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Author(s): Lilly O’Driscoll

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Lilly O'Driscoll

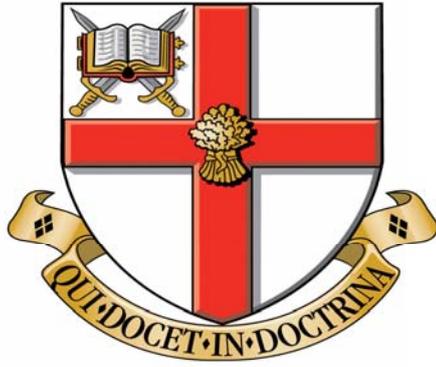
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To what extent and how did the instability of Henry VI's kingship, culminating in civil war, affect the Paston and Stonor families between 1422-1483?

'The fifteenth century was not a time of unmitigated strife and gloom but one in which most people went about their daily business'.¹ This dissertation will aim to modify the above statement made by Kingsford and explore how two gentry families in the fifteenth century were affected by the instability of Henry VI's kingship, which culminated in war and political turmoil throughout the 1400's. The Stonor and Paston letter collections will be examined to understand the social impacts war and political instability had on two different gentry families. The Paston and Stonor archives have been chosen due to their similarities such as status, land ownership and powerful connections. This work will try to understand if the families standing in society, land ownership and lives were put in to jeopardy by political disturbances. Furthermore this work will explore how the fighting to end the political troubles threatened to disrupt the stability and rise of the Stonors and Pastons. Although the families have a number of differences, such as locality and family prestige, the conclusions reached will seek to highlight that the Pastons and Stonors may not have been so different after all.² The period from 1422 to 1483 is being explored to see the effect instability of Henry's kingship had during and after his reign. Also, to determine whether poor kingship was to blame for the problems both of the families faced such as land disputes, or if the tensions would have happened regardless and were only exacerbated by Henry VI's instability.

The Paston and Stonor families have left a wealth of information behind in their letter collections and they have a number of similarities. Both were of gentry status due to their land ownership, wealth and service to the crown notably through their successful careers in law,

¹ C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 11.

² C. Carpenter, *The Wars of the Roses: Politics and the constitution in England, c.1437-1509* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), p. 63.

which allowed them to play a prominent role in local politics.³ The term 'gentry' is very difficult to define as it encapsulated such a variety of men, due to a man only having to earn over £5 per year to hold gentry status.⁴ The gentry were divided into three categories; knights, esquires and mere gentry, their influence was growing and they formed a significant part of the House of Commons.⁵ Wars could have devastating effects on the gentry such as the loss of estates, which resulted in many trying to stay out of the conflict for as long as possible and meant they did not show too much allegiance to a political faction.⁶ The Pastons and Stonors letters on the whole are politically neutral as they do not show their opinions for either the Lancastrian or Yorkist's. However, the families associations indicated by the letters and military involvement in the latter years of the civil war, demonstrates that they did become involved in the conflict and had to decide where their allegiances lay. Furthermore, the families were similar in respect to their land ownership as they were both prominent landowners in their locality. Land ownership in the Middle Ages represented wealth and status, the families were very ambitious to increase and defend their land holdings.⁷ Due to the Paston and Stonor ambition and position in society, it resulted in them not being able to avoid involvement in the political disturbances of the day, despite their best efforts to avoid conflict. A significant proportion of the Stonor property had been purchased by Sir John de Stonor, such as the manors of Stonor, Watcombe and Watlington in Oxfordshire.⁸ The Pastons gentry status had been founded by William Paston in

³ M. Mercer, *The Medieval Gentry: Power, Leadership and Choice During the Wars of the Roses* (London: Continuum UK, 2010), p. 9.

⁴ M. Mercer, *The Medieval Gentry: Power, Leadership and Choice During the Wars of the Roses* (London: Continuum UK, 2010), p.9.

⁵ J.A. Wagner, *Encyclopaedia of the Wars of the Roses* (California: ABC, 2001), p. 100.

⁶ J.A. Wagner, *Encyclopaedia of the Wars of the Roses* (California: ABC, 2001), p. 100.

⁷ S. J. Payling, 'Social Mobility, Demographic Change, and Landed Society in Late Medieval England', *The Economic History Review*, 45 (1992), p. 51.

⁸ C.L. Kingsford, 'Introduction' in *The Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483:Vol 1*, ed. C.L. Kingsford (London: Royal Historical Society, 1981), p. xi.

the early 1400's when he bought ten manors in Norfolk, including Cromer and Gresham and only one property outside of Norfolk, in Cambridgeshire.⁹

The Stonor and Pastons have many similarities, their large property portfolio meant that they were important local figures and had a wide range of connections and subsequently links to national figures. The families rose to significance and gained gentry status through their education of the law.¹⁰ Connections were built through the careers of both families which took the Paston and Stonor men to London, for example Sir William Stonor and Sir John Paston II were both knighted.¹¹ The Stonor and Paston local prominence resulted in their neighbours and magnates being envious and the families had a number of enemies. The envy created by the power they held, resulted in the families having to contend with long running land disputes over the ownership of certain manors as other leading figures in society argued that the land was rightfully theirs. The Stonor and Paston men were very active in local politics, serving as JP's and MP's which enabled them to play a part in national politics.¹² Thomas Stonor II held the position of JP, MP and sheriff.¹³ Similarly, John Paston I was successful in his law career, holding the position of JP on three occasions in Norfolk and his work led to an established

⁹ C. Richmond, R. Virgoe, 'William Paston I, Justice (1378-1444)', in *Oxford DNB (Online)*. Available; <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21514?docPos=1>

¹⁰ J. Gairdner, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 1, p. 30. C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 2.

¹¹ H. Castor, 'Sir John (II) Landowner' in *Oxford DNB (Online)* Available;<http://www.oxforddnb.com.voyager.chester.ac.uk/view/article/21512?docPos=2> oxford Carpenter. C., 'Stonor Family (per.c.1315-c.1500)', in Oxford DNB (Online) Available; <http://www.oxforddnb.com.voyager.chester.ac.uk/view/article/52796/63927?back=,52796,52796>

¹² C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. xxiii.

C. Richmond, 'Paston Family (per. c.1420-1504)', in Oxford DNB (Online) Available; <http://www.oxforddnb.com.voyager.chester.ac.uk/view/article/52791/61167?back=,52791,52791>

¹³ K.E. Kennedy *Maintenance, Meed and Marriage in Medieval English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 16.

association with Sir John Fastolf who had been a distinguished military leader in the Hundred Years War.¹⁴

However, the Pastons and Stonors have a number of differences that have impacted upon the contents of the letters and thus the conclusion which can be drawn on the impacts the political disturbances had on them. The Pastons land was primarily held in East Anglia whereas the Stonors owned property in the Thames Valley, Oxfordshire and areas further afield such as Gloucestershire and Westminster.¹⁵ The Stonor family were a far more established family than their counterparts as the family history originated from the 1290's.¹⁶ Sir John Stonor amassed properties in nine counties and in London through success in law, working as the King's sergeant in 1315 and justice of the King's bench in 1324 and was subsequently knighted.¹⁷ On the other hand the Pastons prestige had only been established from the turn of the fifteenth century.¹⁸ William Paston founded his family's fortunes he gained the position of justice of the Common Pleas of Norfolk in 1418 and served many East Anglian gentleman.¹⁹ William's descendants followed in his footsteps and improved the family's standing in society, such as his son John Paston I and grandson Sir John Paston II who was knighted in 1463.²⁰ The Stonor

¹⁴ H. Castor, 'John Paston I (1421–1466), *Landowner and Letter Writer*', in *Oxford DNB(Online)Available*; <http://www.oxforddnb.com.voyager.chester.ac.uk/view/article/21511/21511?back=,52791>

G.L. Harriss, 'Sir John Fastolf (1380-1459), Soldier and Landowner', in *Oxford DNB (Online) Available*; <http://www.oxforddnb.com.voyager.chester.ac.uk/view/article/9199?docPos=1>

¹⁵ C.L. Kingsford, 'Introduction' in *The Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483:Vol 1*, ed. C.L. Kingsford (London: Royal Historical Society, 1981), pp. vii, xiv, xv. ; J. Gairdner, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 1, pp. 36, 38.

¹⁶ C.L. Kingsford, 'Introduction' in *The Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483:Vol 1*, ed. C.L. Kingsford (London: Royal Historical Society, 1981), p. viii.

¹⁷ C.L. Kingsford, 'Introduction' in *The Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483:Vol 1*, ed. C.L. Kingsford (London: Royal Historical Society, 1981), p. viii.

P.J. Jeffries, 'Sir John Stonor (1281-1354), Justice', in *Oxford DNB (Online) Available*; <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26583?docPos=1>

¹⁸ J. Gairdner, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 1, p. 30. C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 2.

¹⁹ J. Gairdner, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 1, p. 26. C. Richmond, R. Virgoe, 'William Paston (I) (1378–1444), *Justice*' in *Oxford DNB (Online) Available*; <http://www.oxforddnb.com.voyager.chester.ac.uk/view/article/21514?docPos=1>

²⁰ J. Gairdner, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 1, p. 37.

family also involved themselves in other business such as Sir William Stonor, who ventured into the wool trade between 1475 to 1479, in partnership with Thomas Betson.²¹

There is a wide debate surrounding the causes of the instability in Henry VI's reign and the reasons for the loss of his crown in 1461. The role of the monarch in upholding peace and enforcing the law was crucial in the fifteenth century.²² McFarlane believes that Henry's personality and rule was the root cause of his defeat, which is evident in his foreign policy that resulted in the loss of France in 1453.²³ Also, Jones argues that Henry VI's instability was due to the dynastic uncertainty of the period, with York and Somerset vying for the throne in the late 1440's.²⁴ Whereas, Watts argues Henry VI's downfall was largely due to those closest to him such as Henry's wife Margaret of Anjou and the Duke of Somerset who manipulated Henry into enforcing policies for their own benefit.²⁵ Although Henry VI had to deal with a number of problems such as a deficit in royal finances and inheriting the war with France and the dynastic uncertainty from his father Henry V, effective kingship could have saved his reign.²⁶ Henry's personal rule allowed the nobility to outshine royal authority and led to widespread instability, this had numerous consequences for society. The power of the nobility and the role they had in the Pastons and Stonors affairs will be explored to establish the effects Henry VI's reign had on the families.

There are a number of discussions concerning the view of the fifteenth century and the impact the civil war had on the gentry. Amery argues that the gentry were hardly affected by the civil

H. Castor, 'Sir John (II) Landowner' in *Oxford DNB (Online)*

Available;<http://www.oxforddnb.com.voyager.chester.ac.uk/view/article/21512?docPos=2> oxford

J. Gairdner, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 1, p. 26.

²¹ C. Carpenter, 'Stonor Family (per.c.1315–c.1500)', in *Oxford DNB (Online)* Available;

<http://www.oxforddnb.com.voyager.chester.ac.uk/view/article/52796/63927?back=,52796,52796>

²² C. Carpenter, *The Wars of the Roses: Politics and Constitution in England, c. 1437-1509* (Cambridge:CUP

²³ K. B. McFarlane, 'The Wars of the Roses ' in *England in the Fifteenth Century* ed. P. 240 see gl harris

²⁴ M.K. Jones, 'Somerset, York and The War of the Roses', in *The English Historical Review*, 104 (1989), p. 289.

²⁵ J. Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship* (CUP: Cambridge, 1996), p. 199.

²⁶ C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 7.

war as it had little impact on society and were only threatened by the conflict if they had supported the loosing political affinity, through their ties of lordship.²⁷ However, Bennett believes that the civil war caused by weak kingship, did have repercussions for the gentry and society as a whole.²⁸ Furthermore, the Paston and Stonor letters have painted contrasting images of what life was like for a gentry family in the 1400's. Nineteenth century historians Plummer and Stubbs have argued that the fifteenth century was a period when the old order was breaking down to make way for a new era.²⁹ As the lower and non -landed classes had more liberty than ever before and were unable to use it, because the government was not in the position to act on the grievances of the commons which led to violence.³⁰ Additionally, Stubbs believes that the 1400's were filled with evil and unrest due to weak royal governance and administration, which had allowed magnates to hold too much power and threaten the peace.³¹ The Paston letters and the petitions against noble force have supported Stubbs' view.³² Alternatively, Pendrill argues that the dynastic conflict did not cause a complete breakdown in society and the image of complete anarchy has been exaggerated because life in England had always been violent and there was always a possibility for war.³³ The view of the fifteenth century was altered after the Stonor letters came to light and Carpenter argued that it was not such a dark and violent period of English history because the Stonors detail less violence and political disruption.³⁴ Carpenter believes that the Stonor letters have the potential to cause the image of the fifteenth century to be re-explored as their archive was not heavily concentrated

²⁷ A. Emery, *Greater Medieval Houses of England and Wales, 1300-1500* (CUP: Cambridge, 2000), p. 195.

²⁸ H.S. Bennett, *The Pastons and their England* (Cambridge: CUP, 1922), p. 181.

²⁹ C. Carpenter, *The Wars of the Roses: Politics and the constitution in England, c.1437-1509* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), p. 10.

³⁰ C. Plummer, 'Introduction' in *The Governance of England: Otherwise Called, The Difference Between an Absolute and Limited Monarchy*, ed. C. Plummer (New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange, 1885), p. 3.

³¹ W. Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England, in its Origin and Development* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1875). pp. 270, 279.

³² W. Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England, in its Origin and Development* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1875). pp. 270, 279.

³³ C. Pendrill, *The Wars of the Roses and Henry VII* (Great Britain: Heinemann, 2004), p. 35.

³⁴ C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 10.

on noble dominance.³⁵ It is believed that the Stonor family represented a more typical image of the gentry because the Pastons consumed with social aspirations were atypical and very different to the Stonors.³⁶ Areas under consideration in this paper will to establish whether the level of violence and disputes recorded in the letters, changed during times of royal instability and war, compared to more stable periods in the fifteenth century.

This research will seek to determine the impact Henry VI's kingship and its disastrous end had on the Stonor and Paston families because the letters have been primarily focused upon by historians such as Bennett on social themes.³⁷ The letters have not been analysed in their entirety and it has been argued that because the Paston and Stonor men did not participate in military battles to a high extent, they did not feel many repercussions from the political disharmony. The Stonor papers are being examined because they have been largely overlooked by historians and have not been examined to the same extent compared to the Pastons, Noble has noted that 'no historian has used the abundance of material they contain'.³⁸ Also, Noble believes the Stonor letters have not been examined in the context of the area they lived in, this is also the case for the Paston letters as Carpenter believes works existing works do not link the Paston family to the social and political world of East Anglia.³⁹ Through analysing the Paston and Stonor letters, this essay will challenge existing perceptions of the families to highlight that they may not be so dissimilar after all. The Paston letters have been explored from a wider range of avenues such as family, marriage, social rise and their disputes over land. Richmond for example looked at the letters to understand how a family in the fifteenth century

³⁵ C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 10.

³⁶ C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 17.

³⁷ E. Noble, *The World of the Stonors* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), p. 3.
H.S. Bennett, *The Pastons and their England* (Cambridge: CUP,1990).

³⁸ E. Noble, *The World of the Stonors* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), p. 1.

³⁹ E. Noble, *The World of the Stonors* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), pp. 8-9.

could improve their social status and rise in society.⁴⁰ Also, the Stonor and Paston documents have not been explored in relation to how the national events of the time affected them and the level to which the families were involved. Hanham also notes that the Stonor letters have not received the attention they deserve and have not had the best publishing history because there have only been two editions on the family's documents.⁴¹ To add to the existing debate on the impact of the conflict and Henry's instability, the periods of major political upheaval such as 1450 and 1461 will be focused upon to decide if this impacted upon the content and volume of letters. Also, the effects of the over mighty nobility and roles of women in dealing with the war and landed issued will be researched. The involvement of the families in the military battles will be explored in relation to their military service, allegiances to a political party and connections to important military figures.

Primary Sources

The primary sources that will be focused upon are the letters and documents written and received by the Paston and Stonor family. The Paston letter collection comprises of over 1000 documents and first came to light in 1787 when John Fenn a Norfolk gentleman published two volumes of the letters and its popularity gave way to further investigation.⁴² The Paston letters were later published in 1904 by Gairdner and fully compiled by Davis in the 1970's.⁴³ The Stonor papers were first published in 1919 by Kingsford and more recently by Carpenter in 1996.⁴⁴ To date over 750 Stonor documents have been found but only half of the collection

⁴⁰ C. Richmond, *The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996).

E. Noble, *The World of the Stonors* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), p. 6.

⁴¹ A. Hanham, 'Revisiting the Stonor Manuscripts', *Historical Research*, 86 (2013), p. 28.

⁴² F. Gies, J. Gies, *A Medieval Family: The Pastons of 15th Century England* (Harper Collins: Hammersmith, 2010), p. 1;

A. Ramsey, 'Introduction' in *Paston Letters: Original Letters, Written During the Reigns of Henry VI, Edward IV and Richard III*, eds. A. Ramsey, J. Fenn (Charles Knight & CO: London, 1849), p. xvi.

⁴³ J. Gairdner ed., *The Paston Letters, 1422-1509* (Chatto and Windus: London, 1904).

N. Davis ed., *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1971).

⁴⁴ Kingsford, C.L. (ed.), *The Stonor Letters and Papers, 1290-1483*, 2vols (London: Royal Historical Society, 1919).

are letters.⁴⁵ There are many advantages of using letters because they allow us to gain a snapshot of what life was like for a gentry family in the fifteenth century. Letters provide details such as a family's personal and professional links in society, marriage networks, role of women and economic fortunes over a long period. The Paston and Stonor letters have a number of attributes, for example they are far more personal than those written in the early middle ages and therefore give a better insight into the times the authors lived in.⁴⁶ From personal letters it can be assumed that the recipients knew of each other whereas many medieval documents were open and in the form of subordinate to his lord or vice versa.⁴⁷ The letters of both families give an insight into the lives of gentry women and the roles they played within family business.⁴⁸ Rosenthal notes that letter writing was a way women could express themselves and this can be seen by the personal touches they put into their letters. In 1477, Margery Brews wrote a valentine letter to John Paston, 'Ryght wurschypfull and wele beloved volentyne'.⁴⁹ The letters convey emotions at times, when the Duke of Suffolk was murdered William Lomnor wrote to the Pastons informing them of the news and expressing his own emotions at the same time 'I have so washed this little letter with sorrowful tears that you shall read it uneasily.'⁵⁰ The Stonor letters are of significance as they detail the lives of eight generations in the middle ages in comparison to the four generations that the Paston letters cover.⁵¹ Both families were unique

Carpenter. C. (ed.), *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996).

⁴⁵ E. Noble, *The World of the Stonors* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), p. 2.

⁴⁶ J.T. Rosenthal, 'Letters and letter collections' in *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources* ed J.T. Rosenthal (Oxon: Routledge: 2012), p.81.

⁴⁷ J.T. Rosenthal, 'Letters and letter collections' in *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources* ed J.T. Rosenthal (Oxon: Routledge: 2012), p. 74.

⁴⁸ J.T. Rosenthal, 'Letters and letter collections' in *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources* ed J.T. Rosenthal (Oxon: Routledge: 2012), p. 74.

⁴⁹ Letter from Margery Brews to John Paston, February 1477 in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner, (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 5, p. 268.

⁵⁰ H.S. Bennett, *The Pastons and their England* (Cambridge: CUP,1990), p. 117.

⁵¹ E. Noble, *The World of the Stonors* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), p. 15.

and fought for their survival, this can be seen in the longevity of the families as it was unusual for a family to survive over three generations in the Middle Ages.⁵²

However, letters and family archives do have a number of problems which limits the available knowledge. Letters do not contain all the information on a certain topic and much investigation is needed to determine the events that are mentioned in them.⁵³ The Stonor and Paston collections have been edited and translated, consequently errors can occur which could distort the meaning of the original letter. Also, a number of the letters in the Paston collection were draft copies and were not completed versions, for example a number of drafts of Sir John Fastolf's will have been found in the Paston archive.⁵⁴ Another problem with the Stonor letters is that up until the 1450's the majority of letters are written in Latin and very scarce in numbers.⁵⁵ The Stonor collection features letters mainly written to them and this presents an opportunity to explore into the lives of those that wrote to them, as this included members of the social elite such as Thomas Rotherham and John Elmes.⁵⁶ Furthermore, it is uncertain to know how many letters an individual wrote and in many cases letters containing information have been lost.⁵⁷ Also, many letters were dictated to a scribe, thus tone and content of the letter may not accurately represent the sender of the letter.⁵⁸ Furthermore, letter collecting in the Middle Ages was not unheard of but not all letters were saved.⁵⁹ Another problem with using letters from the Middle Ages is that most private letters unlike official documents were not

⁵² E. Noble, *The World of the Stonors* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), p. 16.

⁵³ M. Jolly, ed. *Encyclopedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), p. 131.

⁵⁴ H.S. Bennett, *The Pastons and their England* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p. 116.

Will of Sir John Fastolf, 3 November 1459 in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol 3, p.147.

⁵⁵ C.L. Kingsford, *English Historical Literature in the Fifteenth Century* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1972), p. 196.

⁵⁶ E. Noble, *The World of the Stonors* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), p. 2.

⁵⁷ J.T. Rosenthal, 'Letters and letter collections' in *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources* ed J.T. Rosenthal p. 75.

⁵⁸ J. Haseldine, 'Epistolography' in *Medieval Latin: An Introduction and Bibliographical Guide*, p. 651.

⁵⁹ J. Haseldine, 'Epistolography' in *Medieval Latin: An Introduction and Bibliographical Guide*, p. 651.

dated and therefore pin pointing the exact chronology of a whole collection is difficult.⁶⁰ An example of this is how Margaret Paston dated many of her letters in the form of a saints day such as on 'All Souls' day 'Wretyn in hast, on Sowlemas Day'.⁶¹ Therefore editors have had to make assumptions on when certain documents were written.

Methodology

The letters in the period 1422 to 1483 will be analysed to determine the political, economic and social information they contain. The time frame is being sectioned into three different parts: 1422 to 1442, 1443 to 1462 and finally 1463-1483. The letters will be analysed in a qualitative and quantitative manor, with the content and volume of letters from the different periods of time being compared to determine whether Henry VI's kingship and national events impacted on the content and volume of the letter before and after war started. This work will try to determine whether there were changes in the patterns of the transmission of letters due to legal disputes or court cases, which ultimately allowed them to survive. Another pattern which will be looked into in regards to the survival of the documents is the volume of coverage, whether the number of letters composed in a certain period increased on an individual subjects such as land disagreements or arrangement of marriages and whether this was down to national politics and instability of Henry VI's kingship. To overcome the limitations of the documents, such as the unrepresentative number of letters during certain period's additional secondary sources on the families and material on the areas they lived in will be explored to prevent this affecting the analysis.

Structure of this Dissertation

⁶⁰ J.T. Rosenthal, 'Letters and letter collections' in *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources* ed J.T. Rosenthal (Oxon: Routledge: 2012), p. 78.

⁶¹ J.T. Rosenthal, 'Letters and letter collections' in *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources* ed J.T. Rosenthal (Oxon: Routledge: 2012), p. 84.

This dissertation will be split into four chapters, each will explore the different impacts unstable kingship and war had on both of the families. The first chapter will concentrate on the letter collections, in regards to how letters were constructed and the reasons for their survival. The next chapter will look into how the gentry families were affected by ‘over mighty subjects’ such as John Howard, Duke of Norfolk, Sir John Fortescue and the land disputes they faced. The families’ wealth of connections will be explored, to distinguish their enemies and associates who attacked and protected them during the political instability. Furthermore, one of the main aims of this chapter will be to try and determine whether instability of kingship caused the disputes noted in the letters or if weak kingship only magnified the problems. Although, it can be argued that land problems would always occur regardless of how effective a king was, this work will try to determine if Henry’s kingship allowed for more disputes to arise and increased the time it took for problems to be resolved. In the proceeding chapter, the business accounts and documents relating to the finances of the Stonors and Pastons will be analysed to determine if they were economically affected by the troubles of the fifteenth century. The business relationships the Stonor and Paston family had will be explored into detail, such as the Stonors relationship with Thomas Betson in the wool trade. The final chapter will explore the involvement the families had in the battles of the civil war and the part they played in the conflict the impact the political strife had on the women of the family will be researched into.

Chapter One

Chapter one will focus upon the Paston and Stonor letters, how they were composed, contents they explore, plus how and why they were preserved. It will seek to understand reasons why the focal points of the letters such as disputes with nobles differ at times in the two letter collections. Looking at the rules for letter writing in the fifteenth century will aim to give a better understanding of the relationships between the correspondents. Examining reasons behind the survival of the documents will seek to determine if the dynastic turmoil had an impact on the material within the letters and if the number of letters written and received by the families changed when the political troubles were at their highest and during times of military conflict.

Early medieval letters generally followed specific rules and conventions but by the fifteenth century the academic methods were loosening, with both female and males of different classes were sending letters.⁶² Letters as a form of literary expression really started to emerge after the twelfth century and were not only used as a way for governments to inform their countrymen.⁶³ Unlike official government documents personal letters survived in a family archive and was up to the individual if the letter was stored or destroyed.⁶⁴ Letters took the structure of having five parts to it; they started with a greeting, then a longer formal greeting, after this came an explanation which then led into a request and finally finished with a conclusion.⁶⁵ Furthermore, although not stated in the official rules of letter writing most letters were kept to a short length

⁶² J.T. Rosenthal, 'Letters and letter collections' in *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources* ed. J.T. Rosenthal (Oxon: Routledge: 2012), p. 77.

⁶³ J.T. Rosenthal, 'Letters and letter collections' in *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources* ed. J.T. Rosenthal p. 77.

⁶⁴ J.T. Rosenthal, 'Letters and letter collections' in *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources* ed J.T. Rosenthal p.74.

⁶⁵ J.T. Rosenthal, 'Letters and letter collections' in *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources* ed J.T. Rosenthal p. 78.

and only focused on one topic.⁶⁶ Due to the rules for letter writing, a number of common features appear in the Stonor and Paston correspondence. It was medieval custom in a letter to address the correspondent warmly and at times it is hard to know whether the greeting was truly generous.⁶⁷ The warm start of a letter may have been because the writer was trying to manipulate the person they were writing to, for social, political and business advancement.⁶⁸ Referring to each other as ‘cousin’ in the letters was a typical term for complex relationships.⁶⁹ For example, Thomas Hampden in a letter to William Stonor refers to him as ‘Rygthe worchypefull cossyn’, although they were not related.⁷⁰ Another common feature of the letters is the constant references to the church and religion as the early middle ages had seen the introduction of Christianity.⁷¹ Furthermore, the expression about being pressed for time such was a common convention and found in many letters, James Gloys wrote to John Paston ‘To my right wurchepfull master John Paston be this delyvred in haste’.⁷² On some occasions this expression must have been true especially when letters were composed when the Stonor and Paston families sought help from other family members when their properties were under attack. Bennett had noted that research on the Paston letters shows that the epistolary methods

⁶⁶ J.T. Rosenthal, ‘Letters and letter collections’ in *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources* ed J.T. Rosenthal p. 78.

⁶⁷ J.T. Rosenthal, ‘Letters and letter collections’ in *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources* ed J.T. Rosenthal p. 78.

⁶⁸ J.T. Rosenthal, ‘Letters and letter collections’ in *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources* ed J.T. Rosenthal pp. 78-9.

⁶⁹ C. Carpenter, ‘The Stonor Circle in the Fifteenth Century’ in *Rulers and Ruled in Late Medieval England*, eds. R.E. Archer, S. Walker, (London: Hambledon Press, 1995), p. 184.

⁷⁰ Letter from Thomas Hampden to William Stonor, 1477 in in *Kingsford’s Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483*, ed. C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 285.

⁷¹ J.T. Rosenthal, ‘Letters and Letter Collections’ in *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources* ed J.T. Rosenthal p. 77.

⁷² J.T. Rosenthal, ‘Letters and Letter Collections’ in *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources* ed J.T. Rosenthal p. 77.

Letter from James Gloys to John Paston, 3 December 1448 in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol 2, p. 92.

in the fifteenth century varied and due to the different constructions of some letters suggests that people struggled to convey their feelings.⁷³

The methods of transporting letters affected the content of the letters and it can be assumed that many were lost leaving gaps in the knowledge which survives today. Messengers carried extra information and a letter was used largely to validate the messenger, therefore surviving documents sometimes only contain a partial record of events.⁷⁴ In addition to this it was difficult at times to find trustworthy carriers of letters and the loss of letters on route was a possibility.⁷⁵ There was no established company to send letters and this created problems, for example John Paston III wrote to his brother whilst travelling in the train of the Duke of Norfolk 'I sent no letter to my father, ever since I departed from you, for I could get no man to London'.⁷⁶ Also, messengers at times were unable to deliver letters straight to the recipient and due to this, documents were left at an inn or a friend's house they regularly frequented, causing letters to arrive late or not reaching its destination.⁷⁷ Although there are not many references to missing letters in the Paston correspondence, there is information missing on important family events.⁷⁸ An example of missing letters, is that of Margaret Paston who wrote one hundred of the letters in the collection but after the shock death of her husband in 1466 and shortly before it no letters can be found.⁷⁹

The letter collections survived due to a number of factors and this affects the information that is available to examine today. The Pastons letters are available to read today because family

⁷³ H.S. Bennett, *The Pastons and their England* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p. 114.

⁷⁴ J. Haseldine, 'Epistolography' in *Medieval Latin: An Introduction and Bibliographical Guide* eds. F.A.C. Mantello, A.G. Rigg (USA: CUA Press, 1996), p. 651.

⁷⁵ F. Gies, J. Gies, *A Medieval Family: The Pastons of 15th Century England* (Harper Collins, Hammersmith: 1999), p. 12.

⁷⁶ H.S. Bennett, *The Pastons and their England* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p. 120,

⁷⁷ H.S. Bennett, *The Pastons and their England* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p. 123.

⁷⁸ H.S. Bennett, *The Pastons and their England* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p. 123.

⁷⁹ J.T. Rosenthal, 'Letters and letter collections' in *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources* ed J.T. Rosenthal p. 79.

members stored the letters to keep track of business and each other. Unfortunately, the Paston correspondences like the Stonor letters were not kept in a systematic way and survive due to the recipient and author determining the value of the letter.⁸⁰ The Paston letters survival is largely due to the disputes the family had over the ownership of their property.⁸¹ The strife John Paston I had with the Duke of Norfolk over Sir John Fastolf's Will, forced the family to keep letters as records, to save evidence in their attempt to uphold the Will in their favour.⁸² Also, the documents may have survived due to the advice Margaret Paston gave to her son Sir John Paston to keep his correspondences like his father had before his death 'Kepe wysly your wrytyngys ...your fader ...set more of hys wrytyngs and evydens than he did by any of his moveabell godys'.⁸³ In the seventeenth century Paston men rose to the rank of the Earls of Yarmouth, due to William Paston being in debt he sold a portion of the papers, after changing ownership a couple of times before Fenn started working on the letters from 1774 and started gathering all of the documents together.⁸⁴ In 1787 Fenn presented his edition of the letters to King George III, to be kept in the Royal Library but both Fenn's letter and those presented to the king were lost for over a century and both sets were not discovered until 1889.⁸⁵

Due to the letters changing hands so many times and having been split up originally by William Paston, it can be presumed documents may have been lost and damaged. Many letter writers regarded their correspondences a part of their literary work, therefore this may have impacted

⁸⁰ J.T. Rosenthal, 'Letters and letter collections' in *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources* ed J.T. Rosenthal p. 75.

⁸¹ K.E. Kennedy, *Maintenance, Meed and Marriage in Medieval English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 16.

⁸² K.E. Kennedy, *Maintenance, Meed and Marriage in Medieval English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 16.

⁸³ Letter from Margaret Paston to Sir John Paston, 29 October 1466 in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 4, pp. 254-255.

⁸⁴ S.D. Michalove, 'Marriage in Fifteenth Century England: Part 1, Primary Sources' in *The Online Reference Book for Medieval sources* (Online) Available; <http://www.the-orb.net/bibliographies/marriag1.html>

⁸⁵ M. D. Jones, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters a selection Illustrating English life in the Fifteenth Century* ed. M.D. Jones, (CUP: Cambridge, 1929), p. xii.

on what they put in their letters and what letters they preserved.⁸⁶ Letters detailing negative traits of the authors characteristics may have been destroyed to prevent them being seen in a certain way or to keep negative family issues secret.⁸⁷ However, Hanham has noted that there are a number of letters detailing negative characteristics of William Stonor.⁸⁸ For example William's sister refused to let her brother's servant Giles Wellesborne take a servant from her household.⁸⁹ In a letter to William Stonor, Wellesborne reported that Mary said 'ye were an unkind brother to her, that any servant of yours should take her away from her, for she hath no other comfort but her'.⁹⁰ Another factor reducing the chance of letters being preserved in the fifteenth century was the danger of writing anything derogatory about the king or his ministers in personal letters could have had severe consequences if the letters fell into the wrong hands.⁹¹ Therefore, neither of the Paston or Stonor letter convey strong feelings about royalty and it is hard to ascertain what they really thought about Henry VI's kingship. Although certain letters were sent with a special seal the sender had to be precautionary over the material in the letter 'Sir John Paston wrote to his brother the letter was sealed and would have been evident if someone has opened it but still he wrote 'I would not that letter were seen by some folks...I pray you take heed how that letter comes to your hands, whole or broken'.⁹² One of John Paston's correspondence included sensitive information in his letters by attaching a postscript which was unsigned 'I write to you to thus, that you may cut away this lower part of this letter'.⁹³

⁸⁶ J. Haseldine, 'Epistolography' in *Medieval Latin: An Introduction and Bibliographical Guide* eds. F.A.C. Mantello, A.G. Rigg (USA: CUA Press, 1996), p. 651.

⁸⁷ J. Haseldine, 'Epistolography' in *Medieval Latin: An Introduction and Bibliographical Guide* eds. F.A.C. Mantello, A.G. Rigg (USA: CUA Press, 1996), p. 651.

⁸⁸ A. Hanham, 'Revisiting the Stonor Manuscripts', *Historical Research*, 86 (2013), p. 24.

⁸⁹ Letter from Giles Willesborne to William Stonor, 20 May 1479 in A. Hanham, 'Revisiting the Stonor Manuscripts', *Historical Research*, 86 (2013), p. 24.

⁹⁰ Letter from Giles Willesborne to William Stonor, 20 May 1479 in A. Hanham, 'Revisiting the Stonor Manuscripts', *Historical Research*, 86 (2013), p. 24.

⁹¹ H.S. Bennett, *The Pastons and their England* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p. 124.

⁹² H.S. Bennett, *The Pastons and their England* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p. 124.

⁹³ H.S. Bennett, *The Pastons and their England* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p. 124.

Also, it was common practice was for the recipient to burn the letter after they had received it 'I pray you burn this letter when you have read it'.⁹⁴

Kingsford believed the Stonor papers had survived due to Sir William Stonor's sentence of attainder in 1483 for his involvement in Buckingham's rebellion, and due to the last letter of the collection being dated October 1483.⁹⁵ However, Kingsford also suggests that the Stonor collection may have survived due to the documents coming into the ownership of the crowns due to the Chancery suit in 1512 because of Adrian Fortescue's claims over the inheritance of some Stonor property.⁹⁶ Carpenter highlights that the documents would have probably been restored to the family after the restoration in 1485.⁹⁷ Also, in the early 1500's Cardinal Morton had wanted the papers to become part of public property when the Fortescue case had first come to light.⁹⁸ As the Stonor letters survived due to legal issues it can be suggested that certain letters focusing on say love, marriage and social disharmony may have been discarded. Haseldine has noted that many letters in the fifteenth century which focused solely on accounts and mundane issues were not considered to be important and were not preserved.⁹⁹ Also, it may explain why the majority of the letters are dated after 1460 with the letters focusing on Thomas Stonor and William Stonor when the family faced land issues and there are only a handful that were kept before this time. The Stonor collection was originally stored in the Tower as part of the Chancery Records but were later split up into different sections; Ancient Correspondence,

⁹⁴ H.S. Bennett, *The Pastons and their England* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p. 124.

⁹⁵ C.L. Kingsford, *English Historical Literature in the Fifteenth Century* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1972), p. 209.

⁹⁶ C.L. Kingsford, 'Introduction' in *The Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483: Vol 1*, ed. C.L. Kingsford (London: Royal Historical Society, 1981), p. xxxviii.

S.D. Michalove, 'Marriage in Fifteenth Century England: Part 1, Primary Sources' in *The Online Reference Book for Medieval sources* (Online) Available; <http://www.the-orb.net/bibliographies/marriag1.html>

⁹⁷ C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 9.

⁹⁸ S.D. Michalove, 'Marriage in Fifteenth Century England: Part 1, Primary Sources' in *The Online Reference Book for Medieval sources* (Online) Available; <http://www.the-orb.net/bibliographies/marriag1.html>

⁹⁹ J. Haseldine, 'Epistolography' in *Medieval Latin: An Introduction and Bibliographical Guide* eds. F.A.C. Mantello, A.G. Rigg (USA: CUA Press, 1996), p. 651.

Ancient Deeds, Ministers Accounts and Chancery Miscellanea.¹⁰⁰ Due to this letters were misplaced and were only discovered after the Chancery Miscellanea was organised and these letters were later published.¹⁰¹ Also some of the letters are badly damaged and are hard to read such as a letter written possibly in 1479 to Sir William Stonor.¹⁰² In recent years more letters have been discovered and added to the Stonor archives. Since Kingsford's work on the Stonor letters was published new letters have come to light. Hanham has uncovered two new letters relating to the dispute between Sir William Stonor and Sir Edmund Rede.¹⁰³

The content of the letter collections differs at times due to the different pressures the families faced. Stonors were far more aware and use to defending their interests, this could have attributed to the feature of land issues being far less prevalent in their letters compared to the Pastons. The region of Oxfordshire where the Stonors resided was not dominated by the nobility due to it being under direct control from the crown, as the king owned the majority of the land.¹⁰⁴ The Stonor letters are not as dominated by magnates as the Pastons, as there is no reference to any nobles being involved in the exchange of land for service.¹⁰⁵ However, East Anglia was controlled by two members of the nobility in the first half of the fifteenth century, the Duke of Suffolk and Norfolk.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, the Paston letters frequently mention the nobility as it was an imminent threat and document many problems over the ownership of land. The Stonors on the other hand did not have this direct threat on their property and status. The

¹⁰⁰ S.D. Michalove, 'Marriage in Fifteenth Century England: Part 1, Primary Sources' in *The Online Reference Book for Medieval sources* (Online) Available; <http://www.the-orb.net/bibliographies/marriag1.html>

¹⁰¹ S. D. Michalove, 'Marriage in Fifteenth Century England: Part 1, Primary Sources' in *The Online Reference Book for Medieval sources* (Online) Available; <http://www.the-orb.net/bibliographies/marriag1.html>.

¹⁰² Letter from Hall to Sir William Stonor in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483*, ed. C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 335.

¹⁰³ A. Hanham, 'Revisiting the Stonor Manuscripts', *Historical Research*, 86 (2013), p. 24.

¹⁰⁴ C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ C. Carpenter, 'The Stonor Circle in the Fifteenth Century' in *Rulers and Ruled in Late Medieval England*, eds. R.E. Archer, S. Walker (London: Hambledon Press, 1995), p. 196.

¹⁰⁶ J.T. Rosenthal, 'The Paston Letters' in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature*, eds. D.S. Kastan (Oxford: OUP, 2006), p. 184.

Chancery and Ancient Indictments illustrate that Oxfordshire was a lot less violent than East Anglia, an image that the letters also create.¹⁰⁷ Specific land disputes the Stonor and Paston families had to deal with will be analysed in further detail in the next chapter.

In conclusion, many of the letters survived because of the content of the letters and if the document focused upon land disputes, politics or business affairs. The number of letters received and sent by the Stonors and Pastons rapidly increased after 1460, when after years of weak kingship from Henry VI, society descended into violence to voice their grievances. In the period 1441-1460 there are four surviving Stonor documents and in the years 1461 to 1483, 270 letters have been recovered.¹⁰⁸ The same pattern occurred for the Paston documents, although the rise is not as dramatic it is still evident to see, from 1441 to 1460- 386 documents are available and in the next 22 years an additional 565 Paston sources were added to the collection.¹⁰⁹ Although, other factors such as an increase in literacy during the 1400's has to be taken into consideration.¹¹⁰ Therefore it can be argued that there was a determining factor in whether a document survived. Due to this the letters which survive today may not illustrate the whole story and the real disruptions from the conflict. Letters documenting politics of the time may have been destroyed to protect the family from being accused of treachery. Alternatively, letters documenting land disputes were preserved to a higher extent to act as evidence in legal disputes, therefore political beliefs, affiliations and effects of the civil war can be drawn from the letters detailing landed disputes. Due to many of the letters surviving because they were important to legal trials other historical works on key figures in the letters or enemies of the families will be drawn upon. Works on figures such as Thomas Chaucer and the Duke of

¹⁰⁷ C. Carpenter, 'The Stonor Circle in the Fifteenth Century' in *Rulers and Ruled in Late Medieval England* eds. R. E. Archer, S. Walker (London: Hambledon Press, 1995), p. 177.

¹⁰⁸ C. Carpenter, *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996).

¹⁰⁹ J. Gairdner, *The Paston Letters* (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986).

J. Warrington, *The Paston Letters, 2 Vols.* (London: Dent, 1956).

¹¹⁰ C.L. Kingsford, *English Historical Literature in the Fifteenth Century* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1972), p. 196.

Norfolk will be used to contextualise the letters, to overcome the limitations of unrepresentative samples during certain periods during the fifteenth century.

Chapter Two

This chapter will explore how the instability of Henry VI's kingship allowed the nobility to establish much control over both East Anglia and Oxfordshire, which negatively impacted the Stonors and Pastons. Also, that Henry's reign had long term consequences for the families because the turbulence of the civil war made them more vulnerable to be attacked and the lawlessness remained after Henry was deposed. The aim of this chapter will be to explore how the political disruption of the day filtered down to the gentry and they were threatened due to powerful individuals emulating Henry VI's power and believing they were above the law. Disturbances in the areas the families held land, plus the personal attacks on both of the families will be explored.

Due to the instability of Henry VI's kingship, the normal boundaries of an individual's power were surpassed and meant magnates such as William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk had the opportunity to take the law into their own hands even further than they had under previous kings. Therefore the gentry were greatly affected by Henry's poor kingship because the nobility had grown in power and meant they were at a greater disadvantage than ever before when it came to the handling of disputes. Also, the growing power magnates were displaying in East Anglia and across the country must have been a cause for concern. Warrington argues that the incompetence of Henry VI and his royal government caused violence and lawlessness to be a key feature of life in the fifteenth century.¹¹¹ As this contributed to the attacks on the Pastons Gresham manor in 1448 and led to uprisings, such as Cades Rebellion.¹¹² Alternatively, Haward believes that the bigger issue in East Anglia was the growing divide between the rich and poor classes, with the wealthy especially merchants increasingly becoming more powerful.

¹¹¹ J. Warrington, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters: Vol 1*, ed. J. Warrington (London, Dent: 1924), p. vi.

¹¹² J. Warrington, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters: Vol 1*, ed. J. Warrington (London, Dent: 1924), p. vi.

¹¹³ However, if Henry VI had been a strong leader and prevented the merchants from becoming too influential and suppressing the poor, tensions may not have been so high and could have been avoided.

Across England, there was a growing link between an individual's power and their ability to have an impact on public law, in the form of having writs issued to benefit their cause.¹¹⁴ Medieval people used all the connections they had when it came to court issues and getting the verdicts they wanted whether it be from their lords or magnates.¹¹⁵ Carpenter highlights that this did result in the fifteenth century being a period when law broke down but a feature of society, as modern structures of democracy had not been introduced.¹¹⁶ However, even though trials and the law were not as democratic as modern day Britain, it must have been essential to have a strong king to make sure bias juries were kept to a minimum and the law was upheld in the favour of the king and not his magnates. Carpenter argues that the letter collections show how 'private power and private connections' made society less violent and made sure governance was instilled.¹¹⁷ However, Plummer argues that the Paston correspondence indicates the high level of corruption in the judicial system as it would be pointless to take a matter to court unless the Sheriff and jury were on your side.¹¹⁸ Additionally, it would not be productive to accuse a person who was protected by a powerful man and a jury could not be relied upon due to the fear that loyalties, especially during political instability could change

¹¹³ W.I. Haward, Economic Aspects of the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia in *The English Historical Review*, 41 (1926), p. 175.

¹¹⁴ C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 29.

¹¹⁵ C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 29.

¹¹⁶ C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 29.

¹¹⁷ C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 29.

Need to see her work on the Stonor circle
And Locality and Polity pp. 281-91.

¹¹⁸ C. Plummer, 'Introduction' in *The Governance of England: Otherwise Called, The Difference Between an Absolute and Limited Monarchy*, ed. C. Plummer, (New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange, 1885), p. 29.

quickly.¹¹⁹ The Pastons had to overcome numerous obstacles to maintain their properties, they were consumed by litigation and at times were forced to use methods outside the judicial system to uphold their status. Sir John Paston wrote to his brother John, detailing that he had paid a group of four men such as ‘Wylliam Peny’ to defend their Caistor manor in case it was attacked ‘I have wagyd for to helpe you and Daubeneny to kepe the place at Castr.....in save gard or enforcing of the seyde place’.¹²⁰ Also, the duke of Norfolk targeted tenants on the other properties the Pastons had inherited from Fastolf.¹²¹

Furthermore, the Paston family stood up to those who held considerable power in their region and tried to prevent their problems spiralling out of the control. Tuddenham who had been keeper of the great wardrobe in 1447 and Heydon had many important connections they could call upon to help their cause not only in East Anglia but across the country, such as John Haliday who had received livery from Heydon and John Andrew of Lynn, a port in Norfolk.¹²² The Pastons tried to bring these men to justice and must have been in the position to do so as the repercussions on their name would have been too much to risk. Also. The Pastons had to make sure they chose the right political situation to air their grievances due to the corruption in the courts. In a letter to John Paston, Margaret tells him that she is pleased that ‘John Jenney were putte oute of the Comysyon of the Peas and that my brother Wyll Lumner were set yn hys stede’, this news highlights that the Pastons followed who was appointed to positions of authority in the courts and now believed that they were in a better position to fight their battles legally.¹²³

¹¹⁹ C. Plummer, ‘Introduction’ in *The Governance of England: Otherwise Called, The Difference Between an Absolute and Limited Monarchy*, ed. C. Plummer, (New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange, 1885), p. 29.

¹²⁰ Letter from Sir John Paston to John Paston, 9 November 1468 in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol 4, p. 306.

¹²¹ R. Barber, *A Family in the Wars of the Roses* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1981), p. 146.

¹²² W.I. Haward, Economic Aspects of the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia in *The English Historical Review*, 41 (1926), p. 173.

¹²³ Letter from Margaret Paston to John Paston, 13 May 1465 in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol 4, pp. 141-142.

There were a number of issues that arose in East Anglia due to ‘over mighty subjects’ having too much influence which was unsettling the gentry and landowners of the region. The events in Norwich indicate that power during Henry VI’s rule had been misplaced and was threatening the peace. In 1443 there were riots in Norwich over land disputes between the merchant class who held power in the city government and the well-established church authorities.¹²⁴ The disagreements arose over which group controlled the trade in Norwich, and the city’s mills.¹²⁵ To add to the dispute, there were factions within the merchant group due to the activities of Thomas Wetherby, as he tried to control who was elected to the position of mayor such as William Grey in 1433.¹²⁶ Wetherby gained support from Tuddenham, Heydon and the Duke of Suffolk- Henry VI’s chief minister and Duke of Norfolk.¹²⁷ Tuddenham and Heydon were the Pastons adversaries and they were attacked on numerous occasions by these men. Between 1433 and 1448, Suffolk’s party tried to take over the government of Norwich and there was great rivalry between Thomas Wetherby and his fellow aldermen.¹²⁸ There was mounting dissent especially among craftsmen and lesser landowners that the magnates and wealthy merchants had too much power and this led to Gladman’s Insurrection in 1443.¹²⁹ Two accounts of the insurrection survive, the first account was conducted by the jury who had been set up by Wetherby and were very influenced by his faction and it stated that Gladman had rode into the city dressed up in a kings regalia, to oppose the cathedral priory and Henry’s reign, had closed the city gates preventing the Duke of Norfolk from entering the city.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ R. H. Hilton, *English and French Towns in Feudal Society: A Comparative Study English and French Towns in Feudal Society* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), p. 123.

¹²⁵ R. H. Hilton, *English and French Towns in Feudal Society: A Comparative Study English and French Towns in Feudal Society* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), p. 123.

¹²⁶ W.I. Haward, *Economic Aspects of the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia* in *The English Historical Review*, 41 (1926), p. 176.

¹²⁷ W.I. Haward, *Economic Aspects of the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia* in *The English Historical Review*, 41 (1926), p. 176.

¹²⁸ W.I. Haward, *Economic Aspects of the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia* in *The English Historical Review*, 41 (1926), p. 175.

¹²⁹ R. Hilton, *English and French Towns in Feudal Society* (CUP, Cambridge, 1995), p.123

¹³⁰ R. Hilton, *English and French Towns in Feudal Society* (CUP, Cambridge, 1995), p.124.

However, the city's response believed to be written after the death of Suffolk in 1450 when enquiries were being made into unlawful acts of Tuddenham and Heydon, documented an account which detailed that Gladman had pretended to be king to celebrate Shrove Tuesday, despite the insurrection being five weeks before the religious festival.¹³¹ Humphrey suggests that the insurrection took place five days before a council assembly was due to seal a document to carry out Suffolk's judgement to dismantle new mills.¹³² Suffolk, Tuddenham and Heydon may have supported Wetherby for their own benefit, to extort money and to control the city's burgesses to be able to buy and export wool very cheaply.¹³³ Humphrey highlights that Tuddenham and Heydon who were the henchmen of the Earl of Suffolk were renowned for their bullying and violent conduct.¹³⁴ As two accounts document such contrasting details of the event, it highlights how forceful the magnates were and were highly capable of doing anything to squash the truth to maintain control. Suffolk's affinity was dominated East Anglia until 1450 and after this the Duke of Norfolk became a dominating figure until, the nobility were a major cause of worry for the Paston family. After Suffolk's death in 1450, the party gradually broke up and Lord Scales who had been associated to the Suffolk party and filled the role left by Suffolk who gave his support to Tuddenham and Heydon and the terrorisation of East Anglia continued.¹³⁵ The two accounts do agree that the Gladman faction had defied the Duke of Norfolk and the Earl of Oxford by preventing them from entering the city, this provided the opportunity for Wetherby to take revenge and preserve his image.¹³⁶ Norwich was forced to pay fines of 1000 marks, with the chief baron of the exchequer ordered 'to make any fines for

¹³¹ R. Hilton, *English and French Towns in Feudal Society* (CUP, Cambridge, 1995), p.124.

C. Humphrey, *The Politics of Carnival: Festive Misrule in Medieval England* (Manchester, MUP, 2001), p. 64.

¹³² C. Humphrey, *The Politics of Carnival: Festive Misrule in Medieval England* (Manchester, MUP, 2001), p. 73.

¹³³ W.I. Haward, *Economic Interests in the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia*, p. 177.

¹³⁴ C. Humphrey, *The Politics of Carnival: Festive Misrule in Medieval England* (Manchester, MUP, 2001), p. 64.

¹³⁵ W.I. Haward, *Economic Aspects of the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia* in *The English Historical Review*, 41 (1926), p. 179.

¹³⁶ W.I. Haward, *Economic Aspects of the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia* in *The English Historical Review*, 41 (1926), pp. 176- 177.

any presentment' and Wetherby's ally Sir John Clifton appointed governor to rule over the city, it took three years for the liberties of the city to be restored in 1448, this highlights how long it took for justice to be served.¹³⁷ Gladman's insurrection highlights that power and closeness to the king, allowed men to act above the law and work the system to prove they were innocent. This unrest indicates that the nobility were oppressing the gentry class and many landowners felt aggrieved by this. Earl of Suffolk made East Anglia a dangerous place to live in and resulted in the law not being enforced.¹³⁸ Also, Gladman's insurrection indicates the weaknesses in the royal authority because as one 'over mighty' noble was removed, they were quickly replaced. The system was weak and it allowed men to abuse their powers as they had no king or authority regulating the law. Ambitious men such as Suffolk, had always existed but under previous kings they had been prevented from holding more power than the crown.

The lawlessness of the time is demonstrated by the dangers men faced when they opposed the nobility and this is true of John Paston.¹³⁹ In April 1452, John Paston was attacked outside Norwich Cathedral, in a letter to the Sheriff of Norfolk he informs him that 'Charles Nowell....he had his felachip set upon me....smyting at me, whilis on of his felawis held my armes at my bak'.¹⁴⁰ During John Paston's land disputes in 1461 and the civil war, Margaret Paston informed her husband that he was in danger of being ambushed by his enemies 'an ambush has been set in this district....into the presence of such a lord in the north who will not help you, but will be a danger to your life'.¹⁴¹ Sir John Howard, Sheriff of Norfolk in 1461 was the Duke of Norfolk's cousin and thus Howard supported him against Paston over the manor

¹³⁷ W.I. Haward, Economic Aspects of the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia in *The English Historical Review*, 41 (1926), p. 177

¹³⁸ C. Humphrey, *The Politics of Carnival: Festive Misrule in Medieval England* (Manchester: MUP, 2001), p. 66.

¹³⁹ C. Plummer, 'Introduction' in *The Governance of England: Otherwise Called, The Difference Between an Absolute and Limited Monarchy*, ed. C. Plummer, (New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange, 1885), p. 26.

¹⁴⁰ Letter from John Paston to The Sheriff of Norfolk, 23 April 1452 in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 2, p. 261.

¹⁴¹ Letter from Margaret Paston to John Paston I, 1 March 1461 in *The Paston Women: Selected Letters*, ed. D. Watts (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 64-65.

of Caister which Norfolk had just seized.¹⁴² Consequently, the Pastons were at a disadvantage in the dispute over Caister and knew that Howard in his role of Sheriff would not be fair towards them. Tensions arose, causing John Paston's and Howard's men to quarrel and fight at the election in August 1461 for the MP's of Norfolk.¹⁴³ Howard was a member of the royal household and brought the matter of Caister and the fight between his men and Paston's to Edward IV's attention and this caused additional troubles to the Paston family.¹⁴⁴ In October 1461, Clement Paston wrote to his brother and told him 'the Duke of Norfolk hath made a great complaint of you to the King'.¹⁴⁵ Also, the letter details what Edward IV has said about Paston 'We have sent two privy seals to Paston...and he disobeyeth them, but we will send him another...if he come not then he shall dye for it'.¹⁴⁶ The contentions over Caister, highlight that East Anglia was a small world with the upper echelons of society being very connected and if you were not supported by men who held great power disputes were harder to deal with and this was the case for the Pastons. During the reign of Henry VI, when the power of magnates increased issues were magnified and justice was not being enforced. When the dispute between the Pastons and Howard's disagreement came to Edward IV's attention he was only six months in to his reign, Castor argues that he wanted to enforce his authority and make it unquestionable and due to John Paston disobeying his royal commands it was an opportunity to enforce his power.¹⁴⁷ To assert his authority, Edward IV did have John Paston placed in the Fleet Prison when he came to the King's court in London after missing his first two court appearances.¹⁴⁸ Although Edward IV did initially side against Paston, he made sure his actions

¹⁴² H. Castor, *Blood and Roses: The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century* (Faber: London, 2004), p. 150.

¹⁴³ H. Castor, *Blood and Roses: The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century* (Faber: London, 2004), p. 150.

¹⁴⁴ H. Castor, *Blood and Roses: The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century* (Faber: London, 2004), p. 150.

¹⁴⁵ Letter from Clement Paston to John Paston, 11 October 1461 in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol 3, p. 314.

¹⁴⁶ Letter from Clement Paston to John Paston, 11 October 1461 in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol 3, p. 313.

¹⁴⁷ H. Castor, *Blood and Roses: The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century* (Faber: London, 2004), p. 151.

¹⁴⁸ H. Castor, *Blood and Roses: The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century* (Faber: London, 2004), p. 151.

were justifiable and discovered that John Paston was not guilty and was released from prison, additionally Howard was prosecuted.¹⁴⁹ The involvement of Edward IV in the Paston troubles displays that he was a very active king compared to Henry VI as Edward was willing to be fair and go against men like Howard, who were displaying far too much power despite him being in his royal affinity.

In the areas where the Stonors owned land, the force of the nobility did affect the family. Oxfordshire was home to a significant number of families who were key figures and were divided in their political associations in the conflict, such as the Lovel's, de la Poles and the de Veres.¹⁵⁰ Although no military battles occurred in Oxfordshire, there was much political strife in Devon where the Stonors owned property.¹⁵¹ There was a great rivalry between two leading magnates in Devon; the Earl of Devon and Lord Bonville which spilled into violence in 1451.¹⁵² It can be suggested that the Stonors would have been fully aware of the tensions in the areas where they held property and it is likely that it would have been a cause for concern. Also the Stonor dispute with Sir John Fortescue highlights the power of the nobility, as Fortescue was closely linked through his law career to the Lancastrian's and played an important part in the royal court.¹⁵³

Members of the nobility seized any opportunity to attack other major land holders, believing they were above the law took matters in their own hands to add to their fortunes. In 1444, the family's matriarch William Paston was no longer protecting the family and the Pastons were in more of a vulnerable position to be attacked and with nobles ever increasing their power due

¹⁴⁹ H. Castor, *Blood and Roses: The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century* (Faber: London, 2004), p. 151.

¹⁵⁰ A History of the County of Oxford in *British History Online*, ed. L.F. Salzman Available <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=101939>

¹⁵¹ A History of the County of Oxford in *British History Online*, ed. L.F. Salzman Available <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=101939>

¹⁵² B. Wilkinson, *The Later Middle Ages in England 1216 – 1485* (Routledge: New York, 2013), p. 311.

¹⁵³ A. Emery, *Greater Medieval Houses of England and Wales, 1300-1500* (CUP: Cambridge, 2000), p. 665.

to the declining influence of Henry VI. The Pastons susceptibility for attacks marked an increase in litigation and problems, this highlights that it was essential to be seen as strong or have associates protecting you. The death of William may have forced the Pastons to seek protection from Thomas Daniel in the late 1440's despite his bad reputation and numerous enemies, due to him defrauding Henry Woodhouse, a substantial landowner in East Anglia out of his estates.¹⁵⁴ The Pastons desperate for an ally to help neutralise their disputes in Gresham only made matters worse by associating with Daniel as his enemies included Sir Thomas Tuddenham who was the brother in law of Woodhouse and in turn involved himself in attacking the Pastons properties and tenants.¹⁵⁵ Daniel turned against the Pastons in the 1450's, supporting Lord Moleyns of his claims to Gresham.¹⁵⁶ For the Stonors this happened in 1394 after the death of Ralph de Stonor, a number of disputes over the Stonor's ownership of land emerged because Ralph was found to be in service to the Duke of Gloucester.¹⁵⁷

After the death of Sir John Fastolf in 1459, the issues over his will led to serious problems for the Paston family.¹⁵⁸ The will detailed John Paston as the future owner of many of Fastolf's properties such as the manors of Caister and Hellesdon but the will was challenged and due to the numerous disruptions caused by the civil war, the litigation took numerous years to settle. The Pastons lost a number of properties the Fastolf Will had promised them it can be argued the weak royal government and war allowed for the violence against them to continue. If Henry VI had been an effective and active king by diluting the violence quickly, reduced the power of the magnates or had prevented the nobility building vast private armies, the Pastons would not have faced so much aggression. Additionally, the disputes over Fastolf's Will may have

¹⁵⁴ H. Castor, *Blood and Roses: The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century* (Faber: London, 2004), p. 46.

¹⁵⁵ H. Castor, *Blood and Roses: The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century* (Faber: London, 2004), p. 47.

¹⁵⁶ H. Castor, *Blood and Roses: The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century* (Faber: London, 2004), p. 150.

¹⁵⁷ C.L. Kingsford, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 39.

¹⁵⁸ J. Warrington, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters: Vol 1*, ed. J. Warrington (London: Dent, 1924), p. vi.

been settled at a much earlier date. When Henry VII became king in 1485 he was far more active than Henry VI and he managed to curb the power of the nobles by adding restrictions to the process of retaining men in 1486, so he could control it for his own benefit.¹⁵⁹ The legal battles caused by Sir John Fastolf's gave the Pastons enemies the opportunity to target them. The timing of Fastolf's death coincided with the dynastic conflict and it can be suggested the troubles of the time directed attention away from the implementation of the will, Fastolf was a well-known national figure and his estates were of importance. Fastolf's will caused John to attend numerous court sessions but due to him missing a number of them probably due to poor health, his opponents managed to have him arrested and he was placed into Fleet Prison in 1465 for seven months, despite non-attendance at court hearings not being a punishable offence.¹⁶⁰

Additionally, the instability of Henry's rule and ultimately the loss of his crown, caused a number of problems for the Stonor and Paston families. In March 1461, Edward VI claimed the throne of England and this caused a number of issues for the Paston family.¹⁶¹ In May 1461, only a matter of weeks after Henry VI lost his crown three manors belonging to the Pastons were attacked by the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk; Caister, Drayton and Hellesdon.¹⁶² It is unlikely that it was mere coincidence that trouble broke out at a time when kingship and authority of the crown was at its lowest. Although Henry VI was no longer in power, the consequences of his kingship were still affecting the the Pastons and Stonors. Oxfordshire and East Anglia were concentrated with national figures who were allowed to impose their authority on the Stonors and Pastons without any repercussions due to Henry VI's weak authority. Due to East Anglian and Oxfordshire being closely connected to the crown, the

¹⁵⁹ S.B. Chrimes, *Henry VII* (London: YUP, 1999), p. 188.

¹⁶⁰ S. Kelsey, 'Sir John Fastolf' in *The Late Medieval Age of Crisis and Renewal, 1300-1500*, ed. C.J. Drees (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 386.

¹⁶¹ J. Warrington, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters: Vol 1*, ed. J. Warrington (London: Dent, 1924), p. vi.

¹⁶² J. Warrington, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters: Vol 1*, ed. J. Warrington (London: Dent, 1924), p. vii.

repercussions from Henry VI losing his crown would have changed the balance of power and likely to have impacted upon the gentry.

The region of East Anglia was dominated by the most powerful men in the country, Lynn was controlled by Lord Scales and Ipswich was dominated by the Duke of Norfolk.¹⁶³ Lord Scales had been determined to enter the Paston manor and this was quite typical in the way the magnates conducted themselves.¹⁶⁴ The Duke of Suffolk, John de la Pole had such control over the region that other powerful individuals sought to keep in good favour with the local landowners because it would be hard to get a fair trial in the sheriff's court against Suffolk.¹⁶⁵ John Paston felt the wrath of Suffolk when he had disputes over his manors at Drayton and Hellesdon where the mayor favoured the Duke.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, the Paston correspondence details numerous land disputes caused by leading political figures of the day. The Paston family had gained the manor of Drayton, near to Norfolk from John Fastolf's will but in 1465 the Duke of Suffolk claimed the property was rightfully his, even though his evidence was weak and only a few of the Pastons tenants were favourable to the Duke.¹⁶⁷ Additionally, Margaret had heard rumours that Norfolk had bought the rights from a man named Brytyeff to another Paston property in Hellesdon.¹⁶⁸ The duke sent his bailiff Philip Lipyate and they took horses, one of the tenants did not comply with Margaret Paston and they took from him two mares in the form of rent, Warin later complained to Lipyate, who then brought a hundred and twenty men in armour to threaten the Pastons and their servants and claimed that if the Pastons took any belongings to cover debts in Drayton then they would take the value of an Ox in

¹⁶³ W.I. Haward, Economic Aspects of the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia in *The English Historical Review*, 41 (1926), p. 178.

¹⁶⁴ W.I. Haward, Economic Aspects of the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia in *The English Historical Review*, 41 (1926), p. 178.

¹⁶⁵ W.I. Haward, Economic Aspects of the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia in *The English Historical Review*, 41 (1926), p. 178.

¹⁶⁶ W.I. Haward, Economic Aspects of the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia in *The English Historical Review*, 41 (1926), p. 178.

¹⁶⁷ J. Gairdner, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 1, p. 218.

¹⁶⁸ J. Gairdner, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 1, p. 218.

Hellesdon.¹⁶⁹ The Bishop of Norfolk was brought into the dispute to enforce peace and John Paston had a force of his own men to combat the Duke of Norfolk's men.¹⁷⁰ The duke had a mansion in Cossey across from the manor of Drayton from where he could send armed men claiming his rights to the property. Lipyate brought three hundred armed men to the property at Hellesdon on 8 July but Sir John Paston had a well-armed garrison and the attackers declined to force entry.¹⁷¹ The duke's men claimed they had a warrant for the attack of Paston allies such as Richard Calle, Wykes and Daubeney, although both sides agreed to disband their men, Calle was later attacked in Norfolk by a gang of twelve men.¹⁷²

When Edward IV's troops were defeated in July 1469 and Henry VI regained the throne, and in the disruption it gave the opportunity for men to attack their enemies, the Duke of Norfolk made his claim on the Pastons manor of Caister in August 1469.¹⁷³ After Edward IV was taken prisoner, law and order was further disrupted and the magnates were inflicting their authority on the gentry, the Pastons were unable to reclaim Caister until 1476, after the death of Norfolk.¹⁷⁴ Henry VI and his inability to instil peace meant issues which the gentry faced took years to resolve and even gave men the chance to attack their neighbours who they deemed unqualified for the wealth and power they had. Plummer argues that the lawlessness of the time was deep-rooted and was not instantly solved when Edward IV came to power, local disorders were still problematic and the supremacy of nobles was still strong such as Lord Warwick.¹⁷⁵ The problems which had manifested through Henry VI's reign were long term issues and the gentry continued to feel the consequences of his inability throughout Edward IV's kingship.

¹⁶⁹ J. Gairdner, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 1, pp. 218-219.

¹⁷⁰ J. Gairdner, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 1, p. 219.

¹⁷¹ J. Gairdner, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 1, p. 221.

¹⁷² J. Gairdner, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 1, p. 221.

¹⁷³ J. Warrington, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters: Vol 1*, ed. J. Warrington (London: Dent, 1924), p. viii.

¹⁷⁴ J. Warrington, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters: Vol 1*, ed. J. Warrington (London: Dent, 1924), p. viii.

¹⁷⁵ C. Plummer, 'Introduction' in *The Governance of England: Otherwise Called, The Difference Between an Absolute and Limited Monarchy*, ed. C. Plummer, (New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange, 1885), p. 37.

When the dynastic conflict reached violent levels and was at its worse, the Stonor and Paston affairs were added to and existing disagreements became worse. A major land problem had arisen over the Stonor ownership of the Manor of Ermington, Sir John de Stonor bought the property in 1331 from John de Benstead's heir who had been a key official in Edward II's reign but had originally belonged to John Peverel.¹⁷⁶ In 1351, John de Stonor made a complaint that Ermington had been attacked by Robert de Ferers and his men who had attacked the manor and killed stock such as sheep worth 100 marks.¹⁷⁷ Stonor disputes with the Fortescue's continued into the 1530's century when Adrian Fortescue claimed he was the rightful owner of the manor.¹⁷⁸ The Manor of Ermington was one of the most important Stonor estates due to its value of 80 marks in 1430 and came with the power to appoint the Parish priest of Ermington.¹⁷⁹ In 1462, John Frende who served in Ermington wrote to Thomas Stonor urging him to come to Devonshire as some of the tenants now support Richard Fortescue 'praying yov to sende me word by your letter where ye wil come in to Devonshiretenentes of Modbury... have made an ende with Ric. Fortescue.'¹⁸⁰ The disagreements between the Stonor's and Fortescue's reached the courts and Edward IV was aware of the issue as a Bill of Names over those involved was produced 'these names here undyrwrytyn in the thryd yere of kyng Edward'.¹⁸¹ During the dispute over Ermington, the Stonors had to make extra effort to look after their tenants and forced them to use their connections such as Thomas Chaucer, Cardinal Beaufort and John

¹⁷⁶ C.L. Kingsford, 'Introduction' in *The Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483:Vol 1*, ed. C.L. Kingsford (London: Royal Historical Society, 1981), p. xiv.

¹⁷⁷ C.L. Kingsford, 'Introduction' in *The Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483:Vol 1*, ed. C.L. Kingsford (London: Royal Historical Society, 1981), p. xiv.

¹⁷⁸ C.L. Kingsford, 'Introduction' in *The Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483:Vol 1*, ed. C.L. Kingsford (London: Royal Historical Society, 1981), p. xiv.

R. Rex, 'Sir Adrian Fortescue (c. 1481-1539) Landowner and Alleged Traitor' in *Oxford DNB (Online)*. Available; <http://www.oxforddnb.com.voyager.chester.ac.uk/view/article/9936?docPos=3>

¹⁷⁹ C.L. Kingsford, 'Introduction' in *The Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483:Vol 1*, ed. C.L. Kingsford (London: Royal Historical Society, 1981), p. xiv.

¹⁸⁰ Letter from John Frende to Thomas Stonor, April 1462 in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), pp. 144-144.

¹⁸¹ Stonor v Fortescue: Bill of Names, 28 August 1463 in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 154.

Cotesmore who was on the Devonshire commission of peace.¹⁸² Harris notes that the Stonor letters give an insight into the conflicts of the time and how problems were solved.¹⁸³ It can be suggested that the conflict and poor kingship of Henry VI allowed this disharmony over Ermington to continue. The dispute over Ermington came to an end for a short period of time in 1468, Thomas Stonor wrote to his wife detailing that he had been successful in the court hearing over the property and the jury of 24 had been against Fortescue 'myne adversary of Devonshere hathe had no wurshyp ffor ther aperyd xliij gentylymen as this day, and he is shamyd'.¹⁸⁴ The first letter about the dispute was written in 1462 and it took 6 year before a compromise was reached.¹⁸⁵ The dispute between Sir William Stonor and the Fortescue's over the Ermington is a feature in seven Stonor documents.¹⁸⁶ It can be argued that tensions took a long time to resolve and due to the instability of the time, it gave opportunists the chance to attack the Stonors. Therefore, the weak power at the top was preventing the dilution of problems amongst the nobility and the gentry, making disputes spiral out of control resulting in more violence. Also, it is likely that land problems happened regardless of the state of national politics but during the peaks of the dynastic issue the land issues spilled into violence. The widening tensions caused by Henry VI's kingship, forced the Stonor and Paston men to seek protection as law had broken down and they could no longer rely on their education of it to defend their families name. It can be argued that the Stonor and Paston men added to their wealth of associates as a way to improve their family's protection from the lawlessness of the time. The Paston family were informed of their need to gain lordship as John Paston received

¹⁸² C. Carpenter, 'The Stonor Circle in the Fifteenth Century' in *Rulers and Ruled in Late Medieval England* eds. R. E. Archer, S. Walker (London: Hambledon Press, 1995), p. 190.

¹⁸³ C. Carpenter, 'The Stonor Circle in the Fifteenth Century' in *Rulers and Ruled in Late Medieval England* eds. R. E. Archer, S. Walker (London: Hambledon Press, 1995), p. 190.

¹⁸⁴ Letter from Thomas Stonor to Jane Stonor, 8 October 1468 in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 185.

¹⁸⁵ Letter from John Frende to Thomas Stonor, April 1462 in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 143.

¹⁸⁶ *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483*, ed. C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996).

a letter informing him to ‘spende sum what of your good now....and get lordship’.¹⁸⁷ This letter demonstrates the dangers of the time and that the Paston men needed to buy themselves connections to a lord who they could call upon. In the late fourteenth century the Stonors were protected by Robert Beknap who was a close associate to the king, the Stonors had long traditions of having royal connections.¹⁸⁸ The Paston and Stonors also shared some connections such as the Earl of Oxford, and they were both trying to protect their interests in a similar way and were maybe not so dissimilar as it had been argued. The lack of royal power is evident in the high number of land disputes and it can be argued that the Stonors and Pastons increased their connections and involvement in politics. They may have done this to be more aware and informed on national events and to gain protection if they were attacked. The Stonors and Pastons correspondence show that they were in contact with the individuals who were extremely powerful in their localities and in national politics. Due to their connections it can be assumed that the Stonors and Pastons could draw on their contacts to help their social advancement but on the other hand links to these men were due to disagreements and only added to their worries. Associations with key players in national politics resulted in the families eventually having to take sides in the conflict. The Stonors and Pastons were similar in that they had a network of connections and their closest associates were other landowners and important to their business affairs.¹⁸⁹ The Paston men were not afraid to embroil themselves in a dispute with men who held considerable influence; this is demonstrated by John Paston I’s disagreements with Sir John Howard the sheriff of Norfolk which resulted in John being placed in Fleet prison in 1461.¹⁹⁰ The Paston family who did not have a political patron during the

¹⁸⁷ Letter from an anonymous correspondent to John Paston, October 1450 in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 2, p. 179.

¹⁸⁸ C. Carpenter, ‘Introduction’ in *Kingsford’s Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 4.

¹⁸⁹ C. Carpenter, ‘The Stonor Circle in the Fifteenth Century’ in *Rulers and Ruled in Late Medieval England*, eds. R.E. Archer, S. Walker, (London: Hambledon Press, 1995), p. 179.

¹⁹⁰ H. Castor, ‘John Paston I (1421–1466), *Landowner and Letter Writer*’, in *Oxford DNB* (Online) Available; <http://www.oxforddnb.com/voyager.chester.ac.uk/view/article/21511/21511?back=,52791>

1460's, sought advantageous marriages to gain a patron and to help them with their disputes, which suggests that the Paston men had to do whatever was necessary to protect themselves and realised that outside influence was needed to win legal battles due to favouritism being shown to those that were close to the crown.¹⁹¹ The Pastons endeavour to arrange advantageous marriages display not only their attempt to gain wealth but an opportunity to prevent further attacks on their name by gaining strong royal connections. In March 1469 John Paston II was engaged to marry Anne Haute, who was related to Edward IV's wife Elizabeth Woodville, this would have numerous advantages for the Paston family especially in regards to their land disputes.¹⁹² Due to the changes in the political situation in 1469-71 with Henry VI reclaiming the throne in 1470, the marriage was no longer beneficial for either side.¹⁹³ The political instability caused by Henry VI's reign ignited again in 1469 when he reclaimed the throne, causing the Paston plans to be affected.

The Stonors had a vast array of associates, during Henry VI's reign they worked hard to defend their connections and did build upon them. Thomas Chaucer played an important role in Stonor family affairs, offering wide national and local opportunities and provided custody of Thomas Stonor I.¹⁹⁴ Carpenter notes that the Stonor letters suggest that the nobility did not create disputes or play a part in defusing land issues.¹⁹⁵ The Paston letters are dominated by the presence of the nobility but this may have been more of a case for the Stonors if their correspondence had not been so scarce up to the 1460's when the dominance of the magnates

¹⁹¹ R. Barber, *A family in the Wars of the Roses* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1981), p. 146.

¹⁹² C. McCarthy, *Marriage in Medieval England* (Boydell Press, Woodbridge 2004), p. 89.

¹⁹³ C. McCarthy, *Marriage in Medieval England* (Boydell Press, Woodbridge 2004), p. 89.

C. Richmond, 'The Pastons Revisited: Marriage and the Family in Fifteenth Century England' *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 58 (1985), pp. 27, 28.

¹⁹⁴ C. Carpenter, 'The Stonor Circle in the Fifteenth Century' in *Rulers and Ruled in Late Medieval England*, eds. R.E. Archer, S. Walker (London: Hambledon Press, 1995), p. 184,

¹⁹⁵ C. Carpenter, 'The Stonor Circle in the Fifteenth Century' in *Rulers and Ruled in Late Medieval England*, eds. R.E. Archer, S. Walker (London: Hambledon Press, 1995), p. 196.

had passed its peak.¹⁹⁶ Thomas Chaucer through Henry VI's minority was the most powerful man in Oxfordshire due to the offices he had been granted and him holding the title of Lord of Ewelme, gave him considerable power from 1399 to 1434.¹⁹⁷ Thomas I was head of the family 1415 to 1431, he was close to Thomas Chaucer who was powerful in England through his ties to royalty and Henry Beaufort being his patron.¹⁹⁸ Being an ally of Chaucer, allowed the Stonors to gain protection as well as improve their social standing because it allowed them to be in good favour with Chaucer's successor William de la Pole who was married to Chaucer's daughter.¹⁹⁹ These connections allowed the Stonors to increase their standing in local society and after the death of Thomas Chaucer in 1434, the family were again protected by William de la Pole and can be a reason behind the Stonors having to deal with less attacks on their interests. Through marriage the Stonor's entered the Suffolk affinity, with Thomas II marrying Suffolk's daughter.²⁰⁰ Carpenter suggests that this marriage should have caused the Stonors problems in regards to politics because of their kingship with the Hampden's due to Edmund Hampden being exiled in 1461 and his death in the battle of Tewkesbury in 1471 for Henry VI.²⁰¹

Although the Stonor letters only mention a few events of the civil war, they were close associates to men who were consumed in the troubles and their position in society it can be assumed would have caused them to be involved. In June 1469, Warwick raised men to attack the Woodvilles and managed to gain control of London and Edward IV was captured.²⁰²

¹⁹⁶ C. Carpenter, 'The Stonor Circle in the Fifteenth Century' in *Rulers and Ruled in Late Medieval England*, eds. R.E. Archer, S. Walker (London: Hambledon Press, 1995), p. 196.

¹⁹⁷ C. Carpenter, 'The Stonor Circle in the Fifteenth Century' in *Rulers and Ruled in Late Medieval England*, eds. R.E. Archer, S. Walker (London: Hambledon Press, 1995), p. 196.

¹⁹⁸ C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 5.

¹⁹⁹ C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 5.

²⁰⁰ C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 5.

²⁰¹ C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 6.

²⁰² R. Barber, *A family in the Wars of the Roses* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1981), p. 146.

Warwick was unable to implement order and at the same time, the duke of Norfolk attacked Caister.²⁰³ Richmond argues that when the dynastic conflict resurfaced it caused the Paston problems to resurface and meant their issues were further from being resolved.²⁰⁴ In 1469, Margaret wrote to Sir John Paston telling him that Norfolk's men were harassing their tenants at Heynford and the duke had managed to buy more of their lands from the rival executives of Fastolf's will.²⁰⁵ Margaret Paston informed her son of the damage Norfolk's men had done to their property in Heynford 'for thei have felled all the wood, and this weke thei wull carie it a wey, and lete renne the wateris and take all the fyssh'.²⁰⁶

The Paston correspondence illustrates that the politics of the time created an air of uncertainty, when loyalty could not be guaranteed and allegiances to the Lancastrian and Yorkist changed overnight. Alliances were quick to change during the fifteenth century, this is evident in the Paston correspondences as Thomas Howes who had been named as John Pastons co-executor of Fastolf's will, claimed that the will had been forged by Paston.²⁰⁷ In 1468, William Worchester wrote to Margaret Paston, detailing the claims of Howes and is clearly on the Pastons side and makes political references 'I am very glad Caister is and shall be at your command....and my master Fastolf would never have built it if it was going to come under the control of any sovereign who would oppress the country'.²⁰⁸ Howes claims made it easier for the Pastons enemies to question their rights to the property, Howes wrote to the archbishop of Canterbury another executor of the will, explaining how the Duke of Norfolk wished to purchase Caister from the executors of the original will.²⁰⁹

²⁰³ R. Barber, *A family in the Wars of the Roses* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1981), p.146.

²⁰⁴ R. Barber, *A family in the Wars of the Roses* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1981), p. 146.

²⁰⁵ R. Barber, *A family in the Wars of the Roses* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1981), p. 146.

²⁰⁶ Letter from Margaret Paston to Sir John Paston, 12 March 1469 in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 5, p. 10.

²⁰⁷ R. Barber, *A Family in the Wars of the Roses* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1981), p. 141.

²⁰⁸ R. Barber, *A Family in the Wars of the Roses* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1981), p.142.

²⁰⁹ R. Barber, *A Family in the Wars of the Roses* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1981), p. 144.

In conclusion, the Stonor and Paston letters document the problems they faced due to the instability of Henry VI's reign. Notably attacks on their land were a major issue, plus the dynastic changes generated much fear and worry over how the families should conduct themselves. Both families are similar in how they stood up for themselves and did not buckle from the pressure that was bestowed upon them from their enemies.

Chapter 3: Economic Impacts

There has been little research into how the political disruptions of Henry VI's reign and the civil war may have impacted upon the finances of the Stonor and Paston family. Up until Carpenter's essay 'The Stonor Circle' there had been a lack of interest in connecting the letters and business accounts of the family.²¹⁰ This chapter will explore how the families' incomes in rents or their business transactions may have been affected by the conflict. Additionally the Stonor involvement in the wool trade will be looked into and the economic situations in Oxfordshire and East Anglia will be touched upon. Also, the economic involvement the regions of East Anglia and Oxfordshire had with funding Henry VI's burgeoning finances will be looked at.

There were economic interests linking the Lancastrian party to East Anglia and Oxfordshire, which ultimately affected the Paston and Stonor families. The main towns of East Anglia such as Lynn, Norwich and Ipswich were not ardent supporters of either side in the civil wars but generally swung to whichever party had full control of the government and gave economic support.²¹¹ Haward has noted the economic interests linking the Lancastrian party to East Anglia.²¹² Due to Henry VI's government being in debt, it was unable to repay its loans to members of the Lancastrian party, thus Henry's supporters were repaid in privileges for example men who were exporting wool were granted permission to avoid paying customs.²¹³ The king had also been forced to take loans from men who collected the customs, their growing annoyance at the governments' grants forced the king into withdrawing certain privileges, but

²¹⁰ C. Carpenter, 'The Stonor Circle in the Fifteenth Century' in *Rulers and Ruled in Late Medieval England* eds. R.E. Archer, S. Walker, (London: Hambledon Press, 1995), p. 177.

²¹¹ W.I. Haward, Economic Aspects of the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia in *The English Historical Review*, 41 (1926), p. 174.

²¹² W.I. Haward, Economic Aspects of the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia in *The English Historical Review*, 41 (1926), p. 170.

²¹³ W.I. Haward, Economic Aspects of the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia in *The English Historical Review*, 41 (1926), p. 170.

fresh loans were soon produced to gain further trading benefits.²¹⁴ William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk was at the forefront of the men who were gaining grants, this added to his wealth and further tightened his control in East Anglia and made him extremely unpopular.²¹⁵ In 1444, Suffolk and William Pyrton gained all the subsidies of the goods shipped to and from Lynn and were able to appoint one of the customs collectors there, in repayment of their loans to Henry VI which were over £2000.²¹⁶ The bribery and favouritism which was evident in Henry VI's kingship caused a monopoly of tension both in East Anglia and other regions of the country.

In 1450 there was numerous political charges brought against Suffolk over his financial exploits, other prominent figures of East Anglia such as Sir Thomas Tuddenham and John Heydon were also tarred with the same reputation.²¹⁷ In 1450, attempts were made to bring Heydon and Tuddenham to justice.²¹⁸ In January 1451 John Paston created a document which detailed their misgivings and what they were guilty of 'the shipping of wolle ageyn the statute'.²¹⁹ Also, it states 'Item, to indyte the baly of Swaffham, Todenham, Heydon, Prentys, of feloyne as excercarys'.²²⁰ The document details how these men had openly abused their power and opposed the state to build their fortune and there was growing distress in Norwich and Norfolk, for example the Prior of Westacre had been forced to give Tuddenham a fee per

²¹⁴ W.I. Haward, Economic Aspects of the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia in *The English Historical Review*, 41 (1926), p. 170.

²¹⁵ W.I. Haward Economic Aspects of the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia in *The English Historical Review*, 41 (1926), p. 171.

²¹⁶ W.I. Haward, Economic Aspects of the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia in *The English Historical Review*, 41 (1926), p. 170.

²¹⁷ W.I. Haward, Economic Aspects of the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia in *The English Historical Review*, 41 (1926), p. 172.

²¹⁸ W.I. Haward, Economic Aspects of the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia in *The English Historical Review*, 41 (1926), p. 172.

²¹⁹ Memoranda for Prosecutions, Early part of 1451 in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 2, p. 214.

²²⁰ Memoranda for Prosecutions, Early part of 1451 in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 2, p. 214.

year and to make Shuldham a steward there.²²¹ Haward argues that there was much evidence to confirm what was written in the letters, for example the connections Suffolk, Heydon and Tuddenham had in Lynn such as properties and ships.²²² Although attempts were made to bring men to justice, the abuses of the power still continued as the root cause of the problem was not being tackled by Henry VI. The tensions caused by Henry VI through allowing subjects like Suffolk to have great control over East Anglia, filtered down to the gentry as they felt threatened due to the inconsistencies in law and favouritism being given to those closest to the king. The grants that Henry VI was handing out to those closest to him signalled warning signs to the Pastons, who were clearly threatened.

There were a number of economic issues in the 1400's that the gentry class had to contend with, the problems of Henry VI's reign and the conflict added to the Stonor and Paston problems in balancing their books. During the fifteenth century, the Stonor and Paston men had to deal with the issue of declining rents, which was an issue across England.²²³ Labour shortages decreased rent prices as landholders competed for tenants, this was due to declining populations caused by the Black Death in 1348 and disease outbreaks in the fifteenth century.²²⁴ Additionally, foreign wars such as the Hundred Years War 1337- 1453, impacted upon overseas trade as it decreased merchants profits due to the dangers in exporting their goods such as wool and cloth which constituted a significant amount of England's exports.²²⁵ Henry VI's inability to keep his French crown and the part he played in the end of the war with France in 1453, due to his efforts and will to find peace from 1439 did disrupt trade.²²⁶ The economic

²²¹Memoranda for Prosecutions, Early part of 1451 in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 2, p. 214.

²²² W.I. Haward, Economic Aspects of the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia in *The English Historical Review*, 41 (1926), p. 172.

²²³ M. Bailey, 'Rural Society' in *Fifteenth Century Attitudes*, ed. M. Horrox (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), p. 156.

²²⁴ J.A. Wagner, *Encyclopedia of the Wars of the Roses* (California: ABC, 2001), p. 90.

²²⁵ J.A. Wagner, *Encyclopedia of the Wars of the Roses* (California: ABC, 2001), p. 302.

²²⁶ A.J. Pollard, *The Wars of the Roses* (Palgrave: Hampshire, 2001), p. 57.

problems added to the additional issues the families had to deal with. However, Haward argues that the political rivalry had little effect on the merchants, with the main focus on protecting their trade especially with Burgundy.²²⁷

The Stonor family had connections with Thomas Betson who was a merchant of the wool staple and predominantly traded in Calais.²²⁸ Betson became associated with William Stonor as he had been apprenticed to Elizabeth Stonor's previous husband and due to the vast amount of land and sheep the Stonors had, a business venture was developed.²²⁹ The Stonors were related to the wool business before their association with Betson, a document from the Ancient Deeds in 1460 details Thomas Stonor's agreement with Symon Cooke for the hire of sheep.²³⁰ Betson and Elizabeth were close friends and he went on to marry her daughter Katherine Ryche, in a letter she called him 'my son Betson'.²³¹ Thomas Betson and William Stonor were associates in the wool trade and the Stonor archive documents some of the business transactions they were involved in see docs from April 1476.²³² Sir William Stonor though his business in the wool trade made him a contemporary to the Cely family who were important figures in the wool business.²³³ The business partnership between Sir William Stonor and Thomas Betson ended in 1480 shortly after the death of Elizabeth Stonor in 1479, and in March 1480 a document was composed to settle their affairs and details what Betson needs to repay to Stonor 'In primis a obligacion in the wyche the seyde Thomas with othyr by bown to Syr W.S.'²³⁴ Despite this

²²⁷ W.I. Haward, *Economic Interests in the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia*, p. 175.

²²⁸ A.B. Hanawalt, *The Wealth of Wives: Women, Law, and Economy in Late Medieval London* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), p. 83.

²²⁹ A. Hanham, *The Celys and Their World: An English Merchant Family of the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), p. 250.

²³⁰ An Agreement for the Hire of Sheep, 27 December 1460 in in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 142.

²³¹ A.B. Hanawalt, *The Wealth of Wives: Women, Law, and Economy in Late Medieval London* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), p. 83.

²³² A. Hanham, *The Celys and Their World: An English Merchant Family of the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), p.

²³³ R.E. Moss, *Fatherhood and its Representations in Middle English Texts* (Boydell and Brewer, 2013), p. 20.

²³⁴ Obligations of Thomas Betson to Sir William Stonor, 10 March 1480 in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483*, ed. C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), pp. 358-359.

settlement Betson still owed Stonor £1200 in 1482.²³⁵ In 1482, Richard Page wrote to Sir William Stonor ‘as for the xij li., whiche Bettson awis you’.²³⁶ The amount of money that is owed to William implies that the business partnership may not have been successful and had not ended well. The problems affecting the wool business caused by the dynastic conflict could have played a part in the partnership not being successful.

Hanham notes that the letters which have been uncovered have added to the information known about the arguments between Sir William Stonor and Sir Edmund Rede.²³⁷ The disagreement was over Rede’s lease at Standhill that he had disrupted through not paying the rent.²³⁸ William Stonor tried to use the law to settle the dispute ‘before midsummer’ but before this Giles Willesborne had followed his instructions and taken goods from Rede such as ‘I have done your commandment....I have three score beasts and three and thirty sheep’ to claim back the rent that was owed to him.²³⁹ Also, the Stonors may have felt they needed to take matters into their own hands due to the political disruption and believed that the argument would not have been settled quickly in the courts.²⁴⁰ The instructions of William Stonor demonstrate that he was not willing to allow the matter to be settled in court as he may have believed violence would protect his future interests, in the violent times of the fifteenth century.²⁴¹

The Paston and Stonor families both faced financial difficulties. The Stonor accounts give details on the management of estates, leasing of land and the family’s financial arrears.²⁴²

Noble has noted that the Stonors earned around £200-£300 annually and this resulted in them

²³⁵ Obligations of Thomas Betson to Sir William Stonor, 10 March 1480 in *Kingsford’s Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483*, ed. C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), pp. 358-359.

²³⁶ Letter from Richard Page to Sir William Stonor in *Kingsford’s Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483*, ed. C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), pp. 398-399.

²³⁷ A. Hanham, ‘Revisiting the Stonor Manuscripts’, *Historical Research*, 86 (2013), p. 24.

²³⁸ A. Hanham, ‘Revisiting the Stonor Manuscripts’, *Historical Research*, 86 (2013), p. 24.

²³⁹ A. Hanham, ‘Revisiting the Stonor Manuscripts’, *Historical Research*, 86 (2013), p. 24.

²⁴⁰ A. Hanham, ‘Revisiting the Stonor Manuscripts’, *Historical Research*, 86 (2013), p. 24.

²⁴¹ A. Hanham, ‘Revisiting the Stonor Manuscripts’, *Historical Research*, 86 (2013), p. 24.

²⁴² E. Noble, *The World of the Stonors* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), p. 12.

having close contact with the upper echelons of society such as Duke of Suffolk and through service to Edward IV.²⁴³ Despite their high income there is evidence to suggest that the costs of up-keeping their properties, legal fees and outgoings were still causing a deficit on their finances. In the Stonor documents there are a number of references to rents and empty tenements, in a letter to Thomas Stonor in 1450, he is informed that his mill at ‘Watlyngton’ is not being used but Thomas Whitborne tells him that he will ‘provyde for you a good tenaunt, to more your profit’.²⁴⁴ The political instability of the time and warfare it can be suggested only made the economic situation worse for the Stonors. Henry Mackey in 1482 wrote to Sir William Stonor urging him to find a way to pay his debts ‘wherfor ye moste se a remedy that parishens may be servyde and the dymys payde’.²⁴⁵

The men used by the Pastons and Stonors to attack their enemies in the disputes reignited and caused by the civil war, must have been an added expense and diverted their attention away from other business deals. The Paston and Stonor men were financially affected by the conflict and the repercussions it caused. The attacks on their property and livestock, did cost them money as there is evidence of them trying to win back expenses to cover the damage. Hanham has uncovered an additional letter from 1479 documenting the dispute and this document was unknown to Kingsford.²⁴⁶ In the letter, Giles Wellesborne tells Sir William Stonor how he has lost property and possessions due to the dispute ‘I have three score beasts and three and thirty sheep and nineteen lambs taken as a distress’ due to the rent on the property having not been paid.²⁴⁷ The letter documents the dispute between Sir Edmund Rede and Stonor which

²⁴³ E. Noble, *The World of the Stonors* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), p. 12.

²⁴⁴ Letter from Thomas Whitborne to Thomas Stonor, possibly 1450 in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483*, ed. C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 139.

²⁴⁵ Letter from Henry Makney to Sir William Stonor, 29 January 1482 in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483*, ed. C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), pp. 394-5.

²⁴⁶ A. Hanham, ‘Revisiting the Stonor Manuscripts’, *Historical Research*, 86 (2013), p. 24.

²⁴⁷ Letter from Giles Willesborne to William Stonor, 20 May 1479 in A. Hanham, ‘Revisiting the Stonor Manuscripts’, *Historical Research*, 86 (2013), p. 24.

occurred due to Rede breaking the rent agreement in Standhill.²⁴⁸ Giles informs William that he has acted on his wishes and taken Rede's property to cover the unpaid rent 'I have done your commandment according to your writing. I have three score beasts and three and thirty sheep and nineteen lambs'.²⁴⁹ The letter shows William Stonor to be a harsh man as to defend his interests he took matters into his own hands, despite a date being set to settle their disagreements 'before midsummer'.²⁵⁰ The Pastons had to cover the cost of paying men to defend their property at Drayton in 1465. The Paston men did not have powerful connections they could call on and were short of money to mount a strong legal attack to the allegations and believed it would be a matter of time before they faced an attack from Norfolk's men.²⁵¹

In conclusion, there is evidence to suggest that the dynastic conflict did negatively impact upon the Stonor and Paston income. The significant amount of time spent on legal disputes diverted the Stonor and Paston men from their careers and involvement in the running of their estates. The attacks on property and the damage done cost the families money to repair and they to employ men to try and gain back their losses. In the case of the Pastons they never regained many of the estates that they inherited from Fastolf. If Fastolf had died during a more peaceful time, the Pastons would have had more success in claiming the inheritance.

²⁴⁸ Letter from Giles Willesborne to William Stonor, 20 May 1479 in A. Hanham, 'Revisiting the Stonor Manuscripts', *Historical Research*, 86 (2013), p. 24.

²⁴⁹ Letter from Giles Willesborne to William Stonor, 20 May 1479 in A. Hanham, 'Revisiting the Stonor Manuscripts', *Historical Research*, 86 (2013), p. 24.

²⁵⁰ Letter from Giles Willesborne to William Stonor, 20 May 1479 in A. Hanham, 'Revisiting the Stonor Manuscripts', *Historical Research*, 86 (2013), p. 24.

²⁵¹ R. Barber, *A Family in the Wars of the Roses* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1981), p.144.

Chapter Four: Involvement and Impact of War

This chapter will explore the involvement the Paston and Stonor men had in the civil war, in terms of military service and political allegiance. Also, the impacts the civil war had on the women of the family and the extra responsibilities they had to deal with to protect the interests of their family will be examined.

The instability of Henry VI's kingship culminated in the nobility forming their own private armies and the gentry were consequently embroiled in the fighting. Despite a few garrisons Henry VI did not have an army to call upon and his inactivity in creating one ultimately gave his enemies the chance to overthrow him, a government army was not formed until 1468 by Edward IV.²⁵² Wise highlights that due to Henry VI not having his own standing army, he had to rely on the barons private armies who gained vast fortunes and titles for remaining loyal.²⁵³ The method of raising troops had serious consequences; it is now referred to as 'Bastard Feudalism' and was the process of raising men who were recruited by Lords who were paid by the crown to gather troops.²⁵⁴ This system had been introduced by Edward III but Henry's inability to control it and military defeat in France in 1453, resulted in soldiers returning from war willing to take part in any task their lord advised.²⁵⁵ The lords had grown in wealth through retaining men for Henry's ventures in the Hundred Years War.²⁵⁶ The lack of kingship resulted in the jealousy among lords reaching violent levels because the power and wealth of the crown had been shared with many nobles and Henry was no longer able to control the magnates.²⁵⁷

²⁵² M. Bohna, 'Armed Force and Civic Legitimacy in Jack Cade's Revolt, 1450', *English Historical Review* (Oxford, OUP: 2003), p. 567.

²⁵³ T. Wise, *The Wars of the Roses* (London: Osprey Publishing, 1983), p.

²⁵⁴ M. Hicks, *Bastard Feudalism* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 16.

²⁵⁵ C. Plummer, 'Introduction' in *The Governance of England: Otherwise Called, The Difference Between an Absolute and Limited Monarchy*, ed. C. Plummer, (New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange, 1885), p. 15.

²⁵⁶ C. Plummer, 'Introduction' in *The Governance of England: Otherwise Called, The Difference Between an Absolute and Limited Monarchy*, ed. C. Plummer, (New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange, 1885), p. 17.

²⁵⁷ C. Plummer, 'Introduction' in *The Governance of England: Otherwise Called, The Difference Between an Absolute and Limited Monarchy*, ed. C. Plummer, (New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange, 1885), pp. 18-19.

The increasing wealth of the elite meant a noble's desire to control their locality and region was now a reality and this caused problems throughout the country due to central government weakening.²⁵⁸ Those who appeared loyal to Henry gained increasing powers and when a dispute over landed estates occurred, armed men wearing livery of their lords were used to intimidate the rival and the judge and jury.²⁵⁹ Due to this, the legal system collapsed and rival lords started war to settle their differences, the gentry clearly worried about their rights turned to their local lord for protection.²⁶⁰ Mercer highlights that the gentry chose which political side due to personal loyalties rather than ideology and the wars were fought mainly by the lords, their retainers and tenants.²⁶¹ The Stonor and Paston families were prominent land owners and it can be suggested that when they took up arms and their tenants followed whichever political side they supported.

The regions of East Anglia and Oxfordshire played a part in the military conflict. At the battle of Barnet April 1471, the Lancastrians were led by the Earl of Oxford, Viscount Beaufort and affinities from East Anglia.²⁶² Amery argues that Oxfordshire did not play an important part in national events from around 1200 until the civil war in 1642.²⁶³ However, Haward argues that when towns were brought into the civil war, the merchants, gentry and landed classes heavily determined whether the town would be Lancastrian or Yorkist.²⁶⁴ Also, the Paston letters indicate when Henry VI was opposed it sparked a chain of events and caused unrest in other areas to increase. After the murder of the Duke of Suffolk in 1450, unrest spread across England

²⁵⁸ C. Plummer, 'Introduction' in *The Governance of England: Otherwise Called, The Difference Between an Absolute and Limited Monarchy*, ed. C. Plummer, (New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange, 1885), p. 19.

²⁵⁹ T. Wise, *The Wars of the Roses* (London: Osprey Publishing, 1983), p.

²⁶⁰ T. Wise, *The Wars of the Roses* (London: Osprey Publishing, 1983), p.

²⁶¹ M. Mercer, The Strength of Lancastrian Loyalty during the Readeption: Gentry Participation at the Battle of Tewkesbury in *The Journal of Military History* ed C.J. Rogers, K. DeVines, J. France (Boydell Press, Oct 2007)p. 84.

²⁶² M. Mercer, The Strength of Lancastrian Loyalty during the Readeption: Gentry Participation at the Battle of Tewkesbury in *The Journal of Military History* ed C.J. Rogers, K. DeVines, J. France (Boydell Press, Oct 2007)p. 86.

²⁶³ A. Emery, *Greater Medieval Houses of England and Wales, 1300-1500, Southern....*,p. 11.not correct ref

²⁶⁴ W.I. Haward, *Economic Interests in the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia*, p. 175.

and Jack Cade led a rebellion against Henry VI's rule, to bring in reforms.²⁶⁵ Also, the attacks against Henry VI's government and the keen interest the Stonors and Pastons took in finding information about national events indicates that the instability of Henry VI was affecting them. Additionally, Castor argues that the disturbances and new uncertainties after 1450 presented opportunities for men such as John Paston, Sir Fastolf and Duke of Norfolk.²⁶⁶

The Paston men took part in active military service in the conflict, such as Sir John Paston on the Lancastrian side at the battle of Barnet.²⁶⁷ When Richard Duke of York was killed in the battle of Wakefield in December 1460, Clement Paston wrote to his brother John Paston to 'come with more men, and clenlier arrayed than anoder man of yowr contre' so to gain favour with the lords.²⁶⁸ Clement's letter indicates that the Pastons were Yorkist supporters because he informs John that 'my Lord Fitzwater' had killed 200 of Andrew Trollope's men, Trollope fought for Henry VI after deserting Richard, Duke of York in 1459.²⁶⁹ Clement details his fears of the men in the north 'for the pepill in the northe robbe and styll' which suggests he fully supports the Yorkist cause and is urging John to act quickly.²⁷⁰ The Paston men were involved in the conflict and the attacks they faced from the nobility in Henry VI's reign may have pushed them to support the Yorkist cause. Also, Sir John Paston detailed the casualties of the battle of Barnet and the injuries his brother sustained in the conflict 'my brother John is a lyffe....never the lesse he is hurt with an arrow on hys ryght arm'.²⁷¹ The military service of John Paston III noted in the letter above indicates that the dynastic conflict was of great importance to the

²⁶⁵ H. Castor, *Blood and Roses: The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century* (Faber: London, 2004), p. 60.

²⁶⁶ H. Castor, *Blood and Roses: The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century* (Faber: London, 2004), p. 62.

²⁶⁷ J. Warrington, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters: Vol 1*, ed. J. Warrington (London: Dent, 1924), p. viii.

²⁶⁸ Letter from Clement Paston to John Paston, 23 January 1461 in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol 3, pp. 249-250.

²⁶⁹ Letter from Clement Paston to John Paston, 23 January 1461 in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol 3, pp. 249-250.

J.A. Wagner, *Encyclopedia of the Wars of the Roses* (California: ABC, 2001), p. 273.

²⁷⁰ Letter from Clement Paston to John Paston, 23 January 1461 in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol 3, p. 250.

²⁷¹ Letter from Sir John Paston to Margaret Paston, 18 April 1471 in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol 5, p. 99.

family and that the Paston family felt the danger of the time to a great extent. Richmond believes that the gentry were moving away from chivalry and participation in war, in favour of bourgeois gentility.²⁷² However, Moss argues that despite the Pastons legal profession, John Paston II and John III did not avoid participation in military battles.²⁷³

Stonor men fought in the civil war and were consequently affected by the dynastic conflict. Thomas Stonor II was involved in the conflict due to his loyalties to the Lancastrian cause due to his service to the anti-Yorkist commissions of array in December 1459 and 1460.²⁷⁴ Despite Henry VI losing the throne, Thomas II was not penalised and rose to the Oxfordshire Commission of the Peace in 1466 and maintained his position of power despite the troubles in 1469-1471.²⁷⁵ Sir William Stonor was affected by his participation in the civil war as he was attainted for his role in Buckingham's Rebellion against Richard III in 1483; the Stonors wealth was put in jeopardy as the family's lands were taken into the crown's possession.²⁷⁶ The family regained their lands in 1485 when Henry VII was crowned, it can be suggested that the loss of their lands would have caused much uncertainty about the future.²⁷⁷ Carpenter and Kingsford both argue that the Stonors lack of military involvement in the uprisings was typical of their gentry class.²⁷⁸ Carpenter believes the Stonors military service in the late fifteenth century was very typical as war was no longer their 'raison d'être'.²⁷⁹ Although Thomas Stonor II was not punished by Edward IV for being a Lancastrian sympathiser and the Stonor lands were only

²⁷² R.E. Moss, *Fatherhood and Its Representations in Middle English Texts* (Boydell and Brewer, 2013), p. 20.

²⁷³ R.E. Moss, *Fatherhood and Its Representations in Middle English Texts* (Boydell and Brewer, 2013), p. 20.

²⁷⁴ C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 6.

²⁷⁵ C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 6.

²⁷⁶ Carpenter. C., 'Stonor Family (per.c.1315–c.1500)', in Oxford DNB (Online) Available; <http://www.oxforddnb.com.voyager.chester.ac.uk/view/article/52796/63927?back=,52796,52796>

²⁷⁷ Carpenter. C., 'Stonor Family (per.c.1315–c.1500)', in Oxford DNB (Online) Available; <http://www.oxforddnb.com.voyager.chester.ac.uk/view/article/52796/63927?back=,52796,52796>

²⁷⁸ C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 7.

²⁷⁹ C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 7

confiscated in 1483 for two years, the Stonor men did place themselves in a dangerous situation. Also, the Stonor men did risk their lives and if Henry VII had not seized the throne the Stonor wealth may not have been restored.

The Paston and Stonor archives contain a number of valuable sources on events in the civil war. This gives the impression that they had knowledge of whether the Lancastrians or Yorkists had the upper hand and therefore where their loyalties should lie. The Paston letters document that the family was informed of the events leading up to the restoration of Edward IV in July 1471. In April 1471, Sir John Paston wrote to his mother four days after the battle of Barnet and refers to Edward IV as king and that he is forcing Queen Margaret out of the country ‘Kyngedwarde wyll depart ffrom hyr to ...dryve her owt ageyn’.²⁸⁰ The letters written to Sir William Stonor from Simon Stallworth in 1483, indicate that William was highly knowledgeable on the events in national politics.²⁸¹ Stallworth informs William of the date of Richard III’s coronation ‘coronacion, wyche schalbe bis day fortnight as we say’ and includes reference to important national figures such as the Lord of Salisbury.²⁸² The families’ letters demonstrate that they were highly informed on national and local political events but due to the volume of their archive they do give a more detailed insight into events.²⁸³

The Stonors associations to leading military figures during the fifteenth century highlights that they were well informed in developments of the civil war and were at great risk of being negatively affected by their relationships with national political figures. Carpenter argues that

²⁸⁰ Letter from Sir John Paston to Margaret Paston, 18 April 1471 in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol 5, pp. 99-100.

²⁸¹ Letter from Simon Stallworth to Sir William Stonor, 9 June 1483 in *Kingsford’s Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), pp. 415-416.

Letter from Simon Stallworth to Sir William Stonor, 21 June 1483 in *Kingsford’s Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), pp. 416-417.

²⁸² Letter from Simon Stallworth to Sir William Stonor, 9 June 1483 in *Kingsford’s Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 416.

²⁸³ C. Carpenter, ‘Introduction’ in *Kingsford’s Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 30.

the Stonors did not play a significant part in the wars because they were mainly constrained to a small area such as Berkshire and Oxfordshire and had not formed a county or national network of associates.²⁸⁴ However, William Stonor received letters from national figures including Richard, Duke of Gloucester and Lord Strange, this signifies that William was an important figure in the 1470's and well thought of by the Yorkist dynasty.²⁸⁵ The Stonor family had negotiated the political turmoil well and were still in good favour with the ruling king. Furthermore, Thomas Stonor was a close acquaintance of George Neville and ultimately in the same circles as Warwick and the King's brother George Duke of Clarence, Carpenter argues this had little lasting damage.²⁸⁶ Kennedy believes that even though he was close to his Lord, George Neville brother of Warwick his reputation was not tarnished by the civil war.²⁸⁷

The Pastons and Stonors were affected by the instability caused by Henry VI's reign and the conflict due to the effects it had on the women of the family. The legal case which ensued between the Pastons and the *Duke of Norfolk* meant Margaret Paston who remained in the Manor of Drayton had the new role of protecting her family's interests and dealing with armed men threatening her home.²⁸⁸ Warrington notes the importance of women and how they were affected by the issues caused by ineffective power from the crown and the decisions they took to defend their families.²⁸⁹ Margaret Paston was embroiled in the involvement of protecting the manor of Drayton in 1465, when it came under attack from the Duke of Suffolk and kept her husband informed of the events and was involved in looking into the deeds of the property to

²⁸⁴ C. Carpenter, 'The Stonor Circle in the Fifteenth Century' eds. R.E. Archer, S. Walker, in *Rulers and Ruled in Late Medieval England* (London: Hambledon Press, 1995), p. 179.

²⁸⁵ Letter from Lord Strange to Sir William Stonor, 6 October 1478 in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 325

Letter from Richard, Duke of Gloucester to Sir William Stonor and Humphrey Forster, 9 July 1479 in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 337.

²⁸⁶ C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 6.

²⁸⁷ K.E. Kennedy *Maintenance, Meed and Marriage in Medieval English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 16.

²⁸⁸ J. Warrington, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters: Vol 1*, ed. J. Warrington (London: Dent, 1924), p. vii.

²⁸⁹ J. Warrington, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters: Vol 1*, ed. J. Warrington (London: Dent, 1924), p.vii.

prove that it rightfully belonged to them ‘I send you a copy of the deed that Jon Edmonds of Taveram sent to me’ and Margaret informs her husband that the seal of arms is nothing like ‘the Duk of Suffolks auncesters’.²⁹⁰ In the same letter, Margaret tells John that she has heard from Jon Russe that Suffolk has bought the right to ‘Brytyeff’ and this gives the Duke to ‘makythe a cleyme on to Helysdon’.²⁹¹ Additionally, in May 1465, in a letter to her husband Margaret demonstrates her active part in reclaiming the family’s lands.²⁹² Margaret tells John that she is hopeful all disputes at Drayton and Hellesden will be ‘well from now on’ and intends to ‘go to Hellesdonand send our men to collect money’ at both manors and will ‘have a manorial court held at Drayton’.²⁹³ Also, this letter displays her motherly role in looking after her son and overseeing his behaviour ‘do not think I will support of favour him in any low behaviour’.²⁹⁴ Gairdner highlights that Sir John Paston had done extremely well to prevent an attack on his property, but the threat of a siege and the preparation for one had detrimental effects on his mother Margaret Paston health.²⁹⁵ While the men were embroiled in legal disputes and military service, their wives and mothers were required to protect the family home and send news. A number of Stonor and Paston men spent much time in London due to their careers and this placed pressure on their wives and mothers to play a key part in the running of their estates, especially in periods of strife. Stonor account book.

The consequences of Henry VI’s instability caused distress for the families and also put their servants well-being in danger. The dispute over the manor of Ermington caused worry not only

²⁹⁰ Letter from Margaret Paston to John Paston, 8 April 1465 in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 4, p. 129.

²⁹¹ Letter from Margaret Paston to John Paston, 8 April 1465 in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 4, p. 129.

²⁹² Letter from Margaret Paston to John Paston, 3 May 1465 in *The Paston Women: Selected Letters*, ed. D. Watt (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 72-3.

²⁹³ Letter from Margaret Paston to John Paston, 3 May 1465 in *The Paston Women: Selected Letters*, ed. D. Watt (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2004), p. 72.

²⁹⁴ Letter from Margaret Paston to John Paston, 3 May 1465 in *The Paston Women: Selected Letters*, ed. D. Watt (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2004), p. 73.

²⁹⁵ J. Gairdner, ‘Introduction’ in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 1, pp. 221-222.

for the Stonors but for their servants. John Frende in his correspondences to Thomas Stonor informs him that the arguments with the Fortescue's are becoming worse as he and the other servants fear for their wellbeing 'John Peperell, the son of Robert Peperyll mauneseth me dayly, and put in suche fere of my lyffe, that with other the servauntes of Ric.Fortescu, that I dare not go to cherche'.²⁹⁶ Also, it can be argued that the tension caused by his legal disputes impacted on the health of John Paston who died in May 1466, 5 months after he was released from prison.²⁹⁷

In conclusion, the Paston and Stonor men fought in the conflict and members especially the women of the families were greatly affected by the unrest of the fifteenth century. The dynastic upheaval resulted in the families becoming involved in national events because they had to take action to defend their future. Their late involvement in military conflict suggests they had no other choice but to commit to a political side. Long term plans, health of family members and prospects were negatively affected especially in the latter years of Henry's reign and by the civil war. The Stonor and Paston families may have eventually become involved because they realised that their problems would never be resolved if they watched the events play out before them. When East Anglia was brought into the war, it was the landowners who had the influence to determine the political affiliation of the towns through the process of maintenance.²⁹⁸ The political content of the Stonor and Paston correspondences highlights that the families were involved in national politics and had to be up to date in regards to a king's authority, as both families had felt the impacts from Henry VI's instability and when he was overthrown.

²⁹⁶ Letter from John Frende to Thomas Stonor, 1462, in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 144.

²⁹⁷ S. Kelsey, 'Sir John Fastolf' in *The Late Medieval Age of Crisis and Renewal, 1300-1500*, ed. C.J. Drees (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 386.

²⁹⁸ W.I. Haward, *Economic Interests in the Wars of the Roses in East Anglia*, p. 175.

Conclusion

In conclusion the Paston and Stonor gentry families were affected to a great extent from Henry VI's instability and the civil war. The high level of attacks on the Paston family in the 1450's from the nobility, indicate that Henry VI had allowed men such as Sir Thomas Tuddenham to become far too powerful. Although Pendrill believes the level of violence in the fifteenth century has been over exaggerated, the Stonor and Paston letter collections demonstrate that the 1400's were a dangerous period for the gentry.²⁹⁹ The economic disruption, attacks on property and the continual change in dynastic power was a major cause of worry.

Magnates were able to take advantage of Henry VI's inabilities and increase their domination in their localities, plus have a stranglehold on their subordinates such as the Pastons and Stonors. Thus the magnates took it upon themselves to take lands from the gentry as they believed they were the rightful owners. They did this through the use of force and ignored the law and power of the king. Their ability to survive the conflict highlights the great care they took in following the events and making sure they never over supported one side in the conflict. The position of power the Stonor and Pastons held resulted in them having numerous responsibilities not only in defending their interests but also to their associates who had offered them protection. Relationships with key military figures may have been additional reason for them taking up arms for or against the Lancastrians or Yorkists. Also, the evidence of their knowledge of national events and association to royalty suggests that they were involved from the very start of the civil war because their court cases and prospects would be affected by the outcome.

Carpenter argues that due to the difference in the content of the Stonor and Paston letters they present a contrasting image of the fifteenth century and the Pastons are atypical of their gentry

²⁹⁹ C. Pendrill, *The Wars of the Roses and Henry VII* (Great Britain: Heinemann, 2004), p. 35.

class.³⁰⁰ However, the Stonor and Paston letters have many similarities in connection to the effects Henry VI's instability and war had on them. Both letter collections document that law had broken down and the gentry families had to take matters into their own hands, as the families gained back the money that was owed to them by the use of force. Additionally, the Stonor and Paston level of military involvement was similar and the families were affected by land disputes, which went on for long periods of time. The Pastons and Stonors similarities appear in their skill at managing to become embroiled in the war at such a late date. The importance of land is a key feature in the letters and they both worked tirelessly to uphold what they had worked hard for. In addition to this, the Stonors and Pastons both experienced the loss of lands during the civil war.

The Stonor and Paston letters offer a good insight into the effects Henry VI's kingship had on the gentry. Even though the Stonors and Pastons did not consume themselves in traditional military service they did play a role in the dynastic conflict. The Paston and Stonor family knew that their downfall could be as quick as their rise and this may account for their lack of military service. Also, they were fortunate that their activity in military battles did not cause long lasting damage to their family's status. The families' military involvement in the latter years of the conflict suggests that they had to assert themselves. Also, the Paston and Stonor families were in constant fear they could lose everything if a new king came to the throne or their associates were found to have shown favour to the defeated political side. The danger of revealing political opinions in letters makes it difficult to truly ascertain their own beliefs on the reign of Henry VI. Also, the letters reveal the effects Henry's kingship had on women because they had to deal with violence and play a crucial part in upholding the affairs of their families. Also, due to legal battles being a constant threat it was an essential requirement for

³⁰⁰ C. Carpenter, *The Wars of the Roses: Politics and the constitution in England, c.1437-1509* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), p. 63.

women to have a basic understanding of the law.³⁰¹ Margaret Paston demonstrated her legal knowledge and ability to deal with important family affairs, in a society dominated by men.

The legal disputes, attacks on property and the war affected the families financially. The numerous problems the families had to deal with throughout the fifteenth century had left its mark on the families. By 1483 the gentry needed a stable ruler and consequently may have increased their role in national politics to bring a decisive end to the dynastic feud. There were numerous abuses of royal power by magnates, such as malicious suits and forgery of documents were common place.³⁰² The issues the Pastons faced from Tuddenham and Heydon may have increased John Paston's willingness to go support the Yorkist cause in 1460.³⁰³ The statement noted by Kingsford at the start of this dissertation can be modified because the letters indicate that the fifteenth century was a violent period in which the gentry lived in fear that they would be attacked.³⁰⁴

Word Count: 16, 2227

³⁰¹ J. Gairdner, 'Introduction' in *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (Gloucester: Sutton, 1986), Vol. 1, p. 118.

³⁰² C. Plummer, 'Introduction' in *The Governance of England: Otherwise Called, The Difference Between an Absolute and Limited Monarchy*, ed. C. Plummer, (New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange, 1885), p. 31.

³⁰³ C. Richmond, *The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century: Volume 2, Fastolf's Will* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), p. 118.

³⁰⁴ C. Carpenter, 'Introduction' in *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290- 1483*, ed C. Carpenter (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 11.

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