

【論文】

## What *the Paston Letters* Tell about Land Owning in the 15th Century England

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パストン家書簡集に垣間見る  
15世紀イングランドにおける土地所有の実態

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**Summary:** This article attempts to analyze certain terms on land owning and farm workers (= tenants) which occur in *the Paston Letters and Papers*. The purpose is to reveal, through the close examination of these terms, some aspects of the land owning system and the status of farm workers in the 15th century England.

Jacob (1961) points out that the manorial system of England was declining in the 15th century. How do the terms on land and manors which appear in *the Paston Letters* reflect his observation? I pick up several terms relating to the land owning system in the England of Middle Ages and examine their distribution in the letters; i.e. the terms ‘villein, serf, demesne, bond, rent, and tenant.’

**Key Word:** rent, land, Paston, tenant, bond

### 0. Introduction

This article attempts to analyze certain terms on land owning and farm workers (= tenants) which occur in *the Paston Letters and Papers*. The purpose is to reveal, through the close examination of these terms, some aspects of the land

owning system and the status of farm workers in the 15th century England.

*The Paston Letters and Papers* are the collection of the private letters written by and to the three generations of the Paston family. The family rapidly went up the social ladder from humble beginnings to the status of a landlord in the 15th century England. The law was their family business. This is why the papers include a lot of legal documents, such as wills and petitions.

The lawyers in the family worked as legal advisers for the celebrities in the society. Above all, they served the honorable old soldier and knight, Sir Thomas Fastolf. The knight trusted the Paston family so much that he bequeathed them a lot of land. This generous bequest, however, caused the family to get involved in serious law-suits on land possession.

The facts above make the letters the excellent probe with which we can examine the changing society of England in this period of turmoil, caused by wars after wars.

### **1. The Ambition of the Paston Family: from a bondman to a landlord**

Who were the Pastons? What was their origin? N.Davis Vol.I (1971:xli-xlii) cites a very interesting document which sheds some light on this mystery. The scholar assumes that the manuscript was composed ‘after William I’s death in 1444 but before John I died in 1466’ by an unknown contemporary author.

The memo has the title “A Remembraunce of the wurshypfull Kyn and Auncetrye of Paston, borne in Paston in Gemyngham Soken”. This anonymous author describes the man who founded the Paston family, Clement, his wife, his child William and William’s son John as follows:

Fyrst there was one Clement Paston dwellyng in Paston, and he was a good pleyn husbond, and lyvyd upon hys lond yt he had in Paston, and

kept yron a Plow alle tymes in ye yer, and sumtyme in Barlysell to Plowes.

The seyde Clement yede att on Plowe both wyntre and somer, and he rodd to mylle on the bar horsbak wyth hys corn undre hym, and brought hom mele ageyn under hym.

And also drove hys carte with dyvers cornys to Wynterton to selle, as a good hysbond ought to do.

Also he had in Paston a fyve skore or a vij skore acrys of lond at the most, and myche yrof bonde lond to Gemyngham-halle wt a lytyll pore watyr-mylle rennyng by a lytylle ryver yre, as it aperyth yre of old tyme.

Oyr Lyvelode ne manneris had he non yre ne in none othr place.

And he weddyd Geffrey of Somerton (qwhos trew srome ys Goneld) Sistr qwych was a bond womanne to qwom it is not unknowyn (to ye Pryore of Bromholm and Bakton also, as yt is seyde) yf yt men wyll inquire.

And as for Geffrey Somerton he was bond also, to whom, &c. he was both a Pardoner and an Attorney; and yan was a god werd for he gadred many pens and halfpens, and yrewyth he made a fayre Chapelle att Somerton as it aperyth, &c.

Also the seyde Clement had a sone William qwhych yt he sett to scole, and oftn he borrowyd mony to fynde hym to scole; and aftr yt he yede to Courte wyth ye helpe of Geffrey Somerton hese uncle and lerned the lawe, and yre bygatte he myche good and yanne he was made a Srjaunt, and aftrward made a Justice, and a ryght connyng mane in ye lawe.

And he purchasyd myche lond in Paston, and also he purchasyd the moyte of ye vth parte of ye manr of Bakton callyd oyr Latymers or Stywardys or Huntyngheld qwhyche moyte strechyd into Paston, and so wyth yt and wyth a nothr parte of ye seyde fyvepartys he hath Senery in

Paston but no manr place; and therby wold John Paston sone to ye seyde Wylliam make hym selfe a Lordschype yre to ye Duke of Lancastrs grete hurte.

And the seyde John wold and hath untrewly inCESSYD hym be one ten~nte as wher that the Pryr of Bromholm borrowyd mony of the seyde William for to paie wttall his Dymes, ye seyde William wuld not lend it hym, but the seyde Pryr wold morgage to ye seyde Wylliam one John Albon ye seyde Prowris bondmane dwellyng in Paston, qwyche was a styffe Cherle and a Threfty mane, and wold not obeye hyme unto ye seyde Wylliam, and for yt cause and for evyll wyll yt ye seyde Wylliam had un to hym he desyryd hym of the Prior, and nowe afr ye deth of the seyde Willm ye seyde John Albon deyed, and nowe John Paston son to the seyde William by force of the seyde morgage sent for the son of the seid John Albon to Norwyche. (Davis I pp.xli-xlii)

The following points in the memo are particularly noteworthy.

- (1) Clement was a 'plain husband' with no manors.
- (2) His wife was a bondwoman as well as her brother, Geoffrey Somerton.
- (3) Clement's son William went to a law school with the financial help of his uncle Geoffrey.
- (4) William practiced the law and bought a lot of land with the money he earned.
- (5) The villeinage still existed. The bond tenant John Albon was mortgaged to William by the Prior of Bromholm.

## **2. Historical Background**

According to A. L. Poole (1955:44), as early as in the twelfth century villein services were often commuted for money payment, i.e. there was a large and

## What *the Paston Letters* Tell about Land Owning in the 15th Century England

growing class of tenants who rendered no services or only insignificant services, but instead pay rents. McKisack (1959:341) says that in the fourteenth century the villeinage was already loosing everywhere, and the demarcation of the agricultural population into three main strata - freeholders, tenant-farmers, and landless laborers-- began. E.F.Jacob (1961:370-371) describes the decline of the manorial system in England in the fifteenth century as follows:

‘from about 1390 and during the next century, the seignorial estate was breaking down, and being succeeded by the farms of the successful peasants and of the gentry.’ (‘61:370)

‘English manorial economy had now entered upon a period of leases replacing customary service; the lord, secular or ecclesiastical, no longer exploits the demesne, but is a rentier, receiving what is collected for him by his steward or his agents. Between 1350 and 1450 tenurial serfdom received its quietus, either by the villein, if he did not fly, becoming a wage labourer, or by the consequent eviction of the villeins through deliberate raising of rents and through fines upon entry.’ (‘61:371)

### 3. Analysis of Terms

(1) The words ‘villein’ and ‘serf’ never occur in the letters<sup>1</sup>. The word ‘tenant’ completely replaced these words.

(2) The word ‘demesne’ occurs in the following places.

DEMESNE (demesne, demene, demen, demeane)

p252/419<sup>2</sup> late beyng seised in his demene as of fee of dyuers maners, londis, and tenementes

p387/623 wyth th’appurtenaunces callyd colneys, othyre-wys callyd whynnes in carleton, in hys demene as off fee;

p387/623 seased in theyre demeane as off fee;

p814/456 vpon without the said aunccyen demene, and so ye cannot lose it.

p437/020 item, the same william held no londes ne tenementes in demeane ne in seruice of our seid souerein lord,

p900/560 with th'appurtenauncez in ther demesne as in fee to the vse and behoff of the seid john paston and his heirez;

(3) There are instances of the word 'bond'. Below is the complete list of their occurrences.

TENEMENT p022/035 g.b.and a.g.heywardys,tokyn a dystresse of j.j.on the bond tenement of a.paston calde reynaldys in c.the xxviiij 3ere of thys kyng, and w.goodwyn, baly of c.,

BONDAGE p092/169 and jnfurme myn lord how myn broder qwas all-way in possesscion till he was put owt for the mater off bondage,

BONDLY p182/301 as they huld bondly of the lordshyp,and so to dystrayn hem and trobell hem that they shold be wery of there part. (PL182)

TENANTRY p196/331 item,yf it please you,there ys on harald of haynford hath bought a bond tenantry of yourys of on john whyte,

BONDMAN, BONDWOMAN p229/382 provided allewey that the seid thomas shall take non avantage ne goodes of the bondemen and women belongyng to the seid maners save onely her chyvage,sutez to courtes,and amercymentes, (PL229)

MAN p470/058 tyl jn-to that tyme that it was soyled be a bond man. than he asked me how, (PL470)

GROUND p470/059, and he knewe neuer that seyde lond was cleymed for bond ground. (PL470)

MAN p470/059 and he asked how, and seyde he was amercyed for as meche as he chasticed a servante of hes and a bondeman of 3ovre, (PL470)

MAN p488/082 i answered therto, as for olde briggeman i seide that it was his

will that my maister shulde haue his good, be-cause he was a bonde-man and hadde no childer; (PL470)

GROUND p618/224 come vpon your bonde grounde and brak down the gardeyn dike of the seid lyghtfotes

MAN p720/348 gyven vppon the condempnacion a-yenst hall, that he claymed fore hys bond man,

MAN p752/389 som of the same quest that founde you bondeman shall wisse ayens you. syr thomas howys commyth to london,

MAN p897/551 they shewed divers great evidences and court rolles, how that they and their ancetors had been possessed of a court and seniory in the towne of paston, and of many and sundry bondmen, sithen the time that no mind is to the contrary; (PL897)

HOLDER, MAN p897/551 and how that agnes paston, wife to the said william paston, father to the said john, william, and clement, in title of her dower, is in possession of bondholders and also of bondmen, (PL897)

MAN p897/551 whose ancetors have been bondmen to the ancetors of the said john paston sithen the time that no minde is to the contrary. (PL897)

TENEMENT, LAND, RENT OR SERVICES, FREE OR p925/607 in fee sympille for euer, a tenement called methis, otherwyse called holkham, wyth alle the londes and tenementes, rentes and seruyces, free or bond, and wyth all the apportenaunces ther-to belongyng. (PL925)

(4) The word 'rent' often occurs. Below is shown the context the word appears together with one example.

ALLOW p029/043 item, the seyde bertholomew elis seyth that the seyde reseuore wold not alowe the rent in trunche nor the mercymenty for my sute to the curt.

AND FARM p066/117 item, at the same jurne i woulde richard calle chulde haue redy a bylle in a longe rolle of the tenore of eche of myn tenauntys and fermorrys, as well of the quantite of the londe as rent & ferme, wretyn to-gyddre and sumyd wyth a gret spase folowyng. (PL066035)

ANNUITY AND, RENT CHARGE p070/124 cxx mark of annuite and rent charge, of annuites and rentes charge, (PL070)

ARREAR p048/077 and theroppon the sayd ryotours departid. item, the sayd robert lethum, on the monday nest after esterne day the same yere, toke from on john wilton iiiij neet for rent arere, as he said- (PL048073)

ASK p014/027 geffreie axid palmere why the rentte was notte axid in myn husbonddis tyme, and palmere seyde, for he was a grete man and a wyse man of the lawe, and that was the cawse men wolde not axe hym the rentte. (PL0140015)

BY WHAT p066/117 or ellys vpon ther owyn tenauntrys holdyn of me by copye or ellys holde of me frely, and by what rent as neye as 3e maye, and whedre it was holdyn of me by calcote halle fee or ellys by freton halle fee; (PL066009)

BY YEAR OF, AND SERVICE p726/353 and amending to his tenement contenyng x acres callyd greystenement in basyngham, wheche is chargid to the manour of basyngham with xij s v d. ob. by yeer of rent and seruice;

BY, PAY p530/123 he hahyth xxx acres lande or more by the seyde rent, and whyht ought to pay me othyr rent more by myne evidense. more over y pray you, cosyn, that i may speke with you or y ryde, and that on thursday by the ferthest, (PL530)

CLAIM p872/518 and after thys he proferyd me to selle swafeld halle, be the qwech he cleymyd the rente a-forne seyde, and for dred of more lore and desyryng of pees the seyde williem bowte the seyde halle place xx li. more than it was worth. (PL872)



DISCHARGE p252/421 and other had of the feoffment of rauf lord suydeley and other such, and the hole estat as the seid reuerend fader and lord bewchamp have or had reson of the same feoffment discharged of any rent, reconusaunce, execucion, (PL252)

DISTRAIN FOR, OR FARM, ASK, RENT DAY p073/133 item, that as for distreyn for rent or ferm, thow the dewk had tytill, as he hath not, he may non ask til the next rent day after his entre, that is michelmes. (PL073)

DISTRAIN FOR, PAY, AND FARM p131/228 as for herry goneld,he was dystreynyd 3yesterday for rent and ferm,and he must pay it to-morn,xxij s., of ell lesyn his dystresse.they gadder mony fast of all the tenawntys.al the tenawntys ben chargyd to pay al here rent and ferm be fastyngong sonday. (PL131)

DUE p590/193 i can no newe tidinges but that myn maister hathe put his matier of issabells in scroudeby and the rente of the priour of norwiche dieu to heilesdon in your hande and thomas grene. ye shal the next weke haue the evidences. (PL590)

FEOFEE IN p925/606 whervpon the seid syr john fastolf made the seid william paston on of his seid feoffes in all his seyde maneres, londes, and tenementes, rentes, and seruyces wyth-in this seid reame of ynglond, (PL925)

FOR p924/605 and for this rent ab... the prior and the monkys there shewyd ... seyde john the same moneth and tyme thes obitis foloyng tightled in the martilage ... (PL924)

FOR, CHARGE p540/134 yn the ende of thys terme y suppose to be at london and yn-to west contre. my maistre wryteth to yow for a rent of viij li. of annuite charged of a touneshyp called batham wyly, that maister scope shall be benefited yn the ry3t of it. (PL540)

FOR, PAYING p898/552 and for the rente of the same londe a-3en payyng to me, as 3e may se be the dede that ys in 3oure kepyng vj d. be the 3ere, iiij 3ere on-payyt, summa ij s.; (PL898)

FOR, RENTIS RESOLUTIS p614/218 that i haue receyved here i haue payd out for rentis resolutis, weche drawith iij li. and more. (PL614)

FREE p667/277 for ther hath ben straunge rewle bothe in woodsales and sales of londes holde at wylle for fre rent,

GATHER UP p129/225 the lord moleyns man gaderyth up the rent at gresham a gret pace,

GATHER UP, RENTES FARMES p460/047 and that my lord of york shuld wyte vn-to hese tenaunce that they wold suffyre peny cookes officers go and gadere vp hys rentes fermes with-jnne the seyd dukes lordsheps. (PL460014)

GATHER, AND COMMODITIES p344/562 and the rentez and commoditeez of the same truly and dwly gedered (PL344)

GATHER, AND FARM p618/223 also john warles schal gather the rente and ferme of basyngham this yere. (PL618)

GATHERING p122a/209 in gaderyng of rentes ther or other-wise,eny commaunde-ment or wrytting by vs ro you yeven or made herbefore to the contrare herof natwithstanding; (PL122A)

GO IN MY RENTS p208/351 but as fore the sarsenet, i woold haue yt and yt mythe before i goo in my rentys.

GRANT, RENT CHARGE p097/174 wyth-owte ony reles, estate, feffement, or ony graunte of rent charge or annuyte of them or of ony of them a-for thys mad ar had are here-after desyryng to be had or made to ar by them or to ony othere contrarie to this presentes. (PL097)

HAVE AND HOLD p925/608 his eyres and assygnys, the seid lond, rent, and service for euer more. and vtterly be there dede and ... and dyscharged the seid william paston, his eyres and his assygnys for yeldyng of payment of ony ... service, (PL925)

IN p692/314 item, the capteyn sent certeyn of his meyny to my chamber in your rentes,

INDUED WITH p686/300 for the soule of sir john fastolff, knyght, thei to be indued with certeyn rent and otherwise aftir th'entent and effect

KEEP AWAY RENTAL, RECEIVE p872/519 and also he keypyth away a rental fro hym that he xuld receyuyn by xvj s. of rente be 3ere. (PL872)

LONGING p925/608 tenementes, rentes, seruyces at ony tyme afore or than longyng to the seid tenement or owt ... a manere called hornynghall, LOSE, AND SERVIE p067/119 be whiche cleyme and pretence the seyde paston taryeth and is lettyd and inqueetyd of the takyng of the profettes of the seyde manere of walcotte, and hath forbore and lost the seyde c s. of rent and odre service x yere and more, (PL067)

LOSING p698/322 for losyng of the rent this yer passed. (PL698)

MAKE ESTATE p027/040 and the seid william clopton shall do his feffees make a lawfull estate to the seid william of londes, tenementz, rentz, and seruysez to the yerly value of xl li. ouer all chargez born to haue and hold to hym terme of his lyfe (PL027012)

OF p540/134 ye have nede fare fayre wyth hym, for he ys full daungerouse when he wille. y gate hym gode evidenses of the seyde rent that my maister ne my lady had neuere, and he can not know it &c. (PL540)

OF YEARLY p603/202 with that the seid paston shuld do morteyzen a sufficient lyvelode by annuyte of yerly rente or of lond to mayntene and

OF, SERVICES, p387/622 ande off all the londis, tenementes, rentes, services and lybertes, wyth ther appurtenaunces,

OWED, PAY p294/488 also the revenues of the said landes by the space of iij yeres to the value of vij li. the same my lord the duke receyued and the owt rentes of the same never payed; whiche great trouble was like to be the vndoing of your said suppliant. (PL294)

OWED, PAY, DUE p294/488 wherupon your said besecher continued in possession but half a yere, at whiche time he was chargid in reparacions to the

somme of c marc, and payed the owt rentes dewe by the space of the said iij yere to the somme of xl li. (PL294)

PARDON OF p726/353, and also he pardonyd me, your seid besecher, of v d. of rent for half a rode callyd brettes yerd in recompense, help, (PL726)

PAY p014 027 and now he hathe suffrid the corne to ben with-sette for viij s.of rentte to gymmyngham,wich yowre fadre paide nevere. (PL014013)

RECEIVE p152/255 saue he tolde hym that he receyvyd onys j c s. of the same rent. (PL152)

RECOVER, OBTAIN, AND SERVICE p067/119 hat recouered and opteyned the seyde c s. rent and othere seruice wyth the maner of parham in suffolk

RESERVE p009/016 ferther-more the note of the condicion of the reseruacion of the rent is not yet noted.

RESPITE p268/448 and as for the rent in rakhythe longyng to runham, i had levere itt wer respityd than that ther scholde as yitt be any troble for itt.

SEIZE, POSSESS p530/123 and ye ij tapers of wax of ij lbs. wyghte by the space of xvij yere, that mounthyth xxj s. valued in money; and the lordes of the seyde maner beyng before me, and y yn my tyme, have been seised and possessed of the seyde rent. (PL530)

SELL, BARGAIN p925/608 wyth all the seid aportenaunces ... sold and bargayned to the seid william paston alle suche londes, rentes, and seruyces as the seid sur john fastolf .. or be the ryght of ony manere that he or ony man to his vse had in possession, (PL925)

TAKE DISTRESS FOR, PAY, AND FARM p182/301 please it you to wyte that on satour-day last youre seruauntys naunton, wykys,and othere were at drayton and there toke a dystresse for the rent and ferm that was to pay, to the nombre of lxxvij nete, (PL182)

TAKE, RECEIVE, HOLD, RENT CHARGE p070/123 and also be your letteres patentz to licence the sayd prystes to take and receyve and to holde to theym and

to ther successours the sayd annuite, rente charge, vj acres of lond, auowsons, and the seyde iiij parte of the said mancion for euer, (PL070)

WITH p925/607 in fee sympille for euer, a tenement called methis, otherwyse called holkham, wyth alle the londes and tenementes, rentes and seruyces, free or bond, and wyth all the apportenaunces ther-to belongyng, (PL925)

WITH, AND SERVICES p387/622 all-so the seyde john paston now compleynaunt seyth that john paston, fadyre off the same john, was seased off the manere callyd hollwellhalle wyth th'appurtenaunces in estodenham joyntly wyth all the londis, tenementes, rentes, (PL387)

WITHHOLD p530/123 please you to here that the pryore and convent of norwyche have wythhalden certeyn rent for landes that they halden of me wythynne my maner of haylysdon, (PL530)

YEARLY p547/140 i pray yow that ye lyke to informe my lord how it is appoynted atwix the priour of the seid hous and me that my title of xxv marc. of yerly rente is put in the ordynaunce of yow and fyncheham, (PL547)

Richmond (1990:24) says as follows:

... 'Gadir the rent' is less frequent than 'Aske rente' or 'Aske the ferme': presumably there was a difference. Once there is 'Aske the rente and arreste Smythe.'

The result of this investigation shows that there are five instances of 'ask' and 'gather'; i. e., there appears to be no difference in frequency of their occurrence.

## Appendix 1

### CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

- 1378 William Paston I born  
1399 Henry IV king  
1400 Chaucer d.?  
1413 Accession of Henry V  
1419 Clement Paston I.d.  
1420 William Paston I married Agnes Barry  
1421 William Paston I serjeant-at-law  
    John Paston I born 10 Oct.  
    Henry VI b.  
1422 Accession of Henry VI.  
1425 William Paston I's earliest surviving letter  
    Edmund Paston I born  
1429 Henry VI crowned at Westminster  
    Elizabeth Paston born  
1431 Joan of Arc burnt  
1436 By this date William Paston I legal adviser to Fastolf  
    William Paston II born  
1440 John Paston I married Margaret Mautby by 4 Nov.  
1442 Clement Paston II born  
    John Paston II born  
1444 John Paston III born  
    William Paston I died 13 Aug.  
1449 Edmund Paston I died  
1458 Elizabeth Paston marries Robert Poyings  
1459 William Paston III born  
    Fastolf died 5 Nov.  
    John Paston I an executor  
1461 Edward IV proclaimed king 4 Mar.  
1465 John Paston I in Fleet prison, June  
1466 John Paston I leaves prison, Jan.  
    John Paston I died 22 May  
1469 Margery Paston married Richard Calle  
1471 Edward IV enters London 21 May  
    Henry VI murdered in the Tower the same night  
1477 Clement Paston II died by Aug.  
1479 Agnes Paston died  
1483 Edward IV died 9 Apr.

## What *the Paston Letters* Tell about Land Owning in the 15th Century England

Richard, Duke of Gloucester becomes king  
1485 Henry Tudor takes the crown  
1496 William Paston II died  
1504 Edmund Paston II d.  
John Paston III died 28 Aug.

(Richmond '90:xvi-xxi, Davis '71:lxiv-lxxiv)

### Appendix 2

The Paston genealogy

Clement Paston I (d.1419) = Beatrice Somerton

|  
|

William I (1378-1444) = Agnes 1420 d.1479

|  
|

John I = Margaret 1440 d.1484

1421-66

|  
|

-- John II 1442-79

-- John III = Margery Brews 1477 d.1495  
1444-1503

-- Edmund II d. by 1504

-- Walter c. 1456-79

-- William III c.1459

-- Margery = Richard Calle 1469  
before 1450 - probably by 1479

-- Anne = William Yelverton  
d. 1494-5

Edmund I (1426-49)

William II = Lady Anne Beaufort. third daughter of Edmund, Duke of Somerset (k.1455)  
1436-96

Clement II (1442- by 1479)

Elizabeth (c.1429-88) = (1) Sir Edward Poyings killed 1461

(2) Sir George Browne executed 1483

(Richmond '90:xxii)

**Notes:**

- 1 The first letter written by the Paston family was from Willaim I to John Staynford in 1425, and the last one was by William Paston IV to John III circa in 1495. The first letter written to the Paston family was from the Prior of Bromholm to William I in 1425, and the last one was from William Oclely to William in 1520. This survey is the result of the complete scrutiny of the Davis edition.
- 2 The first letter 'p' and the following three numbers denote the page number, and the three numbers after a slash denote the letter number.

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