

BLOFIELD

AND THE PASTONS



PASTON
FOOTPRINTS

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So who are these Pastons, and why are they here?

BLOFIELD AND THE PASTONS

The Pastons were a prominent Norfolk family for over 300 years. They came from the parish of that name in North-East Norfolk, and since the early 15th century had risen to a position of some wealth and power. We know quite a lot about them because of the Paston Letters, written mainly between 1417 and 1509, which were important because they were the first surviving letters written in English, and tell us a lot about family life in those days, as well as the politics involved in the War of the Roses.

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The manor of Blofield was acquired by Thomas Paston in 1541, when Henry VIII gave away several ecclesiastical properties at the Reformation, including Binham Priory and Thorpe Hall. He also acquired the manor of Appleton in West Norfolk, which has now disappeared.

Who was Thomas Paston?

Thomas was one of at least six children of William Paston and his wife Bridget Heydon. Their marriage had united two families who had been at loggerheads through much of the 15th century – and it was a great match because, as it turned out, they were the ancestors of all the remaining Pastons.

Thomas followed his illustrious grandfather, John Paston III, to court and achieved the high honour of becoming a gentleman of the King's bedchamber – not bad, since his grandfather had fought for the opposition in the Wars of the Roses! To do this he must have been highly favoured by Henry VIII, as his lineage was not that grand.

Thomas was probably the “Mr Paston” who is recorded as

being paid for teaching Princess (later Queen) Mary to play on the virginals in 1536-37. He also played a prominent role in the defence of Norwich during Kett's Rebellion in 1549.

Thomas's brother Clement was a famous sea captain, serving several monarchs. He and his wife Alice Packington were buried at Oxnead, near Aylsham, and their tombs can also be seen there. Clement had no children, and the main Paston line – and much of Clement's wealth – continued through his eldest brother Erasmus. Erasmus and his wife Mary Wyndham (from Felbrigg Hall) were both buried at Paston, and their tombs can still be seen.

However, Clement was also generous to Thomas's son, Edward. Clement had received the Horton estates in 1552 from King Edward VI – they had previously belonged to the disgraced Duke of Somerset – and he also gave Edward these estates and the land for Appleton Hall, where Thomas's grandson Edward eventually lived.

Erasmus's son William, who married Frances Clere, is best known for founding Paston School in North Walsham. He has a magnificent tomb in the church there. William's grandson Edmund and his wife Lady Katherine Knyvett have impressive tombs at Paston, but by then the main family seat was at Oxnead, and Edmund's daughter-in-law Katherine is buried there, though her husband William was probably buried at Paston.

By this time the main line of the Pastons had reached the heights. William's son Robert was made 1st Earl of Yarmouth, and he and his wife Rebecca Clayton were buried at Oxnead, but Robert's son, another William, the 2nd Earl, who was married to Lady Charlotte Fitzroy (natural daughter of Charles II) reached a prominent position but lost control of his wealth, went bankrupt and, in the end, had no heirs. It was the end for the main line.

Back to Blofield

So where do the people buried at Blofield fit into this?

The first Edward, whose monument is on the north wall of the chancel, was Thomas's son. He was born in 1550, when Edward VI was on the throne, and lived through the reigns of Mary, Elizabeth I and James I, dying in 1630 during the reign of Charles I. It is curious that Thomas died the year Edward was born – 1550 – and so Edward VI became his godfather, a high honour. But Edward was a Roman Catholic in the dangerous years of the reign of Elizabeth I, and his line remained resolutely recusant (which means they refused to attend Anglican services). This is why his descendants married into the tight-knit recusant circles of the time. His choice can only have been an act of conviction, as these were dangerous times for Roman Catholics.

Erasmus and Clement, already mentioned, were his uncles, but Erasmus' son, the famous William who founded Paston School, was his cousin and close contemporary. Since Edward lived to a ripe old age, he would also have known William's son Christopher, and Christopher's son Edmund, who died in 1632 and was buried with his wife, Lady Katherine Knyvett, at Paston. There is a small collection of letters from Edward to Katherine at the Norfolk Record Office which were published by the NRO in 1942 by Ruth Hughey – these will be put online as part of the *600Paston Footprints* project.

What else do we know about Edward of Blofield?

Quite a lot. He was a patron of William Byrd and Thomas Tallis and an accomplished musician and linguist himself. He transcribed by hand five books of lute music for use in his household, and these still exist at the British Library. He is said to have put together one of the largest collections of music manuscripts from the Elizabethan era.

He was also prolific in the production of children. All nine of *The monument to Edward, Thomas' son, on the north wall of the chancel in the church.*





The tomb of **Clement of Barningham**, who died on the 25th of July 1662.

them can be seen on the monument, together with his wife, Margaret Berney. They are

- William, who went on to live at Appleton and married Agnes Everard;
- Thomas, who married Mary Browne;
- Clement;
- John, who lived at Barningham;
- Wolstan;
- Edward, who lived at Horton, in Gloucestershire and married Frances Sydenham ;
- Anne;
- and Katherine and Frances, both of whom joined the Order of St Benedict in Brussels as nuns.

Margaret Berney, who came from Reedham – not too far from Blofield – was related to Margaret Mautby, the impressive wife of the first John Paston who wrote many of the Paston Letters and was instrumental in looking after the family's affairs while her husband was practising law in London.

Braydeston Church, less than a mile from Blofield Church, has a 14th century octagonal font bowl and a brass to Osbert Berney, who was wounded by an arrow at the siege of Caister Castle in 1469 when he assisted the Pastons in the castle's defence. The Berney family also paid 40 shillings for rebuilding the steeple there. So the Berneys and the Pastons were clearly close: their estates adjoined each other in this part of Norfolk.

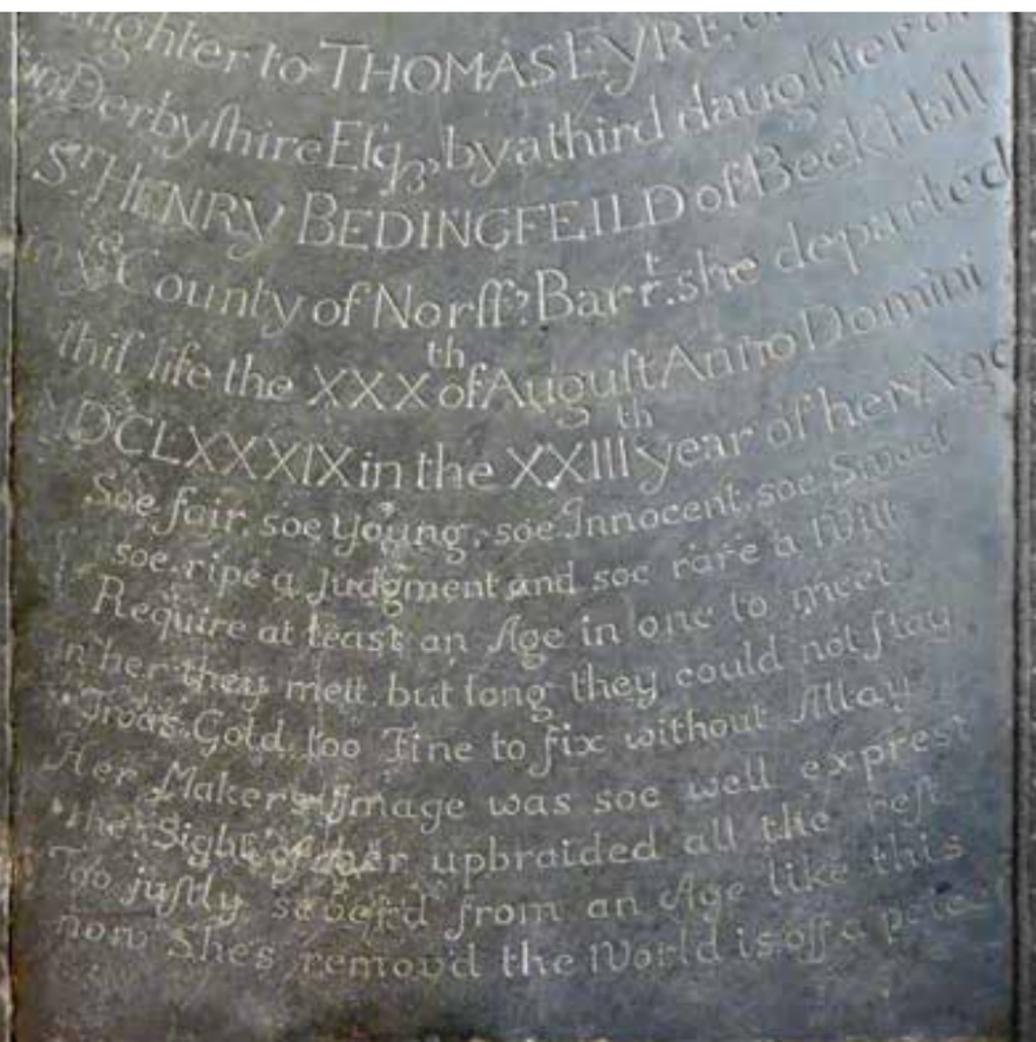
The Paston family's decision to become Roman Catholic resulted, oddly, in the triumphant survival of his line down to the present day, as Sir Henry Paston-Bedingfeld, patron of the Paston Heritage Society, is a direct descendant. But the monument in Blofield Church confirms their strong connection to the manor here – the Manor House, now vanished, was a former Bishop's Palace.

Edward, who built at Appleton rather than Binham for his main Norfolk home, had a son called Thomas, who was succeeded by three men, two of whom were buried at Blofield: **Clement of Barningham**, who died in 1662 in the reign of Charles II; and his son, another Edward (1660-1713), who died just before the advent of the Hanovers to the English throne.

This **second Edward** (later succeeded by a third) was therefore the great-grandson of the first one and lived at the same time that the main branch of the Pastons reached its apogee with Robert, the 1st Earl of Yarmouth (1631-82) and William, the 2nd Earl, whose death in 1732 brought that main Paston line to an end.

Not much is known of the Blofield line after the death of the third Edward, but descendants of Thomas's brothers William of Appleton and Edward of Horton (grandsons of William and Bridget) continued for a while until no male heirs were

*The tomb of **Margaret Eyre**, with the poem by John Dryden*





The tomb of **Colonel John Paston**

forthcoming. Appleton Hall itself was burned to the ground in 1707, rebuilt and later fell into ruin.

The second Edward is remembered especially because of the compliment he paid to his first wife, **Margaret Eyre**, who came from Derbyshire. She died very young in childbirth, and he arranged for the poet laureate John Dryden to write a moving poem to her which can still be seen on her tomb on the floor of the chancel.

*Soe fair, soe Young, soe Innocent, soe Sweet
soe ripe a Judgment and soe rare a Witt
Require at least an Age in one to meet
In her they mett, but long they could not stay
Twas Gold too Fine to fix without Allay
Her Maker's Image was so well exprest
the sight of her upbraided all the rest
Too justly sever'd from an Age like this
now She's remov'd the World is off a peice*

(Edward's successor was by his second wife, Jane Frampton.)

Margaret Eyre was in fact a descendant of Thomas's brother Edward of Horton, and so a distant relative of her husband. Her grandmother (1619-1702) was one of many Margaret Pastons, and she had married Henry Bedingeld, the 1st Baronet. Their son-in-law, Thomas Eyre, was Margaret Eyre's father.

By a peculiar twist of history the name of Paston continues today because of another Margaret Paston, believed to be a descendant of the second Edward's cousin John, who was married to Frances Tichborne.

Although there is a floor memorial to a Col **John Paston** in Blofield Church, the date of death given does not make sense for that John: at 1655, it is too early. Col John is



almost certainly one of the nine children of Edward and Margaret Berney.

The last Margaret Paston married the 6th Baronet Henry Bedingfeld in 1826 on condition that he joined her name with his. And that's why the current Sir Henry Paston-Bedingfeld, of Oxburgh Hall, is patron of the Paston Heritage Society.

More research into the Paston family tree is being carried out during the three-year *600PastonFootprints* project.

PASTON FOOTPRINTS

The Paston Footprints Project is working to provide information and display facilities as part of a wider project to enable community access to areas which specifically relate to the Paston Family in Norfolk.

www.paston600.co.uk

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