A FLEET OF FASTOLFS: THE DESCENDANCY OF ALEXANDER FASTOLF, BURGESS OF GREAT YARMOUTH

by Matthew Hovious[1]

ABSTRACT

Many historians and genealogists have taken an interest in the Fastolf family, yet their published descents have been uniformly inaccurate due largely to the repeated omission of one member and the confusion of his son with a cousin of the same name. As a result of records formerly in private hands having become available over the past century, and through more careful analysis of documents previously cited in other works, this article restores the missing member to his proper place and distinguishes between the homonymous individuals heretofore conflated. It also examines who was at fault in the family's final drop back into obscurity.

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The Fastolfs are one of those families in which the existence of many of its members is all but obliterated by the fame of a single one. It is ironic that this renown should itself be misplaced, and that the individual to whom it is attached seems to have had little use for his relations in his own lifetime – except perhaps as feoffees.

Sir John Fastolf KG racked up an impressive number of achievements, and a fearsome number of opponents. In the century after his death, his character was certainly remembered – perhaps inflated. By the time the first quarto edition of Shakespeare's Henry IV was printed in 1598, pride of place on the title page itself was given to 'the humorous conceits of Sir John Falstalffe'. It has been suggested that Sir John Fastolf's identity was substituted for that of the figure originally lampooned in the play, Sir John Oldcastle, because the latter man had descendants powerful enough in Elizabethan times to uphold his memory, whereas the Fastolfs did not: if that is the case then the substitution itself may be considered a commentary on the Fastolfs' loss of station by the time the Bard lived. Others however have argued that Henry IV, prior to his ascent of the throne did indeed have a boisterous companion in Sir John Fastolf – but a different Sir John Fastolf, an East Anglian landowner who died in 1406.

Whoever the original was, his theatrical doppelganger took on a life of his own, spawning operas, imagined portraits, and fictional autobiographies, all of which probably bear little relation to the real Garter knight whom most people still today associate with the Bard's creation, save maybe the greed suggested in one of the portraits. 'Cruel and vengible he hath been ever, and for the most part without pity and mercy',[2] wrote a servant of the real man.

And what of those obscured by the glitter of the Garter and the lights of the theatre? The Fastolf family was not without other achievers; quite the contrary. Hugh Fastolf, who died in 1392, still rates a rather lengthy entry in the ODNB, and was a Justice of the Peace, Sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk, and Member of Parliament, as well as a

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[2] John Fenn & Alexander Ramsay, eds., Paston Letters I (1849), 76.

holder of lesser appointments too numerous to mention. Hugh amassed an enviable mercantile fortune in an era less propitious to rapid enrichment than our own. Other members of this Yarmouth family who achieved prominence in the reign of Edward III were Thomas Fastolf (d.1361), Bishop of St David's, and his brothers Nicholas (d.1330), a serjeant-at-law and sometime chief justice of Ireland, and Lawrence, who became auditor of the audience court of Canterbury.

Historiography

Nor has the family failed to elicit the interest of antiquaries, though their efforts thus far have collectively met with little success. Thomas William King, Rouge Dragon, wrote in Norfolk Archaeology in 1849 that 'it is greatly to be regretted that with so much concerning this highly honoured family there does not exist any full pedigree of the Fastolfs by which the descent or connexions of Sir John Fastolf can be clearly discovered. Those pedigrees which do exist are so varied in their accounts that none can with safety be relied upon.'[3] Remarkably, Dragon's assessment of the situation has been accurate till the present.

The Fastolf lineage was obliquely touched on in an heraldic pedigree chart now in the Bodleian Library, the precise purpose of which is unclear but which was perhaps meant to show the connexions to diverse Norfolk families of Edmund Paston (+1632); the top part of the pedigree is missing but it depicts a surprisingly frequent gaffe found in assorted Fastolf pedigrees, the placement of Sir John Fastolf KG and his wife Millicent Tiptoft at a point which would suggest they lived in the early 1300s and left issue of their marriage, neither being the case.[4] One of the earliest, and poorest, efforts to focus specifically on the Fastolf descent was the entry in a manuscript compiled by Sir Richard Gipps (d.1708), Master of the Revels to Charles II and sometime antiquary, in which under the heading 'Antiquitates Suffolciences' he attempted to compile brief histories of over one hundred notable Suffolk families and, in the Fastolf entry at least, succeeded in mixing up the spouses, the land holdings and even the centuries when alive, of those named in his pedigree.[5] Peter Le Neve, Richmond Herald, and Francis Blomefield, Norfolk's greatest antiquary, both seem to have taken an interest in the Fastolfs but their notes, today in the British Library,[6] mostly reveal their own confusion, in some cases displaying different impossible and mutually exclusive fragments of pedigrees on the same page: quite a bit of work appears to have gone into extracting references from diverse medieval sources but it seems that in the end neither man succeeded in assembling a coherent pedigree. Antony Norris, a contemporary of theirs, delved into the Fastolf pedigree when compiling his own set of genealogies of Norfolk families. Norris' hand-drawn charts, rich in dates and references, evidence a thorough mind at work. Yet in what should be a caution to researchers dealing with the Fastolfs, Norris was very careful indeed about making connexions, and most of his notes on the Fastolfs comprise trees very detailed but not spanning more than three generations, and beginning or ending with individuals who could be overlaid on other pedigree fragments. Norris' Fastolf pedigree was one of the many Fastolf resources diligently copied into the appropriate place in the impressive collection of genealogical material compiled by Suffolk

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3 Thomas William King, "Remarks on Some Ancient Shields in the Ceiling of the South Aisle of St Nicholas' Church, Great Yarmouth," Norfolk Archaeology II (1849): 171.

4 Bodleian Library, MS. Add. E. 13 (R).

5 Sir Richard Gipps, "Antiquitates Suffolciences", Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology VIII (1894): 157.

6 British Library, Add. 39848.

antiquary David Elisha Davy.[7] He displayed singular drive and initiative in transcribing every document that he could find pertaining to the overall Fastolf genealogy, and unlike Le Neve and Blomefield avoided the pitfall of expending too much effort on the immediate family of Sir John Fastolf KG. Davy's precise transcriptions of wills, letters of attorney, funeral inscriptions and other records pertaining to the Fastolfs spread across dozens of folio pages and would themselves stand as a monument to the diligence of their creator even in the absence of the rest of his output. In the end, though, little came of Davy's efforts on this family. Scores of resources were copied but their contents never compiled into a unified pedigree. Perhaps this was inevitable given the breadth of Davy's interests, or perhaps he simply never got around to it; or perhaps the extinction of the Fastolfs before Davy's time indirectly led to other pedigrees receiving more attention with regard to ultimate compilation. Certainly some of Davy's work formed the basis of the entries regarding specific families in Burke's Commoners, as Davy himself noted under another family's entry; the Fastolfs motivated no such contemporary interest, being – apparently – long extinct by the day of Davy and Burke.

Antony Norris' original manuscript eventually came into the hands of Walter Rye, a great Norfolk family historian of the early 20th century, but who - ironically - added to the Fastolf confusion by stating, for example, that there was 'absolutely no evidence of the existence... of Sir Thomas Fastolf of Kimberley',[8] when in fact administration of Thomas' estate was recorded before Norwich Consistory Court in 1384[9] and a missal mentioning his obit had already been described among the Fastolf papers listed in William Macray's notes on the Magdalen College Muniments,[10] published two decades earlier.

There are at any rate two stories to be told through a closer look at the Fastolfs. One is the genealogical narrative, the precise link between contemporaries mentioned in certain documents. The other is the historical narrative, particularly how the family came to fall into obscurity so rapidly when, in addition to the estate consolidated by the polyfacetic Hugh Fastolf before his death in 1392, the Fastolfs saw the rise of another great fortune through Sir John Fastolf's ambitious investment of his profits of war in the 1400s. The family at this stage is characterised by the tiresome repetition of a handful of Christian names – Hugh, Alexander, John, Thomas – which in principle makes it more difficult to sort out its members, and has led more than one researcher to grief, as for example when John Fenn and Alexander Ramsay wrote in their edition of the Paston Letters that Thomas Fastolf, a minor whose wardship Sir John sought, 'appears by the pedigrees of the family to have been the son and heir of Nicholas Fastolf of Ipswich by Elizabeth daughter and co heir of Sir John Braham Knt and cousin to Sir John Fastolf. He was this time about ten years old' in 1454; but the Nicholas Fastolf who married Elizabeth Braham was the son of a couple married in 1345, so for their grandchild to have been born a century later would stretch even modern ideas of longevity and fecundity![11]

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7 British Library, Add. 19129.

8 Walter Rye, "The Wodehouses of Kimberley and Waxham," The Norfolk Antiquarian Miscellany, Second Series, I (1906): 153.

9 Norfolk Record Office, NCC Will Register Heydon, 234.

10 William Dunn Macray, comp., Notes from the Muniments of St Mary Magdalene College, Oxford, From the Twelfth to the Seventeenth Century (1882), 123.

11 These were the progenitors of the Fastolfs of Pettaugh, who will be found in the assorted published Visitations of Suffolk; their descent has been well developed by, among others, Antony Norris, and additional material exists to tighten up their chronology, such as wills held

In fact, this paucity of given names is a two-bladed sword: it also forced the family, in their own time, to use a variety of qualifiers for the specific identification of individuals, and these sobriquets – 'the elder' 'son of Alexander' and so on – can be quite valuable tools, though they require careful thought regarding their precise meaning and between whom they are meant to differentiate. Where someone is identified with one of these cognomens – 'Alexander son of Thomas' and so on – each statement seems to have contained not only its surface reference to the paternity of the individual cited but also, implicitly, the existence of a contemporary known by the same Christian name.

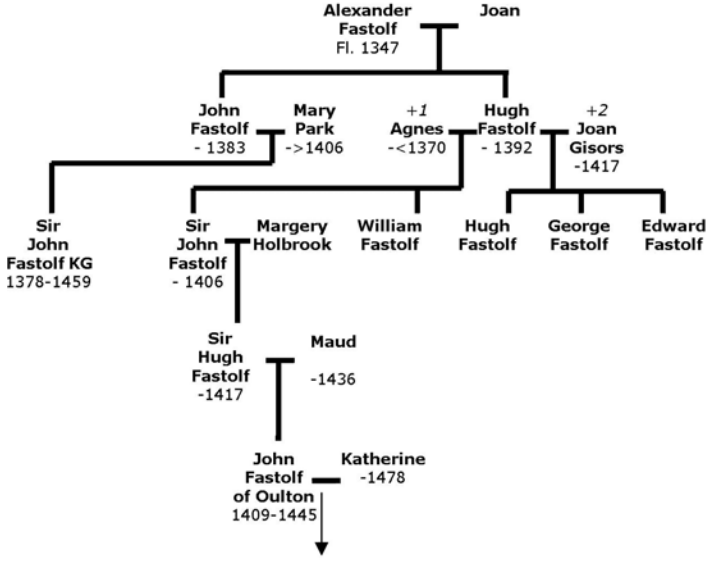


Fig 1. ***Descendants of Alexander Fastolf: the conventional pedigree found in secondary sources***

Beginnings

The earliest known reference to the name Fastolf in Norfolk dates to 1276,[12] and within barely fifty years members of this family had distinguished themselves far beyond East Anglia: Nicholas Fastolf (d.1330) became chief justice of Ireland; Lawrence Fastolf, auditor of the audience court of Canterbury, and Thomas Fastolf had by 1326 embarked on a promising career in the church which would eventually see him become Bishop of St David's.[13]

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at the Ipswich branch of the Suffolk Record Office. Because the Fastolfs of Pettaugh were already, in Alexander's time, a distinct branch, with whom Alexander's family does not seem to have intermarried or shared business dealings, they are not included in this article; they outlasted Alexander's line, though, and there was still at least one male in the Pettaugh line when the 1612 Visitation was taken.

12 Walter Rye, Norfolk Families, comp. Charles Norvell (1911), 189.

13 J H Baker, "Fastolf, Thomas (d.1361)" in ODNB. http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/49670 (accessed April 29, 2008).

By the mid-1300s there had already been enough mentions of Fastolfs in wills and other records to make discovery of their precise connexions something not achievable at first glance. The earliest patriarch of the branch of Fastolfs of interest to this study who is traceable with certainty was Alexander Fastolf, sometime Bailiff of Great Yarmouth,[14] and who through diverse records is linked to his three sons, John, Hugh and Thomas. Alexander Fastolf owned a ship called 'La Blyth Fastolf'.[15] These early years of the Fastolfs' ascent were characterised by a certain ruthlessness likely to have inspired Sir John Fastolf KG, whose resolute approach to business could in our own time have made him a force in the City.

In 1340 'Nicholas Fastolf and Alexander Fastolf, lords, and Richard Dekne, master, of a ship called la Blithe' were among those named as having contravened the King's specific orders and 'boarded a large ship called Taret on its way to Flanders, and carried away the cargo, in satisfaction of which [the King] was afterwards compelled to compensate the plundered merchants to the sum of 16,527£. 17s. 1d.'[16] The following year, the Earl of Suffolk having stored cash and foodstuffs in the home of his aide Richer de Gymingham while travelling, Alexander Fastolf and his son Thomas were among those who 'broke the doors and windows of the house, entered the house, carried away the victuals with other goods and 200£. in money, and besieged the said Richer for some time and assaulted him so that his life was despaired of and imprisoned him until he made fine for 40£. for his deliverance.'[17] Shortly thereafter Alexander seems to have at least cut a deal regarding the earlier charge, as the King granted a 'Pardon to Alexander Fastolf of Great Yarmouth for his part in the plunder of the ship la Taryte, because he will go to sea for two months with his ship la Blyth Falstof at his own charges, in the company of Robert de Morlee, admiral of the king's fleet towards the north.'[18] But sailing under Morley must not have been to Alexander's liking and by the following year he was back up to his old tricks, Morley having charged 'that Alexander Fastolf … and others carried away his goods from a ship of his anchored at the town of Great Yarmouth.'[19] This may been the last straw, and the last known record pertaining to Alexander concerns dealings much more tranquil, a 1347 grant 'to Alexander Fastolf burgess of Great Yarmouth and Joan his wife of a piece of land containing 3 roods with a house built thereon in Filby near the tree land of Mautby church.'[20] Perhaps we may interpret this as Alexander's retirement.

If Alexander had set the bar high, his sons John and Hugh were to prove apt pupils. The Patent Rolls record a 1355 'Pardon of special grace to John Fastolf of Great Yarmouth of the king's suit for the death of Walter de Horsted "goldsmyth," whereof he is indicted or appealed, and of any consequent outlawry…The like to Hugh Fastolf of Great Yarmouth.'[21] Just four years later the brothers were again the subject of a commission of inquiry led by their father's old friend Robert de Morley, concerning a 'complaint by Stephen de Stalham that […] Hugh Fastolf, John Fastolf… and others assaulted him and servants at Great

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[14] Kenneth Bruce McFarlane, England in the Fifteenth Century: Collected Essays, intro. G L Harriss (1981), 196.

[15] CPR: Edward III, 5:483.

[16] CPR: Edward III, 4:491-92.

[17] CPR: Edward III, 5:109, 205 and 216.

[18] CPR: Edward III, 5:483.

[19] CPR: Edward III, 6:168.

[20] Norfolk Record Office, FX 7/1/1-22. In 1346 he also held ¼ knight's fee in Repps, in right of his wife; Deputy Keeper of the Records, comp., Inquisitions and assessments relating to feudal aids, with other analogous documents preserved in the Public record office; A.D. 1284-1431, III (1901), 506.

[21] CPR: Edward III, 10:220.

Yarmouth, county Norfolk.'[22] John, referred to sometimes as 'John son of Alexander'[23] and elsewhere 'John the younger' was the father of our Garter knight: we do know that he participated in at least some of the business ventures[24] of his overachieving brother Hugh, the Hugh Fastolf whose accomplishments are, as stated above, still listed in the ODNB today. John was for a time squire to the Earl of Warwick;[25] he was made a King's Esquire and granted £20 per annum for life in 1374,[26] named attorney in England in 1376 by his absent relation John Fastolf (son of Nicholas),[27] and died before 10 October 1383,[28] having made a will a short time previously.[29]

Of Alexander's son Thomas Fastolf less is known. He certainly was not the same man as the contemporary Thomas Fastolf who was knighted and became squire of Kimberley, nor the Thomas Fastolf who was Bishop of St David's. The instant Thomas was probably Alexander's eldest son, for he occurs in records several years before his brothers Hugh and John. He accompanied his father in the 1341 assault of Richer de Gymingham, as mentioned above. In 1343 he was, like Alexander, charged with being one of the landing party who stole goods from the ship of Robert de Morley (Richard Dekne, probably the same one named as the master of la Blyth Falstof, was another of the miscreants named).[30] The very next year Morley complained yet again, apparently of a separate incident, in which a small army including Alexander Fastolf, Thomas Fastolf, Richard le Dekene 'and others carried away goods to the value of 5,000£ found in ships of his anchored at Loyestoft, co. Suffolk.'[31] In 1355 licence was granted to 'Thomas Fastolf of Yarmouth to lade 100 tuns of ale in the port of the said town, in ships not arrested for the king's service, and take the same to Calais to make their profit of; on the mainprise of Walter Chauntemerle of the county of Devon and Jordan de Barton of the county of York that they will take the same to Calais only and will bring back by the first Sunday in Lent next letters of the captain or the treasurer of that town testifying the discharge of the ale there.'[32] In 1360 Thomas Fastolf of Great Yarmouth and his wife Leticia quitclaimed to Geoffrey de Somerton of Great Yarmouth and his wife Ellen all right to an annual rent from the tenements that Geoffrey and Ellen held of them in Great Yarmouth.[33] An early death may have cut short Thomas' career: he may have been dead in 1368 when his son Alexander sold land in Raveningham to his uncle, Thomas' brother John Fastolf.[34]

In any event, the third individual of interest here was the most significant one socially, politically, and certainly economically – Hugh Fastolf, the magnate

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22 CPR: Edward III, 11:276.

23 For example: Deputy Keeper of the Records, comp., A Descriptive Catalogue of Ancient Deeds in the Public Record Office, IV (1902): 248, Nº A7996.

24 National Archives, SC 8/85/4214.

25 G L Harriss, "Fastolf, Sir John (1380–1459)" in ODNB; http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/09199 (accessed April 29, 2008).

26 CPR: Edward III, 15:405.

27 CPR: Edward III, 16:211.

28 CPR: Richard II, 2:316.

29 Henry Harrod, "Extracts from Early Wills in the Norwich Registries," Norfolk Archaeology, IV (1855): 319-20.

30 CPR: Edward III, 6:166.

31 CPR: Edward III, 6:385.

32 CPR: Edward III, 10:483.

33 Lancashire Record Office, DDTO O (1)/11.

34 Norfolk Record Office, DCN 44/89/5.

mentioned above. In the 1350s he began shifting his wealth from its dependence on maritime ventures and acquiring assets on dry land: the rental of land at Bradwell and Gorleston[35] in 1353 was followed two years later by the purchase of nearly 700 acres of land in Bradwell, Gorleston and Gapton and elsewhere.[36] Eventually he owned more than 1000 acres of land in sixteen villages,[37] and probably controlled even more through various rentals and agreements. The 60s marked a turning point: they were to be the decade of Hugh's decisive shift from shadowy sleight-of-hand to respectability on the straight-and-narrow, and after which his prosperity would never again be seriously endangered: Member of Parliament in 1361, Deputy Admiral of the North in 1362, Collector of Customs… In the midst of all this activity he not only fathered several children in two marriages but also at least one illegitimate daughter, said to have married one Robert Lawney Esq.[38] Though Hugh became an unpopular figure locally whose house was looted in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, he was able to land on his feet every time circumstances threatened. Perhaps his most striking reinvention of himself was his last incarnation as a Grocer, Sheriff of London and supporter of Richard II in his struggle against the Lords Appellant, and one may say that Hugh 'died with his boots on', still serving as MP, Sheriff and Justice of the Peace at what must have been an advanced age.

His eldest son and heir was John Fastolf, occasionally named as Sir John Fastolf in diverse records including his Inquisition Post Mortem, although what personal achievements earned him knightly rank are unclear, and whose manorial land holdings came entirely from his wife.[39] John had made an advantageous marriage, to the daughter and coheir of Sir John de Holbrook. The latter died in 1376 and Margery brought to the marriage considerable land in Suffolk, including the manor of Cowhaugh in Nacton.[40] This John Fastolf seems not to have been as active in politics or business as his father, though Harcourt contends, on the basis of some rather convoluted reasoning, that he was the authentic inspiration for Shakespeare's Falstaff.[41] It is in any event interesting to note that where Hugh had been a supporter of Richard II, John – according to Harcourt – seems to have positioned himself as a friend of Henry IV before his accession. John's wife Margery died on 11 July 1387,[42] and John remarried[43]: he died in 1406 and his estates passed to his eldest son and heir, Sir Hugh Fastolf, who died at Caen in France in 1417.[44] Hugh's widow Maud remarried in 1425, to Edmund Stapleton.[45]

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35 Magdalen College Archives, Suffolk Deeds, Spitlings 178.

36 Magdalen College Archives, Suffolk Deeds, Spitlings 195.

37 Pamela Nightingale, "Fastolf, Hugh (d.1392)" in ODNB; http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/52175 (accessed April 29, 2008).

38 British Library, Cotton Vespasian MS. DXVII, Fº 85: This probably explains the occasional presence of Lawneys as feoffees in Sir John's land transactions.

39 J Caley & J Bayley, eds., (Great Britain, Record Commission), Calendarium inquisitionum post mortem sive escaetarum III (1821): 305. John's IPM prefaces the list of properties involved by stating that they were all held in 'jure Margareta uxoris suae.'

40 National Archives, C 135/255/7.

41 L W Vernon Harcourt, "The Two Sir John Fastolfs", Transactions of the Royal Historical Society (Third Series) 4 (1910): 47-62.

42 British Library, Cotton Vespasian MS. DXVII, Fº 85.

43 CFR: XIII: 33, in which after John's death the Escheator is instructed to preserve Elizabeth's dower rights.

44 Henry Harrod, op.cit. (1855), 320; Hugh's will: Norfolk Record Office, DN/REG 4 book 8 fo. 134.

45 CPR: Henry VI, I:273.

Alexander Fastolf: the 'lost' son of Hugh Fastolf

So much – for now - for the senior line of descent from Hugh Fastolf, the canny merchant of Yarmouth. At least three documents exist documenting Hugh Fastolf's testamentary arrangements. One is a copy of his will of 1392, now in the Magdalen College archives. The second, now in the Norfolk Record Office, is described in their catalogue as 'a Conveyance by Milo de Stapulton, chivaler, John Hadle, William Cressewik, Robert Houtot and James de Belyngford to John Fastolf, Kt., and his issue male, of land in Gorleston, Gapton, Bradwell and Belton', and dated 9 April 1399.[46] The third is a memorandum prepared by some clerk of Sir John KG around 1450, and summarising the descent that Hugh had specified for his lands.

Of the three, the first attempted to be very precise yet, ironically, introduced a degree of confusion into the pedigree. Hugh wanted to clarify which of his sons had been born in his first marriage, and which were born to his second wife. Yet the scribe seems to have made a tiny yet significant error, one which led no less accomplished a historian than the late K B McFarlane to puzzlement. The typescript catalogue entry for Magdalen College Archives' copy of Hugh's will bears a handwritten note recording that Hugh states 'quod prefati Johannes Fastolf Johannes fil. Alexandri et Willelmus sunt procreati inter me et Agnetina nuper uxorem meam et predicti Hugo, Georgius et Edwardus procreati sunt inter me et Johannam uxor meam nunc' and at the end the question 'But how can John the son of Alexander be the son of Hugh?'[47] The compilers of the 4th Report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission seem to have noticed the untidy reference too, and solved the problem by simply omitting from its list of Hugh's heirs any mention of the person to whom Hugh was referring![48]

The second document, the 1399 charter, has the unintended effect of adding to this confusion. It specifies that Hugh's lands were conveyed to his son Sir John and his heirs male: remainder to John, the son of Alexander Fastolf; then to William, son of Hugh; then to Hugh, son of Hugh; then to George, son of Hugh; then to Edward, son of Hugh; and at the end, remainder to the right heirs of the said Hugh, father of John, William, Hugh, George and Edward.

This last section creates the impression that Hugh had only five sons, an impression upheld by the faulty wording of the 1392 will. In fact, it seems likely that all the writer meant to say in the final phrase was not that Hugh had never had any other sons: merely that he was referring to the right heirs of Hugh Senior, not of Hugh the son of Hugh. This interpretation is in fact consistent with that made by a contemporary in the third document mentioned. Among the vast assortment of papers concerning the day-to-day operations of Sir John Fastolf's estates that eventually ended up in the Magdalen College archives is a memorandum created circa 1450 by some underling of the knight's, to the effect that Hugh Fastolf of Great Yarmouth left to his son John Fastolf knight and his heirs male all his manors in Gorleston, Gapton, Bradwell, Belton, Kirkley and Beighton: with remainder to 1) Alexander Fastolf and his heirs; 2) William Fastolf and his heirs; 3) Hugh Fastolf and his heirs; 4) George Fastolf and his heirs; 5) the right heirs of Hugh Fastolf of Great Yarmouth.[49] The writer of this document kept Alexander Fastolf, who probably predeceased his father, in the place rightfully his and from which he would be

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46 Norfolk Record Office, KIM 25/8.

47 Magdalen College Archives, Norfolk Deeds: I, typescript, comp. William Dunn Macray, 53.

48 Great Britain, Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, Fourth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts (1874), 461.

49 Magdalen College Archives, Norfolk Deeds, Spitlings 95.

subsequently ousted through the oversight of later researchers. This Alexander Fastolf was probably the one who was a Bailiff of Great Yarmouth in 1384[50], appointed along with Hugh Fastolf to fortify Great Yarmouth in 1386[51], named Collector of a subsidy at Great Yarmouth 'and all ports between Ipswich and Blakeney' in 1388[52], Bailiff again[53] and Controller of Customs in Great Yarmouth in 1390[54], before disappearing from view.

Which John?

My interest in this family was first piqued by three references, apparently all to one individual, in the published Visitation of Norfolk for 1589 and 1613. The gentleman in question pops up in the pedigrees of Jenney, Berney and Southwell. These families are linked – if not otherwise - through shared descent from the daughters and coheirs of Edmund Wychingham Esq, and in the first pedigree his wife is identified as 'Alice daughter and heir of ... Fastolf'[55]: in the other two she is named specifically as the daughter and heir of John Fastolf[56]. All three are at least in agreement that Alice was an heiress, then, and Jenney and Southwell both quartered the Fastolf arms with those of sundry other families on their own coats, as is standard when there's an heraldic heiress in the family.

A bit of precision can be added to this family nucleus with some chronology: Alice and Edmund were already married in 1434,[57] and probably before. He died in 1472, and she in 1475, leaving a not terribly informative will.[58] A quick perusal of Norfolk fines and charters for the relevant period shows that we may say Edmund Wychingham belonged to the 'in-crowd' of medieval Norfolk: he appears in multiple records as a feoffee or associate of numerous county gentlemen, including not one but apparently two John Fastolfs! What, though, was their relationship? Precisely how many homonymous contemporaries are we dealing with?

Hopes for a quick answer as to the identity of Edmund Wychingham's father-in-law were raised by a reference in one of Rye's works to this document:[59] 'In the 2nd year of King Edward the 4th a fine was levyed between Edmu[n]d Stockman, clerk, querent, Edmund Wiching, Esq. and Alice his wife, daughter & (sic) heir of Sir John Fastolf of ...xt...' Unfortunately these hopes were just as quickly dashed by examination of the original fine at the National Archives: it makes no mention of Alice's parentage. Rye's source for this entry was stated to be a charter belonging to Sir Robert Kemp Bt., a later lord

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50 Francis Blomefield and Charles Parkin, An Essay Towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk, XI (1810): 324.

51 CPR: Richard II, 3:258.

52 CPR: Richard II, 3:455.

53 Francis Blomefield and Charles Parkin, op.cit., XI (1810):324.

54 CPR: Richard II, 4:356.

55 Walter Rye, ed., The Visitacion of Norffolk, made and taken by William Hervey, Clarencieux King of Arms, Anno 1563, Enlarged with Another Visitation made by Clarenceux Cooke, with Many Other Descents; and also the Vissitation Made by John Raven, Richmond, Anno 1613 (1891), 170.

56 Walter Rye, op.cit. (1891), 16, 258.

57 CCR: Henry VI, II:278.

58 Norfolk Record Office, NCC Will Register Gelour, 115.

59 Walter Rye, Some rough materials for a history of the Hundred of North Erpingham in the county of Norfolk I (1883):15.

of Antingham. If so, the information regarding Alice's father must have been someone's addition to the document, possibly an early example of a Fastolf descendant wanting a link to the Fastolf of Shakespearean fame. It must be said that in this work Rye muddied the waters considerably for Fastolf researchers. On the next page of the same book he refers to the 1475 will of 'Alice, daur. & heir of Sir John Fastolf, Knt.' when once again the original document contains no reference to Alice's parents.

In any event, until now, the tendency seems to have been to identify the other John Fastolf occurring in business transactions of the hero of Agincourt as the man usually known as 'John Fastolf of Oulton, Esq'. He is usually identified with the John Fastolf who was declared of age in 1429, the son of Sir Hugh Fastolf; as the husband of a Katherine Bedingfield[60] and the father of Thomas Fastolf, the boy for whose wardship Sir John Fastolf struggled in the 1450s.

John Fastolf of Yarmouth

When however one looks at the chronology, this notion seems to fall apart. When Sir Hugh Fastolf died in the French wars in 1417, his eldest son John was a minor and proof of age taken in 1429[61] suggests this John was only born around 1408. He cannot then be the John Fastolf Esq who appears in other records as a feoffee as early as 1421!

With this knowledge, if one re-examines the records in which a John Fastolf is mentioned during this period, evidence of a new player in the family story begins to emerge. There was a 1421 grant by Stephen Scroop, esquire, son and heir of Stephen Scroop, knight, to William Cheyney, the king's justice, John Fastolf, son of Alexander Fastolf, Edmund Wychyngham and others of his two manors called 'Hevercobham' and 'Heverbroket,' and all other his lands, &c. in the county of Kent.[62] This is a most interesting record, both for its identification of the John Fastolf active in 1421 as 'John Fastolf, son of Alexander Fastolf' and the fact that by this point Edmund Wychingham is in the Fastolf orbit. Perhaps these men were already linked by marital kinship? That same year John Fastolf was on a commission to enquire into the report that certain evildoers went armed to Blundeston, Olton and Flixton, co. Suffolk, forcibly entered those places and unjustly disseised the king's knight Robert Harlyng, on the king's service beyond the seas.[63] In September 1421 John Fastolf Esq was one of the witnesses to a grant made by Henry Sturmer and others to assorted Burgesses of Yarmouth.[64] 1421 was evidently a busy year for this gentleman: he is presumably the individual also mentioned that year in a commitment to William Phelip, knight, by mainprise of John Alderford and John Fastolf, both of the county of Norfolk, of the keeping of a moiety of all the lands late of Annis late the wife of Thomas late lord de Bardolf.[65] The following year John

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[60] For example: John Kirby, "The Suffolk Traveller," in A topographical and historical description of the county of Suffolk (1829), 257. As will be seen, the erroneous identification of Katherine as a Bedingfield seems to stem simply from the accident of their arms having been the longest surviving ones of the assorted coats with which Katherine directed her grave be marked.

[61] National Archives, C 139/46/51.

[62] Deputy Keeper of the Records, comp., A Descriptive Catalogue of Ancient Deeds in the Public Record Office, VI (1915): 284, no.C5935.

[63] CPR: Henry V, II:418.

[64] Norfolk Record Office, MC 268/44, 693 x 9.

[65] CFR: 14:410.

Fastolf of Great Yarmouth bought of John Curlw, clerk, Isabella Curlw and others land in the villages of Heryngfleet, Haskeby and Somerleton.[66] In 1423, John Fastolf was a Commissioner of the Peace in Norfolk.[67] The end of that same year saw a release by William Ferrers, John Fastolf, Edward 'Wythyngham', and Constantine Dewy (?), clerk, to Roger Fenys, knight, Richard Wakeherst, and Thomas Baynden, of all their right in the manors of Hevere Cobham and Hevere Brokays.[68] Early in 1424 Thomas Banstede remitted to John, son of Alexander Fastolf, all his right to certain lands, meadows, and pastures in Heryngflete and villages adjacent.[69] In 1426 John Fastolf was a Commissioner of the Peace in Great Yarmouth.[70] A letter survives dated 26 May 1427 and addressed to John Fastolf, Esq. of Great Yarmouth from Thos. Fulbone, stock-fishmonger of London, concerning a will of which both had been named as executors.[71] On 10 May 1428 John Fastolf of Yarmouth, armiger and others were mentioned in a Letter of Attorney by Prior William of Worstead as being in possession of messuages once held from Prior and Convent by Richard Dewrose Steynour and others.[72] A few days later John Fastolf and his associates executed two deeds conveying to Geoffrey, Prior of Horsham St Faiths the property mentioned in that Letter of Attorney.[73] In May 1429, Edmund Wynter, esq., granted to John Fastolf and Henry Inglose, knights, John Fastolf, Esq, John Kyrtling, clerk, Henry Sturmer and John Lynford, their heirs and assigns, all his tenement called Odes in Saxthorp and all his land in Saxthorp, Briston, Manyngton, and Stafford Berningham.[74] (One wonders if some garbled knowledge of this deed was the root of Rye's spurious reference to 'Sir John Fastolf of ...xt...'. Apart from Saxthorp I cannot think of any other place names in Norfolk containing the letters 'xt' and with which any Fastolfs were ever associated.) In July 1429, and again in October 1431, John Fastolf was named Commissioner of the Peace in Great Yarmouth;[75] in 1433, collector of customs at the port of Great Yarmouth.[76] John Fastolf of Great Yarmouth repeated as a Commissioner in that year, and in 1434 and 1436.[77] He was also, presumably, the John Fastolf, esquire who with the Sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk, and others, was to hold an enquiry into the estate of Ralph Garveys of Gelston, Norfolk, in May 1438.[78]

The above records would seem to prove adequately the existence of a man hitherto overlooked by researchers, and known in his lifetime as John Fastolf of Yarmouth. Yet

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66 William H Turner, ed., Calendar of Charters and Rolls Preserved in the Bodleian Library (1878), 481, Ch.897.

67 CPR: Henry VI, I:566.

68 Deputy Keeper of the Records, comp., A Descriptive Catalogue of Ancient Deeds in the Public Record Office, I (1890): 464, no.C787.

69 William H Turner, ed., Calendar of Charters and Rolls Preserved in the Bodleian Library (1878), 482, Ch.898.

70 CPR: Henry VI, I:567.

71 William Dunn Macray, comp., Notes from the Muniments of St Mary Magdalene College, Oxford, From the Twelfth to the Seventeenth Century (1882), 25.

72 Norfolk Record Office, DCN 45/12/32.

73 Norfolk Record Office, DCN 45/12/33-34.

74 Historical Manuscripts Commission, Report on the Manuscripts of the Marquess of Lothian preserved at Blickling Hall, Norfolk (1905), 54.

75 CPR: Henry VI, I:567 and II:621.

76 CFR: XVI:144, 147, 168, 169, 171, 184.

77 CPR: Henry VI, II:621 and III:523.

78 CPR: Henry VI, III:198.

surely the whole point of referring to the younger man as John Fastolf of Oulton was to distinguish him from John Fastolf of Yarmouth, not from his knightly kinsman, whose identity was sufficiently established by referring to him as 'John Fastolf, knight'?

John Fastolf of Oulton

I believe that these Johns were one and the same man. His having been referred to inconsistently as 'of Great Yarmouth' or 'of Oulton' may have been due to a number of circumstances: occasional sloppiness on the part of those clerks and scribes whose duty it was to distinguish among the unvaryingly named Fastolf men, and perhaps a reflection of his not having been 'of Oulton' all year round, or not having made that his primary residence before about 1438.

References to John Fastolf of Oulton include his participation in 1425 as a feoffee of Sir John Fastolf KG, as John Fastolf of Olton along with John FitzRalph and John Kyrteling, clerk, in a fine levied against William son of Henry Spyttelyng for land in Gorleston, South Yarmouth, Belton, Bradwell and Hopton[79]; and in a fine levied in the purchase 'of the Manor of Hykelyng called Netherhalle'[80]; in 1434 John Fastolf of Oulton, esquire, along with Edmund Wychingham and Sir John Fastolf, was to receive a grant of the Manor of Castle Combe for the term of Sir John's life;[81] in 1435 'John Fastolf of Oulton Esq' was again a feoffee for Sir John, this time in the purchase of land at Caister;[82] in that same year John Fastolf of Oulton, Sir John Fastolf and Edmund Wychingham were among those who were to take possession of any issues accruing from land belonging to Edmund in Eppingheath, once the Escheator had determined that the land in question had been devised to Edmund by his late father and was not held of the King.[83] 1438 saw the signing of a 'Final Concord between John Fastolf, knight, John Fitz Rauf, Esq, John Fastolf of Oulton and John Kyrtelyng, clerk, querents, and William son of Henry Spyttelyng, deforciant, re seven messuages, 200a. land, 200a. pasture, 2a. underwood and 10s. rent in Gorleston, South Yarmouth, Belton, Bradwell and Hopton, Suffolk'.[84] In 1439 John Barney, John Fastolf of Oulton, esquire, and John Kirtling, clerk, borrowed money from Sir Simon Felbrigg, Simon Blyaunt, and Robert Rous.[85] In December 1440 John Fastolf of Oulton and Edmund Wychingham, Esquires, and John Wareyn enfeoffed Robert Lampet Esq and others of lands, meadows, pastures, marshes etc. in 'villa de Westonn de Jernemuth'.[86] In August 1442 'John Fastolff, knight,' and 'John Fastolff of Owilton' were among those named to a Commission of Enquiry to investigate evasion of customs duties by ships surreptitiously discharging goods on the Norfolk and Suffolk coasts.[87]

One other significant event involving John Fastolf of Oulton was his appointment in 1433 by Sir John Fastolf KG as the latter's attorney in England ahead of a planned

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79 Walter Rye, A Calendar of the Feet of Fines for Suffolk (1900), 295.

80 Walter Rye, A Short Calendar of the Feet of Fines for Norfolk II (1886), 410.

81 CPR: Henry VI, II:369.

82 Walter Rye, op. cit. II (1886), 415.

83 CCR: Henry VI, III: 9-10.

84 Norfolk Record Office, PHI 444, 577X8.

85 National Archives, C 241/228/26.

86 Norfolk Record Office, PHI 445, 577X8.

87 CPR: Henry VI, IV:108.

absence.[88] It seems hard to believe that a man as careful and calculating as Sir John would have given such power to an untried and untested relation, given that as shown above only two references to a John Fastolf 'of Oulton' before that date can now be found. If, on the other hand, the man appointed as Sir John's attorney was the same man described as 'of Yarmouth' during the 1420s, then he would probably have been an acceptably known quantity, trusted to work hand-in-glove with Edmund Wychingham, John Kirtling and the rest of the Knight's agents.

On 4 February 1444 John Fastolf of Oulton signed a release giving up to Sir John Fastolf KG 'all his right in the manors, &c. of Blyclynge, Saxthorpe, Heynforde, Tichewelle, Heylesdone, Acle, Haryngby, Runham, Hykelyng, Castre, and Wynterstone in Norfolk, of Caldecotes, Brocostone, Habelound, Spytelyng in Gorlestone, Akethorpe, Cowghawe, and Coltone in Suffolk, and Dedham in Essex.' [89]

This strongly suggests that John Fastolf of Oulton was the man who earlier had been known as John Fastolf of Yarmouth. Perhaps the younger man was ill or injured; the knight not being one to leave loose ends, he would no doubt have felt it desirable to ensure that title of any lands to the purchase of which the esquire had been a party only as his cousin's representative, would be clearly vested solely in himself, avoiding potentially messy claims by widow and orphans after his demise. And so the younger man signed over to the elder any rights to land ranging from Saxthorp – in the purchase of which he had figured as John Fastolf of Yarmouth – to Hickling and the manor of Spitlings in Gorleston, in the purchase of which he had figured as John Fastolf of Oulton. That he also signed over any residual right to Cowhawe – a family property, not one bought by Sir John – is perhaps due to continuing indebtedness: Sir John had loaned £150 to John Fastolf of Oulton in 1433.[90]

The natural question then is how this John fits into the overall structure of the family.

As far as we can tell, Hugh Fastolf of Great Yarmouth did not exactly possess an abundance of grandsons whom he could envision carrying on the family name and nurturing its fortunes: in fact, this 'John son of Alexander Fastolf' would be Hugh's only known male grandchild except for Hugh's eventual heir male, Sir Hugh Fastolf (d. 1417). In that position he would be a likely candidate to be the man who enjoyed some status from, it seems, an early age, yet never quite amassed enough of an estate to leave the same sort of paper trail as his wealthier kinsmen.

If in fact the man known in the 1420s as John Fastolf Esq of Great Yarmouth was the son of Alexander Fastolf, the son of Hugh Fastolf (d.1392) then it is worth noting that the Austin Friars of Norwich recorded, in the obit for Alice Wychingham, that she was the daughter of Alexander Fastolf of Great Yarmouth,[91] not John Fastolf as stated in the visitations referenced above. The monks' reference is of course far closer to being contemporary than the visitation pedigree set down more than a century later by Alice's descendants.

Another issue of interest concerns the identity of the wife of the Alexander Fastolf whom we've put forward here as the putative father of John Fastolf of Yarmouth and of Alice Fastolf, the wife of Edmund Wychingham. There is, unfortunately, no

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88 Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, eds., Dictionary of National Biography VI (1908),1101.

89 Great Britain, Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, Fourth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts (1874), 461.

90 Kenneth Bruce McFarlane, England in the Fifteenth Century: Collected Essays, intro. G L Harriss (1981), 70.

91 William Worcester, Itineraries, trans. John Hooper Harvey (1969), 236.

evidence that I can find of a piece of Fastolf land passing into Edmund's hands de jure uxoris. Alice does seem to have possessed a piece of property by inheritance: land at Salthouse and Kelling in Norfolk. In 1472, Alice and Edmund received royal confirmation of a charter granting free warren and a market there on Tuesdays to John Avenel and his heirs. The great Norfolk antiquary Blomefield makes Alice Wychingham a daughter of Alice Avenel and 'John Fastolf Esq of Fishley'.[92] In doing so, I am afraid he burdens us with another John Fastolf where none was needed. It is possible that Blomefield was influenced by the received (though, I believe, incorrect) knowledge that Alice Wychingham was a daughter of a John Fastolf, with his need to explain the Wychinghams' possession of land at Fishley. In fact, elsewhere in his own work, in the section dealing with Fishley, Blomefield explains that Edmund Wychingham's paternal grandmother was a Hardegrey and it was through her that the Wychinghams inherited land at Fishley.[93]

I've found nothing to indicate that there ever was a person known as 'John Fastolf of Fishley', but as Alice Wychingham clearly did hold the Avenel lands at Salthouse and Kelling, it may be that her mother was the Avenel heiress, and the wife of Alexander Fastolf of Great Yarmouth. Given that by 1421 Edmund Wychingham was already in the orbit of Sir John Fastolf, could his mother-in-law have been the Alice Fastolf who was enjoying Sir John's hospitality at Caister Castle in 1432?[94] In any event, it would appear to follow that Alexander Fastolf married twice, otherwise John Fastolf of Oulton or his daughters would presumably have claimed the Avenel lands, instead of Alice and Edmund Wychingham.



Fig 2. ***The lost monumental brass, formerly in Oulton St Michael church, of John Fastolf of Oulton (d.1445) and his wife Katherine, as printed by Dawson Turner (1842) in his Sketch of the History of Caister Castle.***

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92 Francis Blomefield and Charles Parkin, An Essay Towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk IX (1808), 430.

93 Francis Blomefield and Charles Parkin, An Essay Towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk XI (1810), 101.

94 Magdalen College Archives, Fastolf Papers, 8.

Oulton or Cowhawe?

In attempting to document better the life of the titular head of the Fastolfs, an interesting quandary presents itself. Conventional wisdom has been that the boy whose wardship was to cause John Fastolf KG so much trouble – Thomas Fastolf, sometimes called Thomas Fastolf of Oulton, and sometimes Thomas Fastolf of Cowhawe, was the son of John Fastolf of Oulton and his wife Katherine, whose brasses were once in Oulton St Michael church. John made a will in 1445; Katherine outlived her husband by more than three decades, and herself died testate in 1478.

When however all of the references apparently pertaining to this branch of the Fastolfs are lined up, it becomes apparent that something is wrong. An entry in the Close Rolls in November 1448 directs the escheator in Norfolk and Suffolk to 'take of Agnes who was wife of John Fastolf esquire an oath etc., and in presence of the next friends of the heirs of Thomas son and heir of her husband, who are minors in ward of the king, or of their attorneys, to assign her dower.'[95] At first glance one may conclude that Agnes may be a typographical error for Katherine – perhaps someone read 'Agnetina' for 'Katerina' or some such. But another document ratifies the existence of Agnes Fastolf: a bond from 'Agnes Fastolf of Nacton in Cowhaughe, widow of John Fastolf esquire', to Sir John Fastolf KG.[96] The document is damaged at the crucial spot whereupon was written the regnal year of Henry VI, only the day – 30 July – remaining: it does not however seem reckless to consider this document in some way related to fulfilment of the order in CCR above.

But John Fastolf esquire's widow was Katherine, a well-documented lady who survived him by many years. So who was Agnes? Have we stumbled onto a medieval case of bigamy?

In fact, a closer analysis of the scant surviving records reveals that the parentage of Thomas Fastolf has been consistently misstated in assorted publications over the last five centuries. He was not the son of John Fastolf of Oulton, nor of John's wife Katherine, as has been suggested in a number of publications.[97] He was, rather, the son of John Fastolf of Cowhawe, and his wife Agnes.

John Fastolf of Oulton occurs in records as little more than a satellite of his better-known namesake, John Fastolf KG. It appears that John of Oulton married twice. He was almost certainly the John Fastolf who was married to Margaret, the widow of William Lovel of Titchwell, as early as 1421: Sir John tells us as much, referring around 1449 to 'Margaret, wheche late was the wyf of William Lovelle, and afterward the wyf of John Fastolf of Olton'.[98] She may have been the mother of his two daughters, Joan and Margaret. John's will of 1445 was concerned with providing dowries for their marriage, whereas the girls are not mentioned at all in the 1478 will of his widow, who does however go into considerable detail regarding her children by her first marriage.

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95 CCR: Henry VI, V:87.

96 Magdalen College Archives, Fastolf Papers, 31.

97 For example: Colin Richmond, The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century: The First Phase, (2002), 241.

98 Norman Davis, Richard Beadle & Colin Richmond, Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century III (2004), 66.

A memorandum in the Fastolf Papers states that Thomas was eight years old at the time of his father's death on 9 November 1447;[99] Katherine Fastolf's will reveals that she was the former Katherine Wylesham, whose first husband had been John Sampson of Harkstead: Sampson having lived till 1441 or 1442.[100] In that case it would seem impossible for Katherine to have been the mother of a legitimate heir of John Fastolf.[101]

The man known as John Fastolf of Oulton made his will on 12 January 1444/5 and it was proved in September 1445.[102] Certainly this is at odds with the flurry of legal activity set in motion straightaway upon the death of John Fastolf of Cowhawe in November 1447 – alluded to, among other places, in the memorandum mentioned above, and in the writ of diem clausit extremum and the appointment of successive keepers of his lands in the Fine Rolls.[103] One must conclude that two men known as John Fastolf Esquire died within a relatively short space of time, and history has blurred their identities. This is confirmed by the latter John's Inquisitions Post Mortem which consistently state that his heir was aged eight - with the exception of one placing his age at seven – and name his widow as Agnes.[104]

The precise way in which John Fastolf of Yarmouth became John Fastolf of Oulton is not entirely clear. Documents detailing the precise passage of the manor in the early 1400s are lacking but it appears to have belonged to the senior line of the descendants of Hugh Fastolf (d.1392). Harcourt cites a Coram Rege roll entry indicating that the manor of Oulton was already in possession of Hugh by 1380, and by 1400 was in the hands of Hugh's heir Sir John Fastolf (d.1406).[105] Norris' manuscript pedigree indicates that Joan, the widow of Hugh Fastolf, presented to the church of Oulton in 1414; a John Fastolf Esq presented to Oulton in 1419, which must be our man from Yarmouth already in use of the estate given that no other 'John Fastolf Esq' was then of age for such transactions. For the moment it appears that John's occupation of Oulton was due to some agreement between kinsmen, the written record of which has been lost; John's father seems not to have owned any land and some of his kin may have felt it a good turn to let John occupy and operate Oulton. After John's death in 1445 Oulton presumably reverted to the representative of the senior line, John Fastolf of Cowhawe, but upon his death, control of it seems to have passed to his brother Edmund Fastolf, a son of Sir Hugh Fastolf (d.1417), who in 1459 quitclaimed it to Katherine, the widow of John Fastolf of Oulton;[106] in 1477

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99 Magdalen College Archives, Briggs & Beyton 24; cited in Kenneth Bruce McFarlane, op.cit. (1981), 183.

100 Norfolk Record Office, Rye MS 4. She was still Katherine Sampson when John Copenger of Buxhall made his will on 19 July 1441: John Sampson made a will circa 1442. See Northeast, Wills Sudbury, I: 33-35.

101 Surprisingly, the fact that Katherine seems to have left no heirs of her body was noted as long ago as 1890 by one researcher, but – perhaps because his article was published with the stated goal of identifying the arms on the Kettleburgh font – no one seems to have realised the implications of this for the conventional version of the Fastolfs' descent.
T Bond, "Kettleburgh Font" The East Anglian, III (1889-90): 174.

102 Norfolk Record Office, NCC Will Register Wylbey, 64.

103 CFR: XVIII: 70, 74, and 77.

104 National Archives, C 139/131/15.

105 L W Vernon Harcourt, "The Two Sir John Fastolfs", Transactions of the Royal Historical Society (Third Series) 4 (1910): 58.

106 CCR: Henry VI, VI:432-33.

Thomas Fastolf too divested himself of any right to it and Katherine immediately sold it, giving rise to litigation that continued after her death.[107]

The fine levied in 1477 by William Jenney and Katherine Fastolf 'widow, lately wife of John Fastolf, late of Oulton' against Thomas Fastolf 'son and heir of John Fastolf, late of Nacton in Suffolk'[108] shows not a redundancy in the listing of Johns but rather an indispensable attempt to separate the identities of two men – which, for the most part, has not worked. The entry from the Close Rolls cited above almost sounds ambiguous with regard to whether Thomas was a son of Agnes or some earlier wife of John's, but a pardon roll prepared in December 1471 identifies him as the son and heir of Agnes, the wife of John Fastolf Esq.[109]

Curiously, Thomas Fastolf was not declared of age till 1466,[110] though efforts began to have him declared of age in November 1461.[111] That the event was put off is perhaps testament to the influence of the Pastons or others in whose interest it was to delay the end of Thomas' wardship.

As for Agnes, nothing is presently known of her origin or eventual fate: apart from the handful of references mentioned above, she was probably the Agnes Fastolf residing at Ipswich in October 1450 from whom Sir John instructed Thomas Howes to collect 'x markes'.[112]

The Best of the Rest

Sir John Fastolf KG was born around 1378, and he may have been rather a late child (or perhaps his father was). In any event, most of his Fastolf first cousins died decades before he did. His father John died in 1383; his mother Mary, who died in 1406,[113] daughter of one Nicholas Park, Esq, had already been married to Sir Thomas Mortimer of Attleborough.[114] Through his paternal uncles, Sir John had several Fastolf cousins. One, Alexander the son of Thomas Fastolf, had settled at Bradwell in Suffolk as early as 1383,[115] and seems to have still been making that his primary residence when he made his will in 1405.[116] He is referred to once in 1389 as 'Alexander, the son of Thomas Fastolf'[117] no doubt to differentiate him from Alexander, the son of Hugh Fastolf, whose career we've examined above: Hugh was one of the parties to the deed Alexander was witnessing so precise identification was important.

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107 National Archives, C 1/53/87.

108 Walter Rye, A Calendar of the Feet of Fines for Suffolk (Ipswich: W E Harrison, 1900), 311.

109 Josiah Clement Wedgwood, History of Parliament: Biographies of Members of the Commons House II (1936), 313, Note 4.

110 National Archives, PROB 31/703.

111 Colin Richmond, The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century: The First Phase (2002), 242.

112 Norman Davis, Richard Beadle & Colin Richmond, op.cit. III (2004), 100.

113 British Library, Cotton Vespasian MS. DXVII, Fº 85.

114 Francis Blomefield & Charles Parkin, An Essay Towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk XI (1810), 206.

115 Rev Alfred Suckling, The History and Antiquities of the County of Suffolk I (1866), 325.

116 Norfolk Record Office, Gur 151 146x3.

117 Magdalen College Archives, Norfolk Deeds, Spitlings 88.

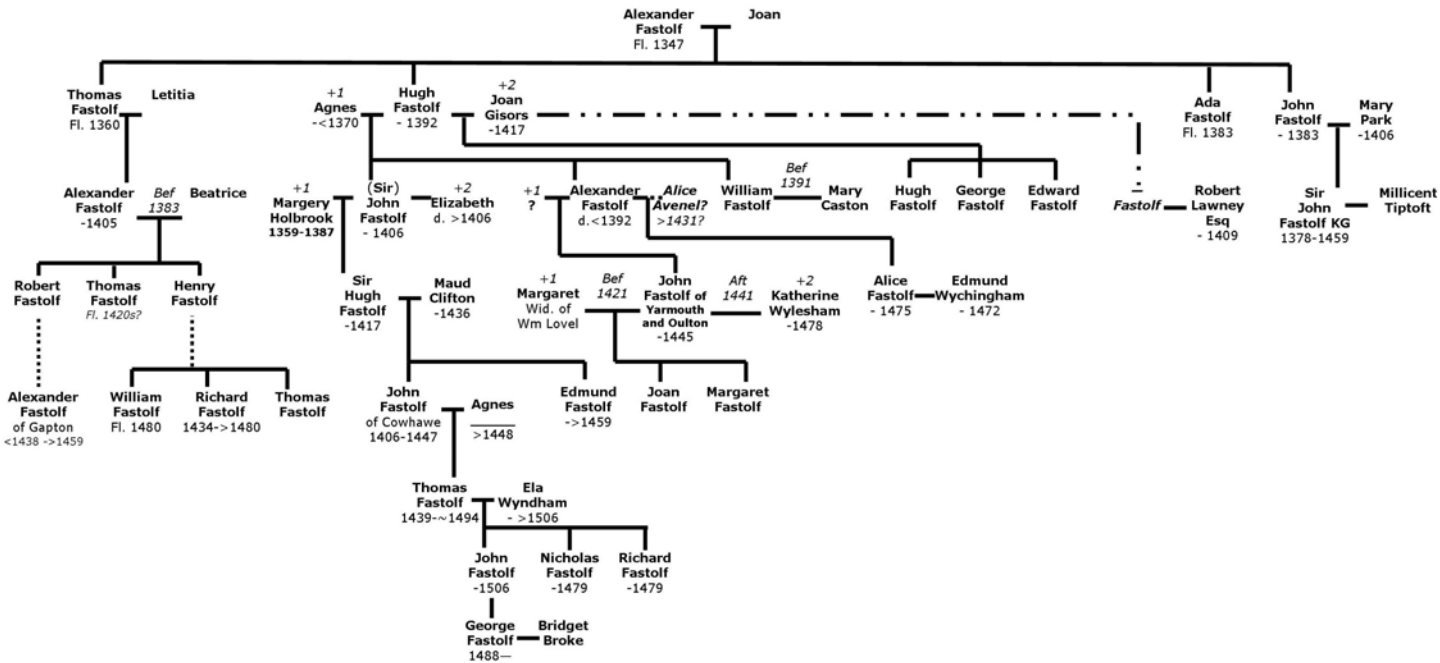


Fig 3. ***Descendants of Alexander Fastolf: proposed genealogy based on research described in this article***

Hugh's third son, William, is stated to have married the daughter of Robert Caston,[118] and sold the manor of Kirkhall in Rockland Tofts in 1387;[119] after that he, like his younger half-siblings, disappears into utter obscurity. He may have been the father of a William Fastolf still active in the Rockland Tofts area in 1449.[120] Hugh's fourth son, Hugh, may have been the husband of the 'Agnes wife of Hugh Fastolf' who died in 1384.[121] Hugh's fifth son was perhaps the 'George, son of Hugh Fastolf' buried at St Helen's Bishopsgate, London.[122]

The next generation witnessed the family's definitive wane even as one of its members had reached lofty heights of wealth and status. None of the descendants of Alexander Fastolf of Bradwell attained any sort of prominence in the 15th century: their descent can be pieced together – just – through three records. One is Alexander's will, mentioned above. Another is a contemporary memorandum prepared circa 1460-70, probably by Sir John's executors, stating that Thomas Fastolf, 'soudiour' of the Hospital of the Holy Cross, and Richard Fastolf, late of Southwark, 'taylllour', were brothers, and sons of Henry Fastolf, younger son of Alexander Fastolf of Gapton, near Yarmouth, son and heir of Thomas Fastolf, younger brother of Hugh Fastolf, and son of Alexander Fastolf.[123] The third, a letter of attorney granted in 1480 by William Fastolf, gent, of Dunmow Chipping, Essex, son of Henry Fastolf the heir of Thomas Fastolf, late of Great Yarmouth, to his brother Richard Fastolf, citizen and tailor of London, appointing the latter his attorney to recover debts due to him in Great Yarmouth.[124]

This letter of attorney in fact states Henry Fastolf to have been the son of Thomas Fastolf of Great Yarmouth, yet I believe the memorandum, not the power of attorney, to have the correct arrangement of the family. Perhaps the scribe erred in writing. Whatever the case, the 1405 will of Alexander Fastolf of Bradwell is a primary source not mentioned by any of those who have examined the Fastolf pedigree in the last few centuries and, I believe, was unknown to all of them, and so would have remained had not a contemporary copy turned up in the Norfolk Record Office. Alexander did indeed have a younger son named Henry – an exceptionally uncommon name among the Fastolfs' tediously unvarying choices – and Alexander was the son of Thomas Fastolf of Great Yarmouth. Alexander's will stated that after the decease of his wife Beatrice, their son Henry was to have all of his messuages in Great Yarmouth. It seems likely that the scribe has skipped a generation and that William, Thomas and Richard were great-grandsons of Thomas. Certainly the very precise references to Richard Fastolf as a Citizen and Tailor of London leave little doubt that he is the same man referenced every time, and so he can be used as a point of reference in assembling the pedigree of the relations with which he is mentioned. Thomas, the son of Alexander and Beatrice Fastolf, may have been the man who witnessed a few land transactions of Sir John's in the 1420s.[125]

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118 British Library, Cotton Vespasian MS. DXVII, Fº 83.

119 CCR: Henry VI, III:439.

120 CFR: XVII: 11 and 115.

121 William Worcester, Itineraries, trans. John Hooper Harvey (1969), 179.

122 British Library, Add. Ms. 19129, 74 verso.

123 Great Britain, Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, Fourth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, (1874), 461.

124 Norfolk Record Office, Phi 612/4 578x6.

125 For example, in 1428: Magdalen College Archives, Norfolk Deeds, Spitlings 60.

Richard, in fact, seems to have been something of a favourite with Sir John, at least in contrast to the cold shoulder he gave the rest of his Fastolf relations. Sir John's will includes this clause which probably did not boost his popularity among his kinsmen: 'Item, forasmyche as it is seyd that dyverse personis of dyverse desentes pretende at this day to be next heneritere [inheritor] to me aftyr my deseas, where knowe that no creature hathe title or right to inheryte ony londes and tenementes, rentes, and servisez that ever I hadde, or ony persone or personys have to myn use ; therfor I will and ordeyne that no persone nor personis as hey . . .me for no douteful or obskure materes conteynid in this my present will, nor for noon othyr, shall take ony maner of avauntage, benefice, or profit be ony manner meanys or weyes, of ony manerez, lordshepis, londes, tenementes, rentes, servisez, goodes, or catellys that were myn at ony tyme.126 Item, I will and ordeyne that suche of my consanguinite and kynred whyche be pore and have but litil substaunce to leve by, that they be relevyd of my goodes havyng consederation to thoo that be nerrest of my kyn and of Also of there good disposecion too God ward and to me.' [127]

In 1456 John Bocking had written to remind Sir John Fastolf 'that ye like to write a good lettre for Richard Fastolf to Sir Roger Chamberleyn, and to Thornton, Chamberleyn of London, and to both of hem, &c.' [128]

In June 1466 Richard Fastolf of London gave testimony to the effect that he had visited Sir John at Caister in mid-September 1459 to ask for help 'that he might marry, as he was one of Sir John's relations. To this Sir John made answer that he had within a few [days] preceding made his will, which he would not alter, and that he had made mention of Richard in it.[129] Richard does not seem to have been one of those inclined to impugn Sir John's will, and perhaps this is why the following year he received from Sir John's executors a messuage with a shop for him to set up trade in Southwark – making him, as far as I can tell, the only member of the Fastolf family to receive anything from Sir John's vast patrimony.[130] Where Sir John did pass anything to his relations, they were in the families of his maternal half-sisters.

The fate of Joan and Margaret, the two daughters mentioned in the will of John Fastolf of Oulton, remains murky. An undated, unsigned letter[131] exists that seems to be from the husband of one of the girls, probably Joan; the writer recounts how he and his father had come to an agreement with Alexander Kingston and Ralph Lampet, two of John's executors, to buy the reversion of the manor of Oulton and associated lands from them; they had already paid 1/3 of the total when William Jenney stepped in and paid the full price, and so took possession of the reversion. Davis suggested the letter was probably written before 1462, and it may be contemporary to the 1459 quitclaim of Oulton made by Edmund Fastolf to William Jenney and Katherine Fastolf. Sir Richard Gipps' unreliable account, mentioned above, assigns husbands to the two girls: Roger Gyney Esq of Knodishall and Robert Jernigan Esq of Stonham, but these two names seem to be imaginary constructs made from bits of other men's identities. Bereft of maritagium lands or any other markers to single them out in Chancery proceedings or Fines, the girls joined the untraceable masses. At present their marriages and posterity, if they left any, remain unknown.

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126 James Gairdner, ed., The Paston Letters III (1904), 151-2.

127 James Gairdner, op.cit. III (1904), 151-2.

128 James Gairdner, op.cit. III (1904), 76.

129 James Gairdner, op.cit. IV (1904), 244-5.

130 Magdalen College Archives, Surrey Deeds, Southwark 164.

131 Norman Davis, ed., Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century II (1976), 267-8.

From Agincourt to Oblivion

A first set of Inquisitions Post Mortem, apparently held with devious intent, declared Thomas Fastolf of Cowhawe to be the heir of Sir John Fastolf KG; subsequently the process was repeated and the new commissioners declared Sir John's heir to be one Alexander Fastolf of Gapton, aged 21 and more in 1459.[132] We may conjecture him to have been a son of either Robert or Thomas Fastolf, sons of Alexander of Bradwell: the Knight having left no issue, his heir at law would have been the issue of his eldest uncle of the full blood, and as we have already seen, the disparity between their assorted first appearances in the Patent Rolls and other records inclines one to think that among the sons of Alexander Fastolf of Great Yarmouth, Thomas was the eldest, followed by Hugh and then John.[133] Being heir at law to Sir John Fastolf KG was however an empty distinction: Alexander Fastolf of Gapton received nothing from Sir John in his will, and a careful study of the provenance of Sir John's lands, at least as disclosed by those lands of which the records of purchase are now stored at Magdalen College Archives,[134] suggests that few if any of Sir John's vast holdings were inherited from his Fastolf ancestors.

What eventually became of this line of the Fastolfs is not presently clear. This Alexander of Gapton, or some brother or cousin his, may have been the ancestor of the parties to a certain chancery suit[135] in which Alice Fastolf and Margaret her sister, wife of William Sparham, sued the widow Elizabeth Fastolf for land in Bradwell, Belton, Freton, South Town and Gorleston: if that's the case then this line seems to have daughtered out by 1500.

Thomas Fastolf of Cowhawe, sometime lord of Oulton, has been confused by Wedgwood[136] with an earlier Thomas Fastolf of Ipswich, as noted by K B McFarlane,[137] and it is also easy enough to confuse him with a near-contemporary, Thomas Fastolf of the Pettaugh line, who married a daughter of Reginald Rous of Dennington and also occurs around Ipswich at the end of the 15th century.

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[132] For this chain of events see Colin Richmond, The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century: Fastolf's Will (2002), 107-113.

[133] Unless the property was somehow entailed (eg by a settlement on the younger sons and their issue), the heirs would be the issue (if any) of the eldest uncle of the full blood (half brothers and their issue would be excluded), and so on in the absence of issue down to the issue of the youngest uncle. Sometimes an IPM will name as the heir someone who is not the "heir at law", but only the heir by virtue of a particular settlement of the property in question.

[134] The records for specific manors and other lands once owned by Sir John Fastolf and now held at Magdalen College Archives constitute an invaluable and for the most part, I believe, still largely unexploited treasure trove of material for the history of the families that owned each tract of land before Sir John. He was as a rule very cautious with regard to ensuring that the sellers of land that he bought possessed clear title, and no doubt for that reason preserved all of the papers showing the land's passage from hand to hand for as much as two hundred years before his purchase. Ironically, the curious constant of all this documentation is that the one family about which it reveals little is the Fastolfs, nearly all of Sir John's lands having been acquired from others: the only exceptions to this general rule occur where Sir John bought lands from relations (for example, his 1415 purchase of Beighton and other lands from Sir Hugh Fastolf [d.1417]; Magdalen College Archives, Norfolk Deeds, Beyton 9 and 30) or where they served as witnesses to his transactions.

[135] National Archives, C 1/226/36.

[136] Josiah Clement Wedgwood, History of Parliament: Biographies of Members of the Commons House II (1936), 313.

[137] Kenneth Bruce McFarlane, op.cit. (1981), 183.

Margaret Paston feared in 1467 that Thomas would attempt to claim Caister Castle, writing that 'Fastolf of Coughhawe maketh all the strength that he may and purposith hym to assaught Caystre… he hath a v score men redy'[138] but otherwise, as Colin Richmond puts it, 'Thomas Fastolf, that useful pawn who was kept a ward, according to his mother, beyond his time (so useful was he) disappeared from view.'[139] Wedgwood's entry certainly mixes up two or more Thomas Fastolfs and under these circumstances it is not clear if Thomas of Cowhawe, or another man, was the MP for Ipswich in 1487. Norris' manuscript refers to a Nicholas and Richard Fastolf, both of whom died in 1479 and were buried in Nacton Church; at least one of their stones survived as late as 1968, referring to 'Richard, son of Thomas Fastolf'.[140]

Thomas does seem to been a persistent thorn in the Pastons' side, trying to claim from his guardian's estate other lands to which his title was questionable at best. Long after Sir John's death, his associates and executors were still engaged in distributing his estate: for example, William Wainfleet, Bishop of Winchester, seems to have used a carrot-and-stick approach, taking Thomas to chancery and also paying him off to make him give up a claim on Beighton.[141] Thomas held on to the Nacton manor of Cowhaugh (or Cowhawe or even Cow Hall, as it is sometimes called); Copinger's descent of the manor mixes up the middle generations, placing John Fastolf of Oulton as the father of Sir John Fastolf KG, but at least seems to correctly attribute the manor's descent from the Holbrooks to Thomas Fastolf, then to Thomas' son and heir John, who died in 1506,[142] and John's son George, born around 1488, who married a daughter of Sir Richard Broke.[143] The manor was in 1506 stated to be worth more than £30, and came with other lands – at Playford, Ash, Somerleyton, Belton and Gorleston, among others.

A perception has long existed - nurtured perhaps by tangentially related details such as that remark about Sir John being 'cruel and vengible', and the deviousness with which he instructed his underlings to all but make up a Lovel genealogy that would suit him in his acquisition of Titchwell - that Sir John so vigorously sought the wardship of the minor Thomas Fastolf of Cowhawe merely to pluck clean Thomas' birthright, and then sealed the Fastolf family's descent into obscurity by dispossessing the heir male of the principal line, and letting all the estates slip into other hands, mostly by way of the Pastons' actions in enforcing that dodgy nuncupative will. A few lands possibly matching some which had been mentioned in the 1448 Inquisition Post Mortem of Thomas' father, such as tracts at Bentley, Kirkley and Rendlesham, do figure in Sir John's own inquisition a decade later. Sir John however pleaded the purest of motives in his struggle to obtain wardship of Thomas. Referring, perhaps disingenuously, to the late John Fastolf of Cowhawe as 'a por kynnesman of myne', Sir John wrote to the Duke of Norfolk seeking the latter's help against Sir Philip Wentworth, another claimant of Thomas' wardship; Sir John indicates that naming Wentworth Thomas' guardian would be 'to the grett hurte and distruccion as well of the inheritance of the seyd heyer as interrupcion and breking of the last will of the seyd John, and

[138] Norman Davis, edit., Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century I (1971), 334-5.

[139] Colin Richmond, The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century: Fastolf's Will (2002), 119.

[140] Alan Jobson, The Felixstowe Story (1968), 168.

[141] National Archives, C1/53/26; Colin Richmond, The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century: Fastolf's Will (2002), 238.

[142] National Archives, C 142/21/57; CIPM: Henry VII, III:256.

[143] W A Copinger, The Manors of Suffolk III (1909), 68.

also to my grett troble and dammage'.[144] Was this his real concern? A list scribbled on the back of this letter seems to be a careful tally of the heir's inheritance:

> 'Br[adwe]ll juxta Jernemut.
> Kirkley juxta Leystoft, viii £.
> Foxhole [&]
> Cowhaw in Nakton on this side Yepiswich, iii. myl. xviii £. Langston in Brustall, ii. myle beyond Yepiswich iii £.
> Bentele, ii. mile beyond Brustall, xiiii £.'

While it is true that Sir John's conduct in matters of business was sometimes less than exemplary – though, to be honest, so was that of his rivals, or of his associates in their own affairs – the family's financial implosion in fact has another culprit: the gentleman mentioned above, George Fastolf of Nacton. The IPM for George's father, mentioned above, lists as George's inheritance the manor and advowson of Nacton and, among others, land in Kirkley, Bradwell and Foxhole [Foxhall], and a good many lesser properties - not quite the same as what his great-great-great-great grandfather had possessed at his death barely 120 years earlier, but still a better estate than many enjoyed.

Series C 131 at the National Archives tells a sorry story of George's speedy squandering of his inheritance and descent into a mire of debt. For example, an inquisition taken in 1512 over a debt of £250 to one Walter Champion, Citizen and draper of London, showed that 'George Fastolf, on the day of the recognisance, was seised of: the Manor of West Creeting with appurtenances in Creeting St Peter, worth £12; the Manor of Necton, worth £24; the Manor of Poundehall, worth £10; the Manor of Greenwich, worth £6; and a messuage in Ipswich, worth 26s. 8d.'[145] At the time of this inquisition the Sheriff, Roger Townsend, replied that George Fastolf 'was not found in the bailiwick.' George apparently sold Nacton to an agent of his father-in-law in 1514, and it was to remain in Broke hands for generations; in that same year Thomas Gybon, then Sheriff, certified that he had delivered the manor of West Creeting to another of George's debtors, Richard King, mercer of Bury St Edmunds;[146] George was again nowhere to be found. Several similar proceedings for debt divested George of the totality of his properties, one by one, and after that George disappears from view altogether.[147] This completed the rise and fall of the house of Alexander Fastolf, sometime Burgess of Great Yarmouth; the blame for the ultimate failure of the lineage to prosper into more recent times resting not with its most rapacious member but rather its most profligate one.

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[144] James Gairdner, ed., The Paston Letters III (1904), 19-20. Oddly enough, the will made by John Fastolf of Cowhawe, in which Sir John implied that he had been chosen as Thomas' guardian, seems to have disappeared.

[145] National Archives, C131/98/14.

[146] National Archives, C 131/260/11.

[147] Around 1550 Jane, the wife of John Perien, who then described herself as granddaughter and heir of John Fastolf of Ipswich, Esquire brought suit against one Richard Byrde of Ipswich, claiming Nacton and many other lands once in this family. National Archives, C 1/1256/14.

of my curiosity regarding the Fastolfs sent me tentative stemma of the Cowhawe line of the family.

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