

## HOW THE FIRST 'PASTON LETTER' CAME TO BE WRITTEN IN SUFFOLK.

by COLIN RICHMOND

WHAT can be claimed (with some certainty) as the first 'Paston Letter' was written by a clerk for Amy Bowet at Wrentham on 28 March 1418. The letter is in French; the jottings on its dorse are in Latin: these are the reasons why the letter has not appeared in the Early English Text Society edition of *The Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*. The letter is at the British Library and is Additional MS 34889, folio 141; it was published by James Gairdner in the Library Edition of *The Paston Letters 1422-1509* (London, 1904), as the second of the more than one thousand items featuring in that edition.

I have written 'with some certainty'; 'with complete certainty' seems tempting fate as the addressee of Amy Bowet's letter is unknown. Initially, because the financial transactions recorded on the dorse involve Geoffrey Somerton, I had pondered that important Yarmouth attorney, Justice of the Peace, and MP as the letter's intended recipient. He, however, died in 1416, and it is therefore highly probable ('almost certain') that it was William Paston, Geoffrey Somerton's nephew and heir, whom Amy Bowet asked for a loan of 40 marks. Although William's father Clement Paston, who had married Geoffrey Somerton's sister Beatrice, did not die until 1419, he was not the man to ask for a loan of so substantial a sum. It is unlikely that Amy Bowet knew much if anything of him. Clement's only son William, on the other hand, was an up and coming lawyer who had been a JP since 1415. Amy undoubtedly knew of William's fairly meteoric rise as she was the daughter and heiress of Sir John Wythe of Smallburgh, Norfolk, who had died in 1387. Smallburgh is not many miles south of North Walsham and what we might call, albeit with historical licence, Paston Country. He was no doubt also the friend she calls him in her letter, being close to the family of her step-father Sir William Calthorp (whose executor he was to be in 1420), and her first husband, John Calthorp, Sir William's son and heir, who died of dysentery at the siege of Harfleur in 1415. We have secured the addressee of Amy's letter; we should also secure the date.<sup>1</sup>

Amy's letter is a politely standard request for a loan of 40 marks from the man she addresses as her 'trescher et mon tresfiabile amy'. It is required on behalf of her husband, 'monsieur mon baron', who is to serve the king in the company of Thomas Beaufort, duke of Exeter. The letter is dated 28 March. On 3 March 1418 the Duke had indentured with his brother Henry V for a year's service in France.<sup>2</sup> His retinue served at the siege of Rouen, which surrendered on 13 January 1419. Sir William Bowet was the husband on whose behalf Amy wrote to William Paston to help with the 'grandes expenses' of his preparations for war, 'entour son arraie en salvacion de son honour'. We know that he was at Rouen in Beaufort's retinue because William Worcester records him and his seven other Norfolk 'logeyng felowys' at the siege.<sup>3</sup>

Who was Sir William Bowet? He was a Cumbrian, who with his brother Richard married into East Anglian money, specifically Ufford money. Two brothers married two sisters, 'the last of the Uffords', the daughters of Robert Ufford and his wife Eleanor Felton. Richard married Ela Ufford, to whom we shall come in due course, and William married Joan Ufford. A third sister Sibyl, being a nun, did not count as an heiress. Ela and Joan inherited considerable property on the death of their mother Eleanor in 1400; their father Robert had died many years before, in 1382. Among these

properties were important estates in Sussex (to which we shall also come later), three Norfolk manors, on one of which, Horsford, Sir William Bowet mainly resided, and seven Suffolk manors: Burgh by Grundisburgh, Covehithe, Henstead, South Cove, Benacre, Thorington, and Wrentham. Richard Bowet does not come into further view; a background figure, who unlike her father does not appear by name on his wife's brass at Wrentham, he almost certainly died young and without issue. As her brass records, Ela Bowet died on 7 February 1400, that is 1401: she had not lived to enjoy her inheritance for long. After her death, Wrentham descended to her sister Joan and Joan's husband Sir William Bowet, for as Ela was buried at Wrentham we must assume it was part of her portion of the Ufford property, and that she lived there (no doubt with her widowed mother until 1400) and died there. Sir William, alive and well at Rouen in 1419, was dead by 1423. It is possible that he was captured at the battle of Baugé in March 1421 and that he died a prisoner (before he could be ransomed).<sup>4</sup>

Amy née Wythe was thus widowed for a second time. She had been left a widow by John Calthorpe's death at Harfleur in 1415. Married by 1418 to Sir William Bowet, she lost her second husband, possibly or probably another casualty of Henry V's war, before 1423, soon after which she married as her third husband Sir Henry Inglose, a bed-fellow of her second husband at the siege of Rouen, and possibly and probably his fellow prisoner after Baugé, as Sir Henry was captured at that battle fatal to the English cause in France.<sup>5</sup> She was a valuable wife but an encumbered one, bringing two children of her own to Sir Henry, William Calthorp and Sybil Bowet, and a step-daughter, Elizabeth, Sir William Bowet's daughter by Joan Ufford. The trials of these children at the hands of Sir Henry have been described on an earlier occasion.<sup>6</sup> About Elizabeth, nevertheless, we shall say a little more here, before turning to Ela Bowet née Ufford's brass at Wrentham.

The reason for the diversion is a document at the Norfolk Record Office which has not had the consideration it deserves. It is the account of Robert Brampton, the Receiver-General of Elizabeth, lady Dacre, for the accounting year 1455-6.<sup>7</sup> Diversion it may be, yet a study of it (if it does nothing else, and it does a good deal else) enables the writer to suggest a redating of another 'Paston Letter'. Elizabeth Bowet's wardship and marriage had been sold by her father to Thomas, lord Dacre of Gilsland, Cumberland: as the sole heiress to the Ufford inheritance she was sought after by a nobleman, a somewhat humble one but a nobleman nonetheless. Lord Dacre had duly married her to his son and heir, also Thomas.<sup>8</sup> The unhappy pair were kept out of the greater part of their Norfolk and Suffolk property by Sir Henry Inglose until a few years before his death in 1451. Sir Henry was as overwhelming a personality and as overpowering a stepfather as was his friend and neighbour Sir John Fastolf: Sir Henry resided at Dilham in Norfolk and Sir John at Caister in the same county. William Paston was a feoffee of the Ufford Suffolk estates along with Sir Henry himself and William Garneys of Geldeston, Norfolk. William Garneys was dead by 1425 so that the marriage of Elizabeth and Thomas Dacre must have taken place before that, probably before 1421, when William Garneys made his will.<sup>9</sup> Thus: Elizabeth Dacre was no longer young at the time of Robert Brampton's account of 1455-6. There is no mention of her husband in the account, only of their daughter Joan, wife of the Sussex gentleman Sir Richard Fiennes. It seems Thomas and Elizabeth Dacre were living distinct lives. Robert Osbern of Barking, Essex, who had married Sybil Bowet, and was at legal daggers drawn with Elizabeth, accused her in 1453 of no longer cohabiting with her husband. She told him it was none of his business whether she and her husband came together or not, but she did not deny the accusation. Joan Fiennes, their only child, and said to be twenty-six in 1459, was undoubtedly the fruit of their earlier, post-pubertal years together.

In 1455-6 Elizabeth was living in East Anglia, probably at Horsford rather than at Wrentham, as Robert Brampton did not account for the Suffolk and Norfolk estates, their revenues going directly to Elizabeth or her household officers. He accounted for £57 from Hurstpierpoint and Westmeston, her two estates in Sussex.<sup>10</sup> Wood sales amounted to £21.<sup>11</sup> Not included in that sum was the sale of the 'Bosco de Wrentham', discussed by Robert Brampton and other of Elizabeth's estate officers at Norwich in February 1456 with an unnamed buyer: there was a separate indenture of the sale between him and the lady. Total receipts, therefore, amounted to £78.

Outgoings came to £82. Legal expenses were considerable. Over £10 was spent on what one presumes was a collusive assize of novel disseisin between the lady and her feoffees for her Norfolk estates of Horsford, Great Hautbois, and Burgh St Margaret, Thomas, lord Scales, William Calthorp esquire, John Heydon, and Henry Lastingham, taken at Norwich on 29 July 1456.<sup>12</sup> This was property that needed protecting for Elizabeth's possession, certainly of Great Hautbois, was under challenge and two murders had been committed during the violence that had erupted in the years after Sir Henry Inglose's death in 1451. The murder that concerns us was of Master Henry Bowet, a Lincolnshire cleric, who, having attested to Elizabeth's right to the estates was murdered while returning to London. A Sir Nicholas Bowet had appealed Robert Ufford of Barking, Essex, of the murder. The 'matiere is piteuous' wrote Thomas Bourghier, Archbishop of Canterbury and Chancellor, to John Paston and William Norwich, probably (or possibly) on 7 September 1455, asking them to intervene with the sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk to hold up proceedings 'so that resonable meanes maye be founden to save the saide Robert harmelesse'. He had also written to Sir Nicolas Bowet 'for a convenient treetie to be taken in that behalve'.<sup>13</sup> In Robert Brampton's account Elizabeth is to be discovered paying the expenses of Sir Nicholas's appeal, so it is likely that he was acting on her behalf. There were plenty of other costs to be borne in this affair, well over £4 in all: for expenses in King's Bench during Hillary term 1456 and on the fees of attorney in Chancery during all four legal terms. In addition 28s 4d was spent on a suit involving the Prior of Butley, Suffolk.

Elizabeth's personal expenditure in London, however, was greater than her legal costs. Silks and woollens (including crimson kersey and russet for her daughter in Sussex), wine, dates and spices, pins and laces were purchased. Debts of £15 to Edmund Redknap of London mercer, of £1 to Richard Alley of London skinner, and of 25s to John Langwith of London, the husband of Ellen Langwith silkwoman of London, were settled. The Langwiths may have had to resort to the law to recover the debt, Elizabeth's legal costs in a case involving Ellen being 5s.<sup>14</sup> The most important purchase of the year was a new saddle for John Fiennes esquire. It cost 16s, was wrapped in canvas and dispatched (with a trace-harness) to Horsham St Faith at a further cost of 2s 4d. Was John a grandson? Was he perhaps at school at Horsham St Faith priory? If so, one hopes he appreciated its justly celebrated wall paintings. Mutton and beef were purchased locally, while Elizabeth also patronized a local apothecary, Ralph Pygot of Norwich. Extravagance does not seem in evidence. Overspending of under £5 would surely have met with the approval of the exacting Mr Micawber.

Elizabeth was a generous woman and an honest employer. There was an annuity of £10 for her daughter Joan Fiennes and a gift to her much abused step-sister Sybil Osbern of 10s, despite the apparently just grievances Elizabeth had against Sybil's husband Robert. There was also the 66s 8d paid to Otwell Worsley esquire on 12 November 1456, when after the auditing of accounts in London, this and other debts were settled.<sup>15</sup> It is a North Country name: was Otwell a Dacre retainer who came and went between estranged husband and wife? Elizabeth paid her officers handsomely.

John Heydon, the chief steward of all her courts and lands, received 66s 8d (for doing nothing one must suppose), Thomas Cryne, the deputy steward (who did all the work), had £2, John Fincham, a Norfolk lawyer she retained, £1, and Robert Brampton himself a hefty £4.

John Fincham ought to have more than part of a footnote, but he will not get it here.<sup>16</sup> Thomas Cryne, on the other hand, as the writer of the third 'Paston Letter' to feature in this piece, gains a place in the text itself. Thomas worked hard for Elizabeth, lady Dacre (and for John Heydon) in 1455-6; he appears to have been working even harder on behalf of Anthony Woodville, earl Rivers (and for John Heydon's son, Henry) in 1482. His letter to John Paston III, now that we know Thomas Cryne slightly better, is worth citing at some length.<sup>17</sup> It is a letter of purpose: a refusal has to be made, an excuse offered for it, and a demand for money made. Those are reasons sufficient for the undeniably obsequious address: 'Righ wurshepfulle one of my most kyndest and tenderest and undeserved most contynuell maister; I recomaunde me to you.' Then, after the refusal, 'And where your trusty maistershep willethe me to come to Norwich, pleas it you I may not', came the excuse:

for ever as in long tyme passed on Thursday in Esterne Weke begynne Maister Heydons courtes and letes, the vieu of the halfyere of the houshold accompte, the cloyng up fynally of the accomptes of alle baillivis so that the resceyvoir may make his fynall accompte, which wille extende in alle to xiiij dayes and more; and to thys season is my dueté, and elles I shulde not fail your pleasure.

It is a good thing that relations between Pastons and Heydons had improved since the days of John Paston III's and Henry Heydon's fathers: one can readily imagine John Paston I's apoplectic response on receiving the news that John Heydon's business was to be given precedence over his own.

It is in the second paragraph that Thomas Cryne makes the demand. It was for customary payments owing at the earl's manor of Hickling from property held by John Paston III at Somerton and Winterton, 'late Ser John Fastolfes' and by Margaret Paston, John's mother for 'Mawtebyes in Waxham', 'wherein', wrote Thomas, 'I beseeche you provide, for I have done therein hertofore asfer as I myght, &c.' But it is Thomas's next sentence that exercises the historian's imagination, stretches it even: 'What it meneth, my lord is sette sore to approwement and husbondry.' The dilettante and sophisticated Anthony Woodville an improving landlord? The quirkily devout and highly literate Earl Rivers devoting himself to husbandry? The foppish overseer of the household of the elder of the Princes in the Tower as conventional a late fifteenth-century landowner as any of his fellows? It is disappointing: one thought better of him. Alas, it is confirmed by the clause in his will in which he asked that the nuns of Blackborough priory in Norfolk, close to his country house at Middleton, be recompensed for his usurpation of their common grazing rights in a fen he had enclosed. I suppose all that Thomas Cryne's information does is prove a Proustian point: we cannot genuinely gauge the character of a friend or acquaintance because we are only ever likely to encounter one or two aspects of his or her character. It was Monsieur Verdurin's generosity to Saniette that brought about this reflection on the part of the narrator in *Remembrance of Things Past*. It tallies with the strictures of St James about rushing to judgement. Not that historians pay any heed. Nor will those who pose as such: the mythical Anthony Woodville will outlast all attempts to render him in the round.

It is time to conclude with a short paragraph about a different matter: Ela Bowet's brass at Wrentham. I have said it was remarkable. It struck me as such on first encountering it, and, although

I am neither knowledgeable about memorial brasses nor a Latinist, two things made me stop and stare: the quality of the brass itself and its stylish inscription. The latter is commonplace in its celebration of Ela's father and not her husband, if unusual in not mentioning him at all, heiresses being prone to recall the quality of the family they sprang from, especially if they married beneath them. The heraldry of Margaret Paston's vanished tomb at Mautby, Norfolk, is a perfect illustration of the theme. Ela's inscription is uncommon in its brevity (economical Latin being a sure guide to the erudition of the writer), and in its poetic last line: 'May she live eternally travelling above the stars'.<sup>18</sup> Nigel Saul, who does know about brasses and is an accomplished Latinist, must have the final word. He says in a letter to the writer of 15 August 2006:

Stylistically the brass is something of a curiosity in that it is a product of one of the minority London workshops, London style 'C'... By marriage Ela was related to Henry Bowet, bishop of Bath and Wells and archbishop of York. I would not mind betting that it was Bowet who commissioned the brass. This would explain both the minority workshop, which was patronised by a number of Richard II's courtiers, and the highly unconventional inscription.

Thus, the county has two more claims to historical fame: the first 'Paston Letter' and a strikingly original example of an English memorial brass.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For the facts of the foregoing paragraph see Richmond 1990, pp. 13, 20-21, 33, 214-5.

<sup>2</sup> Harriss 1988, p. 101.

<sup>3</sup> Richmond 1990, p. 207.

<sup>4</sup> For this paragraph, see Middleton-Stewart 2001, p. 249; Jenkins 1961, pp. 350-1; Richmond 1990, pp. 207, 214-5. It occurs to me only now that the purchase of the wardship and marriage of her son William by John Calthorp, by Amy and Sir William in May 1421 from the Crown *via* Robert, lord Willoughby, might relate to the raising of Sir William's ransom, that is, if there was one to be raised. On the other hand, as they had to pay 700 marks, it might not. Sir William was, however, and for whatever reason, in dire need of cash, for he sold to Thomas, lord Dacre, a Cumbrian like himself, not only the wardship and marriage of Elizabeth, his daughter by Joan Ufford, but the remainder of his Cumbrian patrimony, that is, the half that should have descended to his other daughter (by Amy Wythe) Sybil: see Richmond 1990, p. 218.

<sup>5</sup> Richmond 1990, p. 207.

<sup>6</sup> Richmond 1990, pp. 215-22.

<sup>7</sup> NRO, Norwich, NRS 18533, 33D5. It is barely mentioned in Richmond, p. 211, fn. 30: it is there misdated by a year. Was Robert Brampton a Cumbrian? The town of Brampton is hard by Gilsland.

<sup>8</sup> Richmond 1990, p. 211. Thomas died in 1458, Elizabeth in 1459. Richard Fiennes was created Lord Dacre in 1459 and fought for Edward IV at the battle of Towton two years later. He died in 1483.

<sup>9</sup> For William Garneys, see Richmond 1990, pp. 141-7.

<sup>10</sup> I have often rounded off the figures in the account to the nearest pound. The Sussex property, along with Wrentham itself apparently, came to the Uffords on Edmund de Ufford's marriage to Sybil, daughter and heir of Sir Simon Pierrepont, in the first half of the fourteenth century: Jenkins 1961, p. 351.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Baker of Lewes had £10 worth of wood 'apud Golbrigge'. Adam Ovy had 103 oaks 'infra parcum de Denney' for £6 13s 4d in April 1456; another 35 oaks from there at another time

for 40s; and 26 cartloads of underwood and cut timber 'infra le Ryden' for 13s. Thomas Enfield paid 33s 4d for 60 oaks 'infra les Courtbushes' and Richard West, the lady's parker at Hurstpierpoint, 7s 4d in part payment of 11s 8d for ash and alder out of the park there. The 'parcum de Denney' must be Danny Park between Hurstpierpoint and Hassocks in East Sussex.

<sup>12</sup> Inevitably, the particulars were on a schedule attached to the account and now missing. Another 5s had been spent on sealing documents in the presence of Lord Scales in December 1455. A further 8d Robert Brampton had distributed in 'bribes' to lawyers on the actual day of the assize at Norwich, presumably the equivalent of the modern 'free lunch'.

<sup>13</sup> Richmond 1990, p. 218. Bourgchier's letter (Davis II, no. 562) is the 'Paston Letter' I wish to redate. In spite of the persuasiveness of the arguments of Gairdner and Davis, I am inclined, because of the nature of the legal expenses of Sir Nicholas Bowet in the accounts, to put it a year earlier. William Norwich, who was to be elected sheriff of Norwich on 8 September, the day immediately following the date of the letter, is not addressed as such: would he not have been if the letter had been written on 7 September 1456, his last day in office? On the other hand, the expenses in the accounts might be taken to indicate that the appeal of murder had only been lodged in the course of 1455-6; if that were so, then clearly Bourgchier's intervention has to be dated to 7 September of the latter year. It is also tempting to think that the 'Robert Offord of Berking' of Bourgchier's letter was Robert Osbern of Barking, Essex, who had adopted the surname Ufford in hopes of getting the former Ufford estates, but in the accounts the case in Chancery is termed 'versus Osberne et Ufford'.

<sup>14</sup> For the couple, see Barron and Davies 2003.

<sup>15</sup> The audit in London involved a degree of travel, the East Anglian officials riding into Sussex before they went to London, the auditors coming up directly from Sussex, presumably with them. The overall cost came to 27s.

<sup>16</sup> Richmond 1990, p. 196, fn. 160.

<sup>17</sup> Davis II, no. 794, of 10 April 1482. Thirty to forty years seems to have been the standard working life of petty officials like Thomas Cryne: Richmond 1981, pp. 206-7. Anthony Woodville's will is NA Probate 11/8 f. 316: 'I will in no wyse that the Nonnes of Blakborough be hurt in such Londes of theirs as lieth within Roche Fenne of Myddyltone which I late closid.'

<sup>18</sup> Middleton-Stewart 2001, plate 24.

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