he will be angered when his queen on the manorial chess-board is put into check?

One hopes not, yet Margaret finds it necessary to say that she "wol ben ryt; sory to dwel so nere Gressam as [she] dede tyl þe mater were fully determynd be-twix þe Lord Moleynis and 3ou"(132/24-26). How it will be determined has, at least temporarily, passed from forcible entry to disputes over title deeds.

Removed from immediate danger Margaret spiritedly enters into an argument over the evidence for the ownership of Gresham, denying an accusation of forgery, by one William Hasard. Far from being not yet cold, the seals on the Paston evidence were, as she wittily comments, "to hundred 3ere elder þan he is"(132/32-33). Naturally anxious to have the matter settled, she asks John I to let her know by return of his progress, and with understandable asperity adds "I merveyl meche þat ye send me nomore tydyngys þan 3e haue sent"(132/43-44).

Despite her brave stand Margaret would like nothing better than to be able to live in peace. A year after her eviction from the Gresham mansion the threat of violence still hangs over the county. Margaret, advising John I of local fears, writes

I pray you wyth all myn herth þat ye wyll don
yowre part to haue hys [the Duke of Suffolk]
godelordshcep and his love jn ese of all the
materis that ye haue to don, and jn esyng of myn
hert also.

(135/29-32)

No help was forthcoming from Suffolk. Impeached for treason in February 1450, he was murdered at sea in May of that year (P.L. 450).

It was another Duke of Suffolk, John de la Pole, who was to involve Margaret in her second major battle for Paston lands. The Duke coveted the manors of Hellesdon and Drayton, properties that would consolidate his holdings at Costessey, and which he was claiming as part of the ongoing quarrel between his family and the late Sir John Fastolf. Early in April 1465 Margaret informs John I that "þe seyð Duke is purposyd to entere wythin shorte tyme after Esterne"(178/11-12).

The Gresham affair was some sixteen years in the past and Margaret was no longer the young and resilient girl she had been then. Now entering middle-age she has once more, without her husband's assistance, to face intimidation and physical threat by one of the magnates of the kingdom, who can command a far greater following than the Pastons. Having sought the help of the Bishop of Norwich, and perhaps hoping that ecclesiastical persuasion will be more successful than her own, Margaret reports to John I that the Bishop "wold ryght fayn that ye were come hom"(180/75). A week later her tone is more distressed as she begs that John will conclude matters as swiftly as possible. Again the Bishop's opinion is invoked.

My lord of Norwych seyde to me that he wold not ha
byden the sorow and trobell that ye haue a-byden
to wyn all Ser John Fastolf ys gode.

(181/28-30)

At her marriage some twenty-five years earlier, Margaret had brought to the Pastons "kin as well as status...[she] came trailing relations".²⁹ One of those relations was Sir John Fastolf, and ironically that initially powerful and beneficial family connection had led to the "to orybyll a coste and trobell"(181/26) that now confronted the Pastons.

Although Margaret seeks guidance from her husband - "I pray you that ye wyll send word in hast how ye woll that we doo in thys maters"(180/60-61) - once John I is in prison she realises that she must cope without him, particularly as Suffolk's men are "moch the boldere, I suppose, by-cause that ye be where as ye be"(184/15-16). Margaret shows an essential grasp of the situation as she tells John I "It ys necessary that possessyon be kypt hyre"(184/82), yet in signing herself "youre faynt houswyff"(184/87) she is attempting to convey to him not only her utter exhaustion, but perhaps the secondary meaning of her belief that she lacks the spirit to continue the fight.

However, less than a month later, the threat of an attack on Hellesdon brings out those courageous facets of her character which allow her to cope with this new crisis. Showing a fine sense of military necessity she warns her

29. Richmond, p.134.

eldest son, John II, who is in charge at the manor of Hellesdon, to "make yow as strong as 3e can wyth-inne þe place"(187/4), and to ensure that his brother, John III, is free to ride with news and possibly obtain reinforcements. Not content to leave matters in the hands of her sons, she is at Hellesdon when the attack is made, suffering the "gret affrayes [that] have ben made vppon me and my felashep here"(188/6-7).

It was the nightmare of Gresham all over again, "for it was told me that they schuld come and pulle me out of the place"(189/55-56). On this occasion the Duke of Suffolk was unsuccessful in his attempt to enter Hellesdon, but during these months "what wyth syknesse and troble" Margaret was "browte ryght lowe and weyke"(188/16-17).

Her visit to John I in the Fleet in September went some way towards alleviating her feelings of despair, but all her defensive efforts were of no avail when, during October, Suffolk mounted a successful attack against Hellesdon. The lodge and manor house were razed, the church ransacked. Although Margaret does not appear to have been at Hellesdon during the final attack, her shock and distress are apparent when, after inspecting the property, she reports to her husband "how fowle and orubelly it ys a-rayed"(196/24-25).

One essential task was to compile an inventory of Paston losses, in the hope that restitution might be obtained.

At a time when Margaret might have looked forward to a comfortable middle-age, surrounded by the possessions gathered during the course of her marriage, she has to list amongst the losses not only sheep, equipment from kitchen, buttery and brewery, but also her own featherbed, sheets and blankets, and such precious personal possessions as her daughter Margery's "closse glasse of yueré wyth a grett coumbe of yueré"(195B/50). For the Pastons and their tenants there would be no easy way to replace their losses, and one can appreciate the heartbreak and despair Margaret must have felt as she has to accept the "to orybell a cost and trobell that we haue now dayly"(196/48-49).

The cost and trouble for Margaret was to become even greater some six months later, when John I died leaving her a widow with the disputes over the Fastolf properties still unresolved.

FIVE
THE WIDOW

In the Middle Ages widows could be "powerful and influential figures in their own right, managing their own estates and households ...If, when her husband died, her children were under age, it was the widow who had to hold the family and household together, to arrange family marriages, supervise the estates and conduct lawsuits."³⁰ But a widow "also enjoyed a large measure of free choice not only in the discharge of these responsibilities, but as to how [she] should live and, above all, whether [she] should remarry."³¹

Almost all these aspects of a widow's life, described by Keen, can be detected in the letters of Margaret's widowhood. She was now a middle-aged woman of 44 years, with a family of five sons and two daughters, all unmarried. She would need to arrange suitable marriages for them, marriages which would maintain or even increase the family's wealth and status. Lawsuits, or worse still further violence, could be expected in the matter of the Fastolf inheritance.

As the wife of John I, Margaret's life had been circumscribed by the demands of family, land and tenantry, demands which were intensified by her husband's frequent

30. Keen, p.182.

31. Keen, p.24.

absences from the family home, and by the explosions of local violence. Throughout she identified with the interests of the family she had espoused, but although she had proved her competence, Margaret nevertheless tended to defer to John I's opinions and refer to him for guidance. However great the burden of responsibility she had actually assumed, her husband remained titular head of the family.

Now entering her new condition, Margaret's life had become more complex. She would have to adapt to the fact that there was a new head of the family, reassess her role within that family, and decide on the extent to which she wished to remain central to its concerns. Her exercise of power, influence and freedom of choice can be seen most clearly by observing her continued administration of the estates, and in the arrangement of family marriages. Her relationship with the young adults of the family, and her response to their actions and opinions reveal further aspects of her character.

Margaret's immediate concern was the retention and management of the family estates. Her eldest son John II was of age, had become head of the family, and might be expected to assume the attendant responsibilities, but Margaret's letters to him show little faith in his ability to perform the hard and perhaps tedious work of protecting the family interests.

Of prime importance to the family at this time was the possession of Caister Castle. Even today the ruined tower and walls give some indication of Caister's splendour. In July 1466 - when John II was granted possession by warrant of Edward IV (P.L. 896) - Caister, with its state apartments, outer and inner courts surrounded by moats, and its Great Tower commanding views over the Norfolk countryside, must indeed have been a "ryche juelle"(727/35). Yet by the end of 1466 it is Margaret who is unwillingly having to take the responsibility for the castle and manor, and perhaps is fearful of putting herself once more into physical danger, as she writes to John II from "Castere ... where as I wold not be at thys tyme but for youre sake"(198/34-36).

By mid-1467 the county is full of rumours that an attempt will be made on Caister, but, now writing from Norwich, Margaret will not return there. "...ye wote wele" she tells John II "that I haue ben affrayd there be-fore this tyme... And I can not wele gide ner rewle sodyour, and also thei set not be a woman as thei shuld set be a man"(199/11-13). This does not sound like the Margaret whose steely strength carried her through the events at Gresham and Hellesdon. Possibly, knowing her son as she does, she hopes that an appeal to his sense of chivalry might encourage him to take on a protective role towards her, and at the same time act in the family's interests. However, John II's knightly prowess was only apparent at a tournament at Eltham (P.L. 236 headnote), to the understandable disapproval of his

younger brother John III, on whom the defence of Caister rested, and who writes "by trowththe I had leuer se yow onys in Caster Halle then to se as many kyngys tornay as myght be betwyx Eltam and London"(327/30-31).

Margaret's letters to her eldest son continue to show the poor opinion she has of him. They are full of advice on how to run the family affairs. Regarding his father's will, he must "purvey hastly and wyssely"(200/57), and "lete slauth nomore take [him] in such diffaught"(200/60). This last phrase, with its warning against one of the deadly sins, has a somewhat biblical ring to it, and indeed the letter is written in the hand of James Gloys, the Pastons' chaplain, whose influence on Margaret will be discussed later.

Throughout 1469, as the threat to Caister increases, Margaret is once again in the position of having to manage difficult and dangerous local problems on behalf of the absent head of the Paston household. Her letters begin to take on the same tone, and concern for money, as those written by her husband. "...spede your materes", she admonishes John II, "...that ye may haue lesse felesship at Cayster, for the expences and costes be grete"(201/23-25). In August, when Caister is at last beseiged by the Duke of Norfolk, Margaret tries to awake John II to the urgency of the situation. "...make no lengere delay; for thei must nedes haue hasty socour"(202/24-25).

"The protection and help given to friends, family and servants was a matter of honour."³² Thus Philippa Maddern, arguing that women, although unable to attain honour in the chivalric sense, could nevertheless, by acting within an accepted honour system, gain status and power. The experience Margaret had acquired during her years managing the estates for John I now gave her the right to determine what was honourable. Ironically, the man who enjoyed tourneys and attendances at court still needed such instruction by his mother regarding honourable behaviour. "...if þei be not holpen it shall be to you a gret diswurcheþ"(202/27-28), she warns John II.

Her letter two weeks later is even more emphatic.

"...euery man in this countré marvaylleth gretly that ye suffre them to be so longe in so gret joparté wyth-ought help or othere remedy"(204/7-8). At such a time guidance must give way to firm instruction. "...as ye wull haue my blyssyng, I charge you and require you þat ye se your brothere be holpyn in hast"(204/19-20). Again in Gloys' hand, the semi-ecclesiastical phraseology is apparent, but it is surely Margaret speaking from her heart who writes "I had lever ye lost þe lyffelode than there lyfes"(204/39-40), the alliteration adding emphasis to her sentiments.

32. P. Maddern, *Honours among the Pastons: gender and integrity in fifteenth-century English provincial society*. p.360.

Her letter brings a sharp response from John II. There is no customary formal or respectful opening,³³ merely an abrupt "Moodre". His resentment at her previous letter is obvious.

But, moodre, I fele by yowre wryghtyng that ye deme in me I scholde not do my deuyre wyth-owt ye wrot to me som hevye tydyngys; and, modre, iff I had nede to be gwykynynd wyth a letter in thys nede I were of my-selfe to slawe a felaw.

(243/26-29)

He somewhat blusteringly calls on "Gode to wittnesse þat I haue don my devoyre"(243/34), and assures her, twice, that "wyth Goddys grace" the situation will be remedied, a stance somewhat spoiled by "mother, I beseche yow sende me som mony"(243/59).

Margaret is not one to let such comments go unanswered, and indeed in her reply there is a suggestion of her wanting the last word. She cannot allow him to think that she wrote to him "fabylys and ymagynacyons"(205/3); she had reported the situation at Caister as she had been informed. She continues with the fullest expression of Christian belief found in her letters; didactic in tone, it echoes the phrases of the pulpit and is an obvious reproach to John II on his shortcomings as a Christian, and in his duty to the family in the present situation. A particularly revealing comment on how she views his behaviour is

33. N. Davis, *The Litera Troili and English Letters*. p.236.

yf any thyng haue be a mysse any othere wyse pan
 yt howte to haue ben be-fore thys, owthere in
 pryde ore in laues expencys ore in any othere
 thyng pat haue offendyd God, amend yt and pray
 hym of hys grace and helpe [my emphasis]
 (205/14-16)

Margaret obviously believes John II to be not only
 dilatory, but a spendthrift.

She continues:

and entend welle to God an to 3owr neybors; and
 thow 3owr poore hereaftyre be to aquyte hem of
 here maleys, 3et be mersyfulle to them, and God
 xale send 3ow be more grace to haue 3owr entente
 in othere thynggys.

(205/17-20)

"Goddys grace" should be a blessing to be earned, yet it
 seems she thinks his reliance on God mere empty phrases, as
 she makes the rather barbed comment "I remembyre thys
 clawsys be-cause of be last letter pat 3e sent me"(205/20-
 21). Having paid his men at Caister she cannot send him
 any money, and tells him firmly "be my feythe I haue
 holppyn as mysche as I may, and more"(205/55-56).

This exchange seems to typify the relationship between
 Margaret and John II. She resents his apparent unconcern
 for his inheritance, and the lack or mismanagement of money
 is a frequent cause for reproach on her part.

By 1471 Margaret is in great distress over shortage of
 money. She has in fact borrowed money on John II's behalf
 and now cannot repay the debt to her cousin. She entreats
 her second son, John III, "comune wyth ywyre brothere here-

of and send me woord how that he wull mak shyfth there-fore in hast"(209B/7-9), putting him in the position of a go-between. She obviously has a much better relationship with this son, and confides to him that John II's behaviour "is to myn hart a very spere"(209B/21), the imagery illustrating the measure of her distress.

A few weeks later she has heard from John II that he is deeper in debt and cannot repay her. Once again she unburdens herself to John III "remembereng wat we haue had before thys and ho symppylly yt hath be spente, and to lytyl profythe to any of vus"(212/5-6). It must have been very hard to see all that she had worked for being frittered away because her son would not devote as much energy and attention to the family estates as she had. Her despair is encapsulated in her dramatic phrase "yt is a deth to me to thynk vp-on yt"(212/12).

The gulf between her and John II is widening, and she angrily tells his brother "Me thynkkyth be 3owr brothere pat he is wery to wrythe to me, and there-fore I wylnot akumbyre hym wyth wrythtyng to hym. 3e may telle hym as I wryth to 3ow"(212/29-31).

However, the rumour that John II has sold Sporle woods induces Margaret to resume her correspondence with him. Her letter expresses in the most strong terms her disapproval of his actions, which apart from causing her personal distress will have repercussions in the public

sphere. Sporle was his inheritance from his father, who "cherysshed in euery maner his woodes"(214/13), and John II appears to her unfeeling and disrespectful to his father's memory. Furthermore, local opinion will brand him "a wastour"(214/19) who has had to sell "thurgh [his] owyn mys-gouvernaunce"(214/36). Margaret is quite uncompromising on this issue, as she tells him "do as I advyse you in this behalffe or ell trost neuer to haue comfort of me"(214/40-41).

Margaret's vehemence regarding Sporle suggests an involvement which goes beyond the merely financial. It is a matter "pat goth right nere [her] hert"(214/2), due to her awareness of the Paston family inheritance and identification with her late husband's endeavours.

When it comes to the loss of the Fastolf properties, Margaret is more angry and bitter than emotionally involved. "We bette þe busschysse, and haue þe losse and þe dysworschuppe, and othere men haue þe byrdys"(216/9-11) is her country-woman's observation. Nevertheless she appreciates the value both in status and financial return of Caister: "yf we lesse þat, we lesse þe fayere-este flowere of owr garlond"(216/19-20), she tells John II.

Richmond pleads for sympathy towards John II, commenting "It is hard...to understand his mother's particular reluctance to lend him money ... and her general lack of

sympathy for him."³⁴ Granted John II had inherited mortgaged properties and was unable to get his title to Caister confirmed until 1476 (P.L. 300), and that "All the chief estates were in the tight and long-lasting clutch of heiress dowagers: Agnes had Paston and Oxnead, Margaret had Gresham and Mautby."³⁵ However, from Margaret's perspective that tight and long-lasting clutch was the only thing keeping her and the rest of the family from ruin. She probably remembered her husband's description of John II as "a drane amonges bees"(72/38), or even more harshly as one who "leuith, and euer hath, as man disolut"(73/8). She knows of her son's preference for tournaments and court attendance, and perhaps also of his gambling tendencies (P.L. 237). If she appears harsh it is because she cannot bear to see her dilettante of an elder son bring the family name into disrepute, and her strength of character will not allow her to evade her duty to correct him, even if it means they become estranged.

Matters improve between them in 1475, when Margaret exhibits the kindlier tone of a mother anxious for the welfare of her son. John II is in Calais, and has been in poor health. Margaret offers him practical help as well as spiritual guidance.

34. Richmond, p.187.

35. Richmond, p.186.

I shall be as good an huswyff for yow as I can,
 and as I wold be for my-selff. Send me word how
 ye doo of yowyr syknes... and yff God wol nowt
 ssuffyr yow to have helth, thank hym ther-off and
 takyt passhently, and com hom a-geyn to me, and
 we shall lyve to-gedyr as God woll geve vs grase
 to do.

(221/36-40)

John II responds in similar mood, beseeching her for her
 "preyerys and remembrance"(291/33), and promising on his
 return from France "to daunce atendaunce most about yowre
 plesure and ease"(291/35), a courtly, if impractical, turn
 of phrase.

In May, with John III and Edmond about to leave for Calais,
 Margaret has to acknowledge John II's competence and
 experience in an area in which she cannot participate, and
 writes to him "For Goddes loue, and your breper go ouer þe
 see, avyse them as ye thynk best for here sauegarde, for
 som off them be but yonge sawgeres and wote full lytyll
 what yt meneth to be as a saugere"(224/37-39). At last
 John II seems to have come of age in her eyes. Another
 letter written to John II at Calais in August indicates
 that Margaret is still dealing with family affairs on his
 behalf, promising "þat I may do I wol do aswele as I
 can"(225/33). These three letters of 1475 are the only
 ones in the collection in which Margaret chooses to begin
 "Right welbeloued son". This salutation seems to mark a
 definite change in their relationship: a reconciliation
 and perhaps a tacit acknowledgement of John II as head of
 the family.

His response from Calais in September to his "Ryght reuerend and ... most tendre and kyynde moodre" in which he promises, in more practical vein, to "come home to yow and be yowre hosbonde and balyff"(293/16), reinforces this impression of an improved relationship and shift of responsibility from Margaret to John II. A letter from John III about this time, tells John II that their mother "wold fayne haue yow at hom wyth hyr; and if ye be onys mette she tellyth me ye shall not lyghtly depart tyll dethe depart yow"(365/28-30). It seems that Margaret wants John II as companion as well as bailiff.

This mood of mutual family support is rudely shattered in a letter from Margaret to John II in August 1477. Without even a cursory attempt at a greeting she plunges straight into the matter at hand. He has obviously not been managing things to her satisfaction, and in her response to his request for money she exhibits the power of an independent dowager. "I wul nat be compellyd to pay yowr dettys a-3ens my well"(227/5-6) she tells him. The thirty-seven years that have passed since she married into a family of lawyers have not been without their effect on Margaret as she vehemently denies that she promised him more money, citing as evidence "yowyr letterys of yowyr owyn hande-wrytyng þe wech I haue to schew"(227/11-12).

Once again it is the mortgaging of Sporle which has aroused her anger and prompted the thinly veiled threat

Yt causyth me to be in gret dowte of yow what
 yowyr dysposycion wul be here-aftyr for swheche
 lyfelood as I haue be dysposyd be-fore þis tyme
 to leue yow after my decesse

(227/19-21)

Whether Margaret would in fact have cut John II out of her will cannot however be known, as he was to predecease her. Her concluding paragraph, from a mother who holds at least some of the purse strings, is a sharp reminder of the respect she believes is due to her. "I thynke 3e sette butte lytyl be myn blyssyng, and yf ye dede ye wulde a desyrdyt in yowyr wrytyng to me"(227/36-37). One would like to think this was written more in sorrow at the deterioration of their relationship, but Margaret's letter is so full of anger that she seems to have taken John II's omission as a deliberate insult.

To any parent, the realisation that children have become adult requires considerable adjustment in attitude; to medieval parents, who appear to have expected unquestioning compliance on the part of their offspring, the adjustment could have been extremely difficult. Viewed in this light, it is possible that some of Margaret's anger towards John II arose from the frustration of no longer being able to direct the actions of an adult son whose sense of duty was not as strong as her own.

Margaret never succeeded in making John II into a competent manager, and she was to be disappointed in the ability of this "best cheser of a gentell-woman"(745/21-22) to find

himself a suitable wife. The financial plight of the family in the years following John I's death might well have been alleviated had John II won the hand of another heiress. It seems that he was in fact aiming high, as marriage negotiations were entered into with Anne Haute, a cousin of the Queen (P.L.905).

Apparently John II had not kept his mother informed of the negotiations, as she writes to him in the spring of 1469

I haue non very knowleche of your ensuraunce, but if ye be ensured I pray God send you joy and wurchep to-geder, and so I trost ye shull haue if it be as it is reported of here.

(201/6-8)

The more practical side of Margaret's character does however cause her to caution him

I wuld pat ye shuld not be to hasty to be married till ye were more suere of your lyvelode, for ye must remembre what charge ye shall haue, and if ye haue not to mayntene it, it wull be a gret rebuke

(201/12-15)

Margaret quite naturally wishes her son happiness in the marriage, and wants to do things correctly to maintain the family's status in society. The negotiations for the marriage, and later for a dispensation to break the engagement, were to occupy John II for several years. Margaret appears supportive to him over the whole affair, and writes in 1475 "I wold ye war delyueryd of my Mastres A.H., and than I wold trost pat ye shuld do the bettyr"(221/41-42). By 1477 John II is able to assure his

mother that "the mater bytween Anne Hault and me, shall wyth Goddys grace thys terme be at a perffygth ende"(308/7-8).

The following year it appears that John II has another marriage prospect, and one that would bring the family status and property - the perfect Paston recipe for success. Margaret expresses the hope that he will be able to marry "rygth nygth of þe Qwenys blood"(228/29-30), and even though the family have no knowledge of the lady "yf yt be so þat yowyr lond schuld come a-gayne by þe reason of your maryage, ... at þe reuerence of God for-sake yt nowt"(228/30-32). Despite this calculating approach, Margaret will not condemn her son, or his bride-to-be, to a marriage for purely mercenary reasons, as she adds the proviso "...yf 3e can fynde in your harte to loue hyr, so þat sche be suche on as 3e can thynke to haue jssv by; or ellys by my trowth I had rathere þat 3e neuer maryd in your lyffe"(228/32-34). It is tempting to think that this apparent desire for a love match reveals a romantic side to Margaret's character. However, if she had knowledge of his philandering ways, and of his illegitimate daughter, she may have considered that neither family honour nor John II's future happiness would be served by a marriage of convenience. Whatever her reasons, and despite her apparent exclusion from his plans, in her usual forthright manner she has not hesitated to state her opinion on the matter. The fact that by this date (May 1478) her second son, John III, was married and with a child expected shortly (P.L. 312), may have had some bearing on her

attitude, as it was less imperative for John II to produce an heir.

In contrast to her lack of involvement in John II's abortive marriage plans, Margaret was instrumental in bringing John III's negotiations for the hand of Margery Brews to fruition. Sir Thomas Brews entered into discussions with John II, as head of the Paston family (P.L.773). However, John III was aware that there might be financial problems, and knew he would be more likely to succeed if he had his mother, rather than his brother, as an ally. He therefore made careful arrangements for Margaret to meet with Margery's mother, suggesting to his mother that she and Dame Elizabeth Brews should "dyne in your howse on Thursday, for ther shold ye haue most secret talking"(374/28-29). This has a ring of intrigue about it; perhaps he was hoping to persuade these ladies into settling the matter away from the ears of John II and Sir Thomas. On the other hand it may have meant nothing more than a friendly meeting between the prospective mothers-in-law. Whatever his reasons, his efforts were rewarded by Margaret's generous promise of the manor of Sparham for Margery's jointure. Unfortunately John II could not ratify the gift as the manor was entailed (P.L. 304), and it seemed as though the negotiations would break down, or be unduly protracted by financial obstacles. However, although now retired to Mautby, Margaret still had considerable influence in family affairs, and taking the initiative she wrote to Dame Elizabeth, arranging to meet

her and Sir Thomas. She expresses the hope that "wyth yowyr advyse and helpe and myn to-gedyrs, we schall take some way þat yt schal not breke; for yf yt dyd yt were non honoure to neyther partyes ... consydering that it ys so ferre spokun" (226/12-15). Once again honour is a motivating factor for Margaret, but she also seems genuinely pleased at John III's choice of "Margery, to whom I supposyd to haue gevyn an othyr name or thys tyme" (226/25-26).

Margaret's welcoming attitude to Margery Brews, as her future daughter-in-law, appears ironic when one considers how she had treated her own daughter, Margery, some eight years earlier. Haskell comments "The bitterness of medieval women seems never to have reached greater depths than in dealing with their daughters...".³⁶ Margaret must have been aware of how harshly her mother-in-law, Agnes, had behaved towards her own daughter, Elizabeth. The young girl had been shut away, not permitted to communicate with anyone and had been beaten "onys in þe weke or twyes, and som tyme twyes on o day and hir hed broken in to or thre places" (446/22-24). The *Letters* do not reveal the reason for this treatment, but as the family was attempting to marry Elizabeth to an elderly widower, Stephen Scrope, it is possible that she had objected. Those particular negotiations seem to have broken down and Elizabeth's single state continued to be of concern to the family.

36. A. S. Haskell, *The Paston Women on Marriage in Fifteenth Century England*. p.470.

Some five years after the beating incidents Margaret wrote to her husband

My modere prayith yow for to remembre my suster,
and to do your parte feythfully or ye come hom to
help to gette here a gode mariage. It semyth be
my moderys langage pat she wold neuer so fayn to
haue be delyueryd of her as she woll now.

(150/26-29)

The problems caused by mother and daughter living under the same roof were repeated one generation later. Margaret writes to John II in April of 1469 "I wuld ye shuld purvey for your suster to be wyth my lady of Oxford... or in summe othere wurchepfull place... for we be eythere of vs wery of othere"(201/28-31). Agnes and Elizabeth may have fallen out over the choice of a husband for the daughter; Margaret and Margery certainly did. This time, however, it was the daughter who took the initiative, but found no support within the family for her decision to marry the family bailiff, Richard Calle. Conscious of the Pastons' social status, John III declares to his brother that Richard Calle "shold neuer haue my good wyll for to make my sustyr to selle kandyll and mustard in Framlyngham"(332/16-17). However, to modern eyes it is Margaret's reaction which is the most shocking. She had hoped to delay an investigation by the Bishop of Norwich until other members of the family could be present but

[the Bishop] sayde playnly...pat he mythe not,
nore woold, no lengare delayyt, and schargyd me
in peyn of cursying pat sche schuld not be
deferred but pat sche xuld a-pere be-forn hym pe
nexte day.

(203/6-9)

Margaret's anger is so great that she defies the Bishop - "I sayd pleyntly þat I woold nowder bryng here nore send here"(203/9-10). Despite her mother's opposition, Margery is heard by the Bishop, and when it appears that she cannot be shaken in her love for Richard and her determination to be his wife, Margaret reports to John II

I schargyd my seruantys þat sche xuld not be reseyued in myn hows...And I sent to on ore ij more þat they xuld not reseyue here yf sche cam.
(203/51-54)

Margaret's rejection of her daughter is utterly without pity as she tells John II

remembyre 3ow, and so do I, þat we haue lost of here but a brethele, and setyt þe les to hart;...fore and he were ded at thys owyre sche xuld neuere be at myn hart as sche was.
(203/65-68)

In the only extant letter from Richard to Margery, he addresses her as "Myn owne lady and mastres, and be-for God very trewe wyff" and refers to "the gret bonde of matrymony þat is made be-twix vs"(861/5). When examined by the Bishop, Margery had re-affirmed that bond, saying that "sche thowthe in here conschens sche was bownd"(203/38). Margaret refused to acknowledge her daughter's right to choose her marriage partner, a right embodied in the *dicta* of Gratian which "put power to marry in the hands of those getting married",³⁷ yet only a few months earlier she had written to John II, regarding his

37. J.T. Noonan Jr., *Power to Choose*. p.430.

own engagement to Anne Haute, "And a-nemps God ye arn as gretly bownd to here as ye were maried"(201/8-9).

As Haskell comments, "There was at work here... the double standard of marriage choice. Women of eminent position had the ultimate right to reject a prospective spouse or to wed independently with the expectation of church sanction, but such a choice was likely to involve ostracism from the family. Men, however, had complete freedom to marry - or not to marry at all - without fear of any penalty whatsoever."³⁸

Margaret had become resigned to John II's bachelor condition, tacitly accepting that the choice was his to make. She had given her approval and had been active in smoothing the way for John III's marriage. However, when faced with the problems posed by Margery's proposed marriage, Margaret followed the example of her mother-in-law in dealing with a recalcitrant daughter, applying the norms and pressures of the society in which they lived. In denying her daughter the right to follow her conscience, Margaret could or would not accept a concept of honour and status that did not accord with her own. Margaret's marriage to John I had brought with it the large burden of responsibility for the management of the Paston estates, in addition to the responsibility of being "the sole heiress of her father".³⁹ Margery, with two older brothers to

38. Haskell, pp 468-9.

39. Richmond, p.121.

carry the destiny of the family, was under no such obligation, and was rebelling against attempts to direct her life. Perhaps Margaret's excessive animosity towards Margery was fuelled by an unconscious resentment that her daughter's choice meant an escape from the demands of land, status and society; a choice she herself may not have been given. Margaret would have been particularly stressed by and aware of family responsibilities at this time, as the problem with Margery arose contemporaneously with the Duke of Norfolk's attack on Caister Castle. So although she reveals a somewhat pitiless side to her character, one can perhaps understand, if not excuse, her behaviour. The *Letters* give no direct indication of a reconciliation between mother and daughter; there is no bequest to Margery in Margaret's will, but as Davis suggests, Margery may have already died.⁴⁰ However, Margaret did remember Margery's sons in her will (P.L. 230), and at the very least this indicates that she was generous-hearted enough not to bear a grudge against her grandsons because of her estrangement from their mother.

Richmond has suggested that Margaret seemed to take an almost anti-Paston stance after 1465.⁴¹ There does indeed appear to have been a shift in her tone and attitude, explained perhaps by her belief that the whole Paston endeavour over the past twenty-five years had led to her husband's death. Her bitterness is apparent as she writes

40. Davis I, p.lxii.

41. Richmond, p.187 n.109.

to John III regarding the Fastolf properties, "I had leuer ye had neuer know þe lond. Remembre it was þe distruccion of your fader"(213/17-18). For the widowed Margaret there was very little freedom to live her life as she chose. She was well aware that her power as an independent dowager carried with it responsibilities to family and community. The indications are that she would have preferred to relinquish those responsibilities to her eldest son, but until this was possible her strong sense of duty and clear view of family honour drove her to continue as virtual head of the family.

SIX

THE EXTENDED FAMILY

As well as her immediate family, there were many others who affected Margaret's life. Throughout her marriage she experienced long periods of loneliness, and was appreciative of those friends and neighbours who compensated for her husband's absence. When time and circumstance allowed, she enjoyed social occasions; after dining with the mayor and mayoress and John Damme she tells John I "I am beholde to hem, for they haue sent to me dyuers tymys sythe ye yed hense"(154/52-53). She could herself be a good friend; one Alice Crane writes "thankyng you of the grete frenship that ye haue do to my moder"(711/6-7), and "thankyng you of the grete chere that I had of you whan I was with you laste"(711/15-16).

The tenants on the Paston estates were like an extended family, for whom Margaret took responsibility and who turned to her in times of trouble. It was of course part of her duties to care for them, but Margaret seems to have had a genuine concern for them and an understanding of their everyday problems. When tenants at Mautby cannot afford repairs to their houses, Margaret practically and sensibly suggests to her husband "ther is wyndfall wood at pe maner...pat myght helpe hem wyth to-ward pe reparacion"(178/27-29). During the disturbances of 1465 Margaret defends her tenants' rights against the Duke of Suffolk's agents (P.L. 182). Her support is much

appreciated; the "tenauntys at Haylesdon and Drayton...be ryght glad that we erre there a-mongys hem, and so be many othere of oure old nebors and frendys"(183/29-31), she tells her husband. There was little need for John I's reminder that "ye be a gentilwoman, and it is worshep for yow to confort yowr tenantis"(73/37-38). Indeed to see Margaret's relationship with her tenants as part of a "competition for honour"⁴² would be to do her less than justice.

Her concern does not end when her husband dies. Advising John II on his duty she warns "...purvey an redy remedye, or ell ye lese the tenauntes hertes"(200/20-21). These same tenants should now be the responsibility of John II, but it is Margaret who is distressed by the "swemefull and petowse compleyntes of the pore tenauntes that come to [her] for comfort and socour"(200/22-23).

There is one person in the *Letters* who is often present at memorable moments in the life of the Pastons, and that is their chaplain, James Gloys. The *Letters* give no information on his religious duties, but he seems to have been invaluable to the family as an agent in many of their business affairs.

Not unnaturally Margaret came to rely on him during her husband's absences. In 1465 it is Gloys that she sends, with Thomas Bonde, to Drayton to hold the court in John I's

42. Maddern, p.364.

name. As she reports to her husband "I cowde gete non othere body to kepe the court...be-cause I suppose thei were a-ferd of the pepill þat shuld be there of þe Duke of Suffolk parte"(189/3-6).

This reliance was to increase in intensity during the years of Margaret's widowhood. Throughout her marriage Gloys had acted as scribe for Margaret on occasion, but after John I's death more than half of her extant letters were written by her chaplain. The younger members of the family considered that Margaret had allowed herself to be unduly influenced by Gloys. According to Richard Calle it was Gloys who conspired with Margaret to obtain letters Richard had sent to Margery (P.L. 861). It was Sir James who, on Margaret's instructions, turned Margery away from her mother's house after her hearing by the Bishop of Norwich (P.L. 203).

Several of the letters of rebuke and censure from Margaret to John II were in the hand of Gloys, and it is possible that her critical attitude was in part the result of Gloys' influence. Certainly after the death of her chaplain Margaret's attitude towards John II softened considerably, although their reconciliation was not permanent.

This impression of undue influence is born out by comments made by John III to his elder brother, describing Gloys as "the proud, pevyshe, and euyll dysposyd prest"(353/27), whom he suspects of influencing Margaret regarding the

disposition of her estate. "...in thys angyr betwen Syr Jamys and me" continues John III, "she hathe promyseid me that my parte shall be nowght"(353/58-59). Later in that same year (1472), John III complains to his brother "Syr Jamys is euyr choppyng at me when my modyr is present, wyth syche wordys as he thynkys wrathe me and also cause my modyr to be dyspleaseid wyth me"(355/16-18). After Gloys' death, late the following year, John II is relieved that Margaret will now take advice from John III, and warns his brother "Wherffor be ware fro hense forthe þat noo suche felawe crepe in be-twyen hyre and yow"(282/5-6).

Whatever the opinion of others, Margaret seems to have been genuinely fond of Sir James despite his apparently quarrelsome nature. Early in his relationship with the Pastons, when he is involved in a public brawl in the streets of Norwich, Margaret sends him to London to join John I, to whom she writes

I pray 3w hertyly þat 3e late not Jamys kom hom
 a3en in non wyse tyl 3e kom home, for myn hertys
 ese; for be my trwth I wold not þat he were
 hurt, ner non man þat longyth to 3w in 3wr absens
 for xx pwnd.

(129/60-63)

To the widowed Margaret, at odds with her older children, and still with many responsibilities, the companionship and assistance of an old and trusted friend must have meant a lot. In 1473 Margaret writes to Gloys⁴³ thanking him for

43. Although the letter has no address, I follow Davis (P.L. 220 headnote) in believing it was intended for Gloys.

his "delygente labour"(220/2). "Ye haue lyghted myne hert perin by a pound"(220/4-5) she tells him. Her trust and confidence in Gloys are apparent as she asks that he escort her young son Walter to Oxford, a son she is loth to lose "for I trust to haue more joye of hym þan I haue of them þat bene owlder"(220/11-12). Margaret has removed herself to Mautby, and this manor of her childhood seems to represent a haven to which she can escape from her pressing responsibilities and problems. To Sir James, a person outside the immediate family, she is prepared to reveal a less self-reliant side to her character as she confides that "me lyketh myne abydyng and þe contré here right well...for I am cherysed here botte to well"(220/46-48).

SEVEN

THE INDIVIDUAL

"The literary, chronicle and letter sources provide conflicting images of women. On the one hand there are the helpless damsels in courtly romances who are prone to victimization by dragons, while on the other hand there are women like Margaret Paston...".⁴⁴

Margaret was no helpless damsel to be victimised by dragons or intimidated by Dukes. Here was no Criseyde "slydyng of corage"⁴⁵ in the face of the enemy, but perhaps someone more like "an extremely hard-worked woman and a very hard nut to crack for [those] enemies".⁴⁶ However, like any real person she was a many-faceted character, presenting different aspects of herself to different people and according to circumstances.

Haskell has commented "The marriage contract of John and Margaret Paston was the foundation for an endeavour to which both parties contributed equally. In such an atmosphere the woman operated independently and freely on a par with her husband".⁴⁷ As a bride, Margaret Paston brought to her husband lands and status, but she brought much more than that. The *Letters* show her to be a loving wife, tenderly concerned for her husband's health and

44. B.A. Hanawalt, *The Female Felon in Fourteenth-Century England*, p.127.

45. G. Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*. V. 825.

46. Power, p.43.

47. Haskell, p.471.

welfare and unhappy when she displeased him. Margaret did not exhibit a desire for freedom and independence; her separations from John I caused her great distress and anxiety. However, her unwavering support, loyalty, and dedication to the Paston endeavours show her to have been at the very least an equal partner in the marriage.

She did not shirk the responsibilities demanded of her by the Paston proclivity for acquiring lands and status. Most remarkable and admirable is the way in which she suppressed her own fears and courageously assumed the role of defender of those properties the Pastons considered their own. In discussing the civil strife of the period Keen comments on "...gentlemen [who] were ... a tough, proud, independent breed, ready to act in any situation in which they thought that their rights, interests or worship might be threatened",⁴⁸ characteristics which could well be attributed to Margaret herself.

The qualities which Margaret had exhibited as a wife, remained with her through her widowhood. Her sense of duty would not allow her to set aside the work of half a lifetime, and despite the curtailment of her own personal freedom, she continued, however unwillingly to play an active part in the management of Paston affairs. Her strength, determination and steadfastness did, however, make her appear inflexible, especially in her later years, and particularly in relation to her children.

48. Keen, p.214.

Margaret died in 1484. Her life was lived during a period from which English society was to emerge "with a consciousness of its individuality that had not been there before".⁴⁹ Within the Paston family Margaret was probably closer in spirit to her mother-in-law, Agnes, whose circumstances had been so much like her own, than to her daughter Margery whose new individualism had so "baffled and infuriated her mother".⁵⁰ Margaret herself was no rebel, acting as she did within the conventions of her own society, but to try to define her through her familial relationships might suggest that she had no independent personality outside that framework.

Working within the constraints of an incomplete historical record, and given the particular problems associated with the letter form, one must acknowledge that there will always be some doubt about certain interpretations of Margaret's thoughts, feelings and actions. Nevertheless, the "epistolary mosaic",⁵¹ although fragmented, is sufficiently whole to have allowed the character of Margaret Paston to emerge from this examination of her vivid and articulate letters. Her own words, sometimes witty, occasionally poetic, always forthright, have been spoken straight from her heart, that heart to which she refers on so many occasions. They have shown her to be a woman possessing courage, steadfastness and her own individual integrity.

49. Keen, p.303.

50. Maddern, p.369.

51. Altman, p.167.

In her will Margaret Paston instructed that her body "be beried in the ele of the cherch of Mauteby byfore the ymage of Our Lady there"(230/8-9). That south aisle no longer stands today, but wherever she lies, words from the Rawlinson manuscript provide a fitting epitaph.

All my harte I have here wrytton
To sende yow yn a byll.⁵²

52. Quoted in A. Barratt (ed), *Women's Writing in Middle English*. p.264.



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PART OF NORFOLK AND SUFFOLK

Names of places containing Paston residences are underlined.

Source: N. Davis (ed). *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*

LETTERS AND DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT

Adapted from N. Davis (ed), *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, Vol I pp.vii-xix and Vol II pp.vii-xxii.

From Agnes Paston

- | | | |
|-----|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 13. | To William Paston I | probably 1440, 20 April |
| 20. | To John Paston I | probably 1450, 11 March |
| 23. | To John Paston I | probably 1451, 8 November |
| 24. | To John Paston I | probably 1451 21 November |
| 32. | Part of Draft Will | probably 1466 |
| 33. | Part of Draft Will | probably 1466 |

From John Paston I

- | | | |
|-----|---|----------------------|
| 36. | Petition to Henry VI | 1449, before 16 July |
| 72. | To Margaret Paston, John
Daubeney, and Richard Calle | 1465, 15 January |
| 73. | To Margaret Paston, John
Daubeney, and Richard Calle | 1465, 27 June |
| 77. | To Margaret Paston | 1465, 20 September |

From Margaret Paston

- | | | |
|------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| 125. | To John Paston I | probably 1441, 14 December |
| 126. | To John Paston I | probably 1443, 28 September |
| 127. | To John Paston I | 1444, 8 July |
| 129. | To John Paston I | 1448, 19 May |
| 130. | To John Paston I | 1448 |
| 131. | To John Paston I | 1449, 15 February |
| 132. | To John Paston I | 1449, 28 February |
| 134. | To John Paston I | perhaps 1449 |
| 135. | To John Paston I | probably 1449, 9 May |
| 138. | To John Paston I | 1451, 15 March |
| 140. | To John Paston I | probably 1451, 3 June |
| 141. | To John Paston I | 1451, 1 July |
| 144. | To John Paston I | probably 1452, 5 November |
| 145. | To John Paston I | perhaps 1453, 30 January |
| 146. | To John Paston I | 1453, 20 April |
| 147. | To John Paston I | 1453, 6 July |

148. To John Paston I	perhaps 1453, 15 October
150. To John Paston I	perhaps 1454, 29 January
151. To John Paston I	perhaps 1454, 1 February
153. To John Paston I	probably 1459, 24 December
154. To John Paston I	1460, 21 October
159. To John Paston I	1461, perhaps 2 July
160. To John Paston I	1461, 9 July
162. To John Paston I	1461, 18 July
163. To John Paston I	1461, 2 November
165. To John Paston I	probably 1461, 20 November
166. To John Paston I	1461, 3 December
167. To John Paston I	1461, 29 December
168. To John Paston I	1462, 7 January
177. To John Paston I	1464, 8 June
178. To John Paston I	1465, 8 April
180. To John Paston I	1465, 10 May
181. To John Paston I	1465, 13 May
182. To John Paston I	1465, 20 May
183. To John Paston I	1465, 27 May
184. To John Paston I	1465, 11 June
187. To John Paston II	1465, perhaps 6 July
188. To John Paston I	1465, 12 July
189. To John Paston I	1465, 7 August
191. To John Paston I	1465, probably August
192. To John Paston I	1465, 27 September
193. To John Paston I	1465, 27 September
195B Inventory of goods stolen	1465, soon after 17 October
196. To John Paston I	1465, 27 October
198. To John Paston II	1466, 29 October
199. To John Paston II	1467, 11 July
200. To John Paston II	1469, 12 March
201. To John Paston II	1469, 3 April
202. To John Paston II	1469, 31 August
203. To John Paston II	1469, 10 or 11 September
204. To John Paston II	1469, 12 September
205. To John Paston II	1469, 22-30 September
209B To John Paston III	1471, 5 November
212. To John Paston III	1471, 29 November

213. To John Paston III	probably 1471, 7 December
214. To John Paston II	About 1472
216. To John Paston II.	1472, 5 June
220. Probably to James Gloys	probably 1473, 18 January
221. To John Paston II	1475, 23 January
224 To John Paston II	1475, 23 May
225. To John Paston II	1475, 9 August
226. To Dame Elizabeth Brews	1477, 11 June
227. To John Paston II	1477, 11 August
228. To John Paston II	1478, 27 May
230 Copy of will	nominally 1482, 4 February

From John Paston II

236. To John Paston III	1467, probably March
237. Indenture of wager	1467, 1 May
243. To Margaret Paston	1469, 15 September
282. To John Paston III	1473, 22 November
291. To Margaret Paston	1475, 22 February
293. To Margaret Paston	1475, 11 September
300. To John Paston III	1476, 30 June
304. To Margaret Paston	1477, 28 March
308. To Margaret Paston	1477, 7 August
312. To John Paston III	1478, 25 August

From John Paston III

327. To John Paston II	1467, April
332. To John Paston II	1469, May
353. To John Paston II	1472, 8 July
355. To John Paston II	1472, 16 October
365. To John Paston II	1475, 10 October
374. To Margaret Paston	1477, 8 March

From John Damme

444. To John Paston I	1448, 30 November
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From Elisabeth Clere

446. To John Paston I	not after 1449, 29 June
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From William Lomnor	
450. To John Paston I	1450, 5 May
From Sir John Fastolf	
536. To John Paston I	1455, 11 December
From Richard Calle	
632. To John Paston I	1461, 5 June
861. To Margery Paston	1469
From Alice Crane	
711. To Margaret Paston	perhaps about 1455, 29 June
From William Worcester	
727. To Margaret Paston	probably 1468
From Thomas Daverse	
745. To John Paston II	1467, 29 January
From Sir Thomas Brews	
773. To John Paston II	1477, 8 March

RELATED DOCUMENTS

687. Copies of writs concerning Paston's outlawry	1464, August-November
896. From King Edward IV to the Bailiffs of Yarmouth and others	1466, 26 and 27 July
905. From Lord Scales to an unidentified person	1469, 10 April