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Edited by James Gairdner

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The Paston Letters, A.D. 1422–1509

Archivist and historian James Gairdner, C.B. (1828-1912) began his career in the Public Record Office at 18 and retired as assistant keeper forty-seven years later. The author of numerous historical works, Gairdner is best-known for his archival and editorial work, which forms his most significant contributions to historical scholarship. He oversaw almost entirely the publication of *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*; *The Paston Letters* represent a similarly important work. The *Letters* reveal the fortunes of the Norfolk Paston family and of their tumultuous times. Beginning in the reign of Henry VI and continuing through the reigns of Edward IV, Richard III, and Henry VII, the *Letters* are of great interest to early modern historians and literary critics. Volume One includes a preface and the highly-praised Introduction, which provides a near-exhaustive and invaluable study of the letters' historical context.

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VOLUME 1

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PASTON LETTERS

A.D. 1422-1509

NEW COMPLETE LIBRARY EDITION

EDITED WITH NOTES AND AN INTRODUCTION

BY

JAMES GAIRDNER

OF THE PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE

VOLUME I

LONDON

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EXETER

JAMES G. COMMINS

1904

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PUBLIC attention was first drawn to the Paston Letters in the year 1787, when there issued from the press two quarto volumes with a very lengthy title, setting forth that the contents were original letters written ‘by various persons of rank and consequence’ during the reigns of Henry VI., Edward IV., and Richard III. The materials were derived from autographs in the possession of the Editor, a Mr. Fenn, of East Dereham, in Norfolk, who was well enough known in society as a gentleman of literary and antiquarian tastes, but who had not at that time attained any great degree of celebrity. Horace Walpole had described him, thirteen years before, as ‘a smatterer in antiquity, but a very good sort of man.’ What the great literary magnate afterwards thought of him we are not informed, but we know that he took a lively interest in the Paston Letters the moment they were published. He appears, indeed, to have given some assistance in the progress of the work through the press. On its appearance he expressed himself with characteristic enthusiasm:—‘The letters of Henry VI.’s reign, etc., are come out, and *to me* make all other letters not worth reading. I have gone through one volume, and cannot bear to be writing when I am so eager to be reading. . . . There are letters from *all* my acquaintance, Lord Rivers, Lord Hastings, the Earl of Warwick, whom I remember still better than Mrs. Strawbridge, though she died within these fifty years. What antiquary would be answering a letter from a living countess, when he may read one from Eleanor Mowbray, Duchess of Norfolk?’¹

So wrote the great literary exquisite and virtuoso, the man

¹ *Walpole’s Letters* (Cunningham’s ed.), ix. 92.

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whose opinion in those days was life or death to a young author or a new publication. And in spite of all that was artificial and affected in his character,—in spite even of the affectation of pretending a snobbish interest in ancient duchesses—Walpole was one of the fittest men of that day to appreciate such a publication.. Miss Hannah More was less easily pleased, and she no doubt was the type of many other readers. The letters, she declared, were quite barbarous in style, with none of the elegance of their supposed contemporary Rowley. They might perhaps be of some use to correct history, but as letters and fine reading, nothing was to be said for them.¹ It was natural enough that an age which took this view of the matter should have preferred the forgeries of Chatterton to the most genuine productions of the fifteenth century. The style of the Paston Letters, even if it had been the most polished imaginable, of course could not have exhibited the polish of the eighteenth century, unless a Chatterton had had some hand in their composition.

What was thought of them by some.

General interest in the work.

Yet the interest excited by the work was such that the editor had no reason to complain of its reception. The Paston Letters were soon in everybody's hands. The work, indeed, appeared under royal patronage, for Fenn had got leave beforehand to dedicate it to the King as 'the avowed patron' of antiquarian knowledge. This alone had doubtless some influence upon the sale; but the novel character of the publication itself must have excited curiosity still more. A whole edition was disposed of in a week, and a second edition called for, which, after undergoing some little revision, with the assistance of Mr. George Steevens, the Shakspearian editor, was published the same year. Meanwhile, to gratify the curious, the original ms. letters were deposited for a time in the Library of the Society of Antiquaries; but the King having expressed a wish to see them, Fenn sent them to Buckingham Palace, then called the Queen's Palace, requesting that, if they were thought worthy of a place in the Royal Collection, His Majesty would be pleased to accept them.

¹ Roberts's *Memoirs of Hannah More*, ii. 50.

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They were accordingly, it would seem, added to the Royal Library ; and as an acknowledgment of the value of the gift, Fenn was summoned to Court, and received the honour of knighthood.

But the two volumes hitherto published by Fenn contained only a small selection out of a pretty considerable number of original letters of the same period in his possession. The reception these two volumes had met with now encouraged him to make a further selection, and he announced with his second edition that another series of the Letters was in preparation, which was to cover the same period as the first two volumes, and to include also the reign of Henry VII. Accordingly a third and fourth volume of the work were issued together in the year 1789, containing the new letters down to the middle of Edward IV.'s reign. A fifth and concluding volume, bringing the work down to the end of Henry VII.'s reign, was left ready for publication at Sir John Fenn's death in 1794, and was published by his nephew, Mr. Serjeant Frere, in 1823.

Of the original mss. of these letters and their descent Fenn gives but a brief account in the preface to his first volume, which we will endeavour to supplement with additional facts to the best of our ability. The letters, it will be seen, ^{The mss.} were for the most part written by or to particular members of the family of Paston in Norfolk. Here and there, it is true, are to be found among them State papers and other letters of great interest, which must have come to the hands of the family through some indirect channel ; but the great majority are letters distinctly addressed to persons of the name of Paston, and in the possession of the Pastons they remained for several generations. In the days of Charles II. the head of the family, Sir Robert Paston, was created Earl of Yarmouth ; but his son William, the second bearer of the title, having got into debt and encumbered his inheritance, finally died without male issue, so that his title became extinct. While living in reduced circumstances, he appears to have parted with a portion of his family papers, which were purchased by the great antiquary and collector, Peter Le Neve, Norroy King of Arms.

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Le Neve was a Norfolk man, possessed of considerable estates at Witchingham and elsewhere in the county ; and he made it a special object to collect mss. and records relating to Norfolk and Suffolk. Just before his death in 1729 he made a will,¹ by which he bequeathed his mss. to the erudite Dr. Tanner, afterwards Bishop of St. Asaph's, and Thomas Martin of Palgrave ; but this bequest was subject to the condition that within a year after his death they should 'procure a good and safe repository in the Cathedral Church of Norwich, or in some other good and public building in the said city' for their preservation, the object being to make them at all times accessible to those who wished to consult them. The condition, however, was not fulfilled, and the bequest would naturally have become null ; but 'honest Tom Martin of Palgrave' (to give him the familiar name by which he himself desired to be known) married the widow of his friend, and thus became possessed of his mss. by another title.

The Le Neve collection, however, contained only a portion of the Paston family papers. On the death, in 1732, of the Earl of Yarmouth, who outlived Le Neve by three years, some thirty or forty chests of valuable letters and documents still remained at the family seat at Oxnead. These treasures the Rev. Francis Blomefield was allowed to examine three years later with a view to his county history, for which purpose he boarded at Oxnead for a fortnight.² Of the results of a general survey of the papers he writes, on the 13th May 1735, to Major Weldon a number of interesting particulars, of which the following may be quoted as bearing upon the subject before us :—'There is another box full of the pardons, grants, and old deeds, freedoms, etc., belonging to the Paston family only, which I laid by themselves, for fear you should think them proper to be preserved with the family ; they don't relate to any estates. . . . There are innumerable letters of good consequence in history still lying among the loose papers, all which I laid up in a corner of the room on a heap which

¹ See Appendix after Introduction, No. I.

² *Cursory Notices of the Reverend Francis Blomefield.* By J. Wilton Rix, Esq.

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contains several sacks full.’¹ But Blomefield afterwards became the owner of a considerable portion of these papers ; for he not only wrote his initials on several of them, and marked a good many others with a mark by which he was in the habit of distinguishing original documents that he had examined and noted, but he also made a present to a friend of one letter which must certainly have once been in the Paston family archives. He himself refers to his ownership of certain collections of documents in the Preface to his *History of Norfolk*, where he informs the reader that he has made distinct reference to the several authors and originals he had made use of in all cases, ‘except’ (these are his words) ‘where the originals are either in Mr. Le Neve’s or my own collections, which at present I design to join to his, so that, being together, they may be consulted at all times.’ Apparently honest Tom Martin was still intending to carry out Le Neve’s design, and Blomefield purposed to aid it further by adding his own collections to the Le Neve mss. But though Martin lived for nearly forty years after his marriage with Le Neve’s widow, and always kept this design in view, he failed to carry it out. His necessities compelled him to part with some of his treasures, but these apparently were mainly books enriched with ms. notes, not original ancient mss., and even as he grew old he did not altogether drop the project. He frequently formed resolutions that he would, *next year*, arrange what remained, and make a selection for public use. But at last, at the age of seventy-four, he suddenly died in his chair without having given effect to his purpose.

Neither did his friend Blomefield, who died nine years before him, in January 1762, succeed in giving effect to *his* good intention of uniting his collections with the Le Neve mss. For he died deeply in debt, and by his will, made just before death, he directed all his personal property to be sold in payment of his liabilities. His executors, however, declined to act, and administration was granted to two principal creditors. Of the Paston mss. which were owned by him, a few are now to be found in one of the volumes of the Douce Collection in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. These, it would seem, were

¹ *Norfolk Archaeology*, ii. 210, 211.

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first purchased by the noted antiquary John Ives,¹ who acquired a number of Le Neve's, Martin's, and Blomefield's mss.; and after his library was sold by auction in March 1777, they became part of the collections relating to the counties of Oxford and Cambridge, which Gough, in his *British Topography* (vol. ii. p. 5), informs us that he purchased at the sale of Mr. Ives' papers. To this same collection, probably, belonged also a few of the scattered documents relating to the Paston family which have been met with among the miscellaneous stores of the Bodleian Library, for a knowledge of which I was indebted to the late Mr. W. H. Turner of Oxford.

Martin's executors seem to have done what they could to preserve the integrity of his collections. A catalogue of his library was printed at Lynn in 1771, in the hope that some purchaser would be found to take the whole. Such a purchaser did present himself, but not in the interest of the public. A certain Mr. John Worth, a chemist at Diss, bought both the library and the other collections, as a speculation, for £630. The printed books he immediately sold to a firm at Norwich, who disposed of them by auction; the pictures and smaller curiosities he sold by auction at Diss, and certain portions of the mss. were sent, at different times, to the London market. But before he had completed the sale of all the collections, Mr. Worth died suddenly in December 1774. That portion of the mss. which contained the Paston Letters he had up to that time reserved. Mr. Fenn immediately purchased them of his executors, and they had been twelve years in his possession when he published his first two volumes of selections from them.

So much for the early history of the mss. Their subsequent fate is not a little curious. On the 23rd May 1787, Fenn received his knighthood at St. James's, having then and there presented to the King three bound volumes of mss. which were the originals of his first two printed volumes.² Yet,

¹ See Nichols's *Literary Anecdotes*, iii. 199.

² The following announcement appears in the *Morning Chronicle* of the 24th May 1787: 'Yesterday, John Fenn, Esq., attended the levee at St. James's, and had the honour of presenting to His Majesty (bound in three volumes) the original letters of which he had before presented a printed copy; when His Majesty, as a mark of his gracious acceptance, was pleased to confer on him the honour of knighthood.'

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strange to say, these mss. were afterwards lost sight of so completely that for a whole century nobody could tell what had become of them. They were not in the Royal Library afterwards given up to the British Museum; they were not to be found in any of the Royal Palaces. The late Prince Consort, just before his death, caused a careful search to be made for them, but it proved quite ineffectual. Their hiding-place remained unknown even when I first republished these Letters in the years 1872-75.

To this mystery succeeded another of the same kind. The originals of the other three volumes were not presented to the king; but they, too, disappeared, and remained for a long time equally undiscoverable. Even Mr. Serjeant Frere, who edited the fifth volume from transcripts left by Sir John Fenn after his death, declared that he had not been able to find the originals of that volume any more than those of the others. Strange to say, however, the originals of that volume were in his house all the time, and were discovered by his son, Mr. Philip Frere, in the year 1865, just after an ingenious *littérateur* had made the complete disappearance of *all* the mss. a ground for casting doubt on the authenticity of the published letters. It is certainly a misfortune for historical literature, or at all events was in those days, that the owners of ancient mss. commonly took so little pains to ascertain what it was that they had got. Since then the proceedings of the Historical mss. Commission, which have brought to light vast stores of unsuspected materials for history, have awakened much more interest in such matters.

Thus three distinct portions of mss. that had been carefully edited had all been lost sight of and remained undiscoverable for a long series of years. The originals of the first two volumes presented to the King could not be found. The originals of volumes iii. and iv. could not be found. The originals of volume v. could not be found. These last, however, after a time, came to light, as we have seen, in 1865, having been discovered in the house of the late Mr. Philip Frere at Dungate, in Cambridgeshire; and with them were found a large number of additional mss., also belonging to the

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Paston Collection, among which was the original of one of the letters of volume iii. separated from all its fellows, whose place of concealment remained still unknown.

This discovery, however, was important, and at once suggested to me the possibility of producing a new edition of the Letters arranged in true chronological order, and augmented by those hitherto unedited. It suggested, moreover, that more of the originals might even yet be discovered with a little further search, perhaps even in the same house. But a further search at Dungate, though it brought to light a vast quantity of papers of different ages, many of them very curious, did not lead to the discovery of any other than the single document above referred to belonging to any of the first four volumes. All that Mr. Philip Frere could find belonging to the Paston Collection he sold to the British Museum, and the rest he disposed of by auction.

The question then occurred : Since the originals of volumes iii. and iv. had not been found at Dungate, might they be in the possession of the head of the Frere family, the late Mr. George Frere of Roydon Hall, near Diss, in Norfolk? This was suggested to me as probable by Mr. Philip Frere, his cousin, and I wrote to him accordingly on the 3rd December 1867. I received an answer from him dated on the 6th, that he did not see how such mss. should have found their way to Roydon, but if they turned up at any time he would let me know. Unluckily he seems to have dismissed the subject from his mind, and I received no answer to further inquiries repeated at various intervals. At last it appeared hopeless to wait longer and defer my edition of the Letters indefinitely on the chance of finding more originals anywhere. So the first volume of my edition went to press, and the second, and the third. But just after I had printed off two Appendices to vol. iii., a friend of Mr. George Frere's called upon me at the Record Office, and informed me that a number of original Paston letters had been discovered at Roydon, which he had conveyed up to London. After some further communication with Mr. Frere himself I was allowed to inspect them at his son's chambers in the Temple, when I found among them those

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very originals of Fenn's third and fourth volumes which eight years before he could not believe were in his possession ! Every one of them, I think, was there with just two exceptions—the first a document which, as already mentioned, was found at Dungate ; the second a letter (No. 52 in this edition) now preserved at Holland House, the existence of which was made known to me before my second volume was issued by a recent book of the Princess Marie Liechtenstein.¹

It was mortifying, I confess, not to have received earlier intelligence of a fact that I had suspected all along. But it was better to have learned it at the last moment than not till after my last volume was published. So, having made two Appendices already to that volume, the only thing to do was to add a third, in which the reader would find a brief note of the discovery, with copies of some of the unpublished letters, and as full an account of the others belonging to the same period as circumstances would permit. Altogether there were no less than ninety-five new original letters belonging to the period found at Roydon Hall, along with the originals of Fenn's third and fourth volumes.

In July 1888 these Roydon Hall mss. were offered for sale at Christie's. They consisted then of 311 letters, mainly the originals of Fenn's third and fourth volumes, and of those described in my third Appendix. Of the former set there were only four letters wanting, viz. the two in volume iii. whose existence is accounted for elsewhere, and two in volume iv. 'which,' the sale catalogue observes, 'are noted by Fenn himself as being no longer in his possession.' As to the letters in my Appendix the catalogue goes on to say :—

'Of the ninety-five additional letters above mentioned (Gairdner, 992-1086) *four* are missing (Nos. 1016, 1029, 1077, 1085). On the other hand, on collating the present collection with the printed volumes, it was found to contain *four others* of which no record exists either in Fenn's or Mr. Gairdner's edition, and which consequently appear to have escaped the notice of the latter gentleman while examining the treasures at Roydon Hall.'

'The latter gentleman' begs leave to say here that he never

¹ *Holland House*. By Princess Marie Liechtenstein, vol. ii. p. 198.

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was at Roydon Hall in his life, and was only allowed to examine such of the 'treasures' found there as were placed before him in the year 1875 in a certain chamber in the Temple. A well-known bookseller purchased the mss. offered at Christie's for 500 guineas, and some years later (in 1896), sold them to the British Museum. They are thus, at length, available for general consultation. The number of missing originals, however, is not quite as given in Christie's sale catalogue. There are four, not two, lacking of volume iv. On the other hand, only two letters of the Appendix are wanting.¹

About fifteen years after the discovery at Roydon there came another discovery elsewhere. On the 29th March 1890 it was announced in the *Athenæum* that the missing originals of Fenn's first and second volumes—that is to say, the mss. presented to King George III.—had likewise come to light again. They were found at Orwell Park, in Suffolk, in 1889, after the death of the late Colonel Tomline, and they remain there in the possession of his cousin, Mr. E. G. Pretyman, M.P., now Secretary to the Admiralty, who kindly showed them to me at his house soon after their discovery. They have come to him among family papers and heirlooms of which, being only tenant for life, he is not free to dispose until some doubts can be removed as to their past history; and I accordingly forbear from saying more on this point except that their place of deposit indicates that they may either have got mixed with the private papers and books of Pitt, of which a large number are in the Orwell library, or with those of his old tutor and secretary, Dr. George Pretyman, better known as Bishop Tomline. Dr. Pretyman had just been appointed Bishop of Lincoln when Fenn published his first two volumes, and it was many years afterwards that he assumed the name of Tomline. But whether these mss. came to his hands or to Pitt's, or under what

¹ The missing letters of volume iv. are Nos. 24, 97, 99, and 105 (Nos. 551, 726, 735, and 758 of this edition). The last never formed part of Fenn's collection. I do not know of any other noted by him as 'no longer in his possession.' The letters missing of the Appendix are only Nos. 997 and 1019. Of the four said to be missing in Christie's catalogue, 1016 is not a document at all, the number having been accidentally skipped in the Inventory, and the other three are in the British Museum. No. 1077, however, is inaccurately described in the Appendix.

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circumstances they were delivered to either, there is no evidence to show. Possibly the King's illness in 1788 prevented their being placed, or, it may be, replaced, in the Royal Library, where they were intended to remain.

The edition of these Letters published by Mr. Arber in 1872-75 was in three volumes. It was printed from stereotype plates, and has been reissued more than once by the Messrs. Constable with corrections, and latterly with an additional volume containing the Preface and Introduction by themselves, and a Supplement giving the full text of those newly-found letters of which the reader had to be content with a bare catalogue in 1875. My original aim to have a complete collection of all extant Paston Letters had been defeated; and there seemed nothing for it but to let them remain even at the last in a general series, an Appendix and a Supplement. The present publishers, however, by arrangement with Messrs. Constable, were anxious to meet the wants of scholars who desired to possess the letters, now that the collection seems to be as complete as it is ever likely to be, in a single series, and in a more luxurious form than that in which they have hitherto appeared. I have accordingly rearranged the letters as desired—a task not altogether without its difficulties when nice chronological questions had to be weighed and the story of the Pastons in all its details had for so many years ceased to occupy a foremost place in my thoughts; and I trust that the unity of the series will now give satisfaction. At the same time, the opportunity has not been lost of rectifying such errors as have been brought to my notice, which could not have been conveniently corrected in the stereotype editions.

Notwithstanding the recovery of the originals of the letters printed by Fenn, it has not been thought necessary to edit these anew from the mss. Whether such a thing would be altogether practicable even now may perhaps be a question; at all events it would have delayed the work unduly. Fenn's editing is, as I have shown in previous editions, fairly satisfactory on the whole, and it is not to be supposed that a comparison of all the printed letters with the original mss. would lead to results of very material consequence. A large number

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have been compared already, and the comparison inspires the greatest confidence in his care and accuracy. His misreadings are really very few, his method of procedure having been such as to prevent their being either many or serious; while as to his suppressions I have found no reason to believe, from what examination I have been able to make, that any of them were of very material importance.

It was not editorial carelessness on Fenn's part which made a new edition desirable in 1872. It was, first of all, the advance of historical criticism since his day—or rather, perhaps, I should say, of the means of verifying many things by the publication of historical sources and the greater accessibility of historical records. And secondly, the discovery of such a large number of unprinted documents belonging to the Paston Collection made it possible to study that collection as a whole, and fill up the outlines of information which they contained on matters both public and private. On this subject I may be allowed simply to quote what I said in 1872 in the preface to the first volume:—

‘The errors in Fenn's chronology are numerous, and so exceedingly misleading that, indispensable as these Letters now are to the historian, there is not a single historian who has made use of them but has misdated some event or other, owing to their inaccurate arrangement. Even writers who have been most on their guard in some places have suffered themselves to be misled in others. This is no reproach to the former Editor, whose work is indeed a perfect model of care and accuracy for the days in which he lived; but historical criticism has advanced since that time, and facilities abound which did not then exist for comparing one set of documents with another, and testing the accuracy of dates by public records. The completion of Blomefield's *History of Norfolk*, and the admirable index added to that work of late years by Mr. Chadwick, have also been of eminent service in verifying minute facts. Moreover, the comprehensive study of the whole correspondence, with the advantage of having a part already published to refer to, has enabled me in many cases to see the exact bearing of particular letters, which before seemed to have no certain place in the chronology, not only upon public events, but upon the private affairs of the Paston family. . . .

The care taken by Sir John Fenn to secure the accuracy of his text can be proved by many tests. It might, indeed, be inferred from

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the elaborate plan of editing that he adopted, exhibiting in every case two transcripts of the same letter, the one to show the precise spelling and punctuation of the original, the other to facilitate the perusal by modern orthography. A work on which so much pains were bestowed, and which was illustrated besides by numerous facsimiles of the original handwritings, signatures, paper-marks, and seals of the letters, was not likely to have been executed in a slovenly manner, in so far as the text is concerned. But we are not left in this case to mere presumptive evidence. The originals of the fifth volume have been minutely examined by a committee of the Society of Antiquaries, and compared all through with the printed text, and the general result of this examination was that the errors are very few, and for the most part trivial. Now, if this was the case with regard to that volume, which it must be remembered was published after Fenn's death from transcripts prepared for the press, and had not the benefit of a final revision of the proof-sheets by the editor, we have surely every reason to suppose that the preceding volumes were at least not less accurate.

‘At all events, any inaccuracies that may exist in them were certainly not the result of negligence. I have been favoured by Mr. Almack, of Melford, near Sudbury, in Suffolk, with the loan of several sheets of ms. notes bequeathed to him by the late Mr. Dalton, of Bury St. Edmunds, who transcribed a number of the original mss. for Sir John Fenn. These papers contain a host of minute queries and criticisms, which were the result of a close examination of the first four volumes, undertaken at Fenn's request. Those on the first two volumes are dated on the 3rd and 7th of May 1788, more than a year after the book was published. But on vols. iii. and iv. there are two separate sets of observations, the first of which were made on the transcripts before they were sent to press, the other, like those on the two first volumes, on the published letters. From an examination of these criticisms, and also from the results of the examination of the fifth volume by the committee of the Society of Antiquaries,¹ I have been led to the opinion that the manner in which Sir John Fenn prepared his materials for the press was as follows:—Two copies were first made of every letter, the one in the exact spelling and punctuation of the original, the other in modern orthography. Both these copies were taken direct from the original, and possibly in the case of the first two volumes they were both made by Fenn himself. In vols. iii. and iv., however, it is stated that many of the transcripts were made by Mr. Dalton, while those of vol. v. were found to be almost all in his handwriting when that volume was sent to press in 1823.² But

Mode in which Fenn prepared the letters for publication.

¹ *Archæol.* vol. xli. p. 39.

² See Advertisement in the beginning of the volume, p. vii.

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this statement probably refers only to the copies in the antique spelling. Those in modern spelling I believe to have been made for the most part, if not altogether, by Fenn himself. When completed, the two copies were placed side by side, and given to Mr. Dalton to take home with him. Mr. Dalton then made a close comparison of the two versions, and pointed out every instance in which he found the slightest disagreement between them, or where he thought an explanation might be usefully bracketed into the modern version. These comments in the case of vol. iii. are upwards of 400 in number, and extend over eighteen closely written pages quarto. It is clear that they one and all received the fullest consideration from Sir John Fenn before the work was published. Every one of the discrepancies pointed out between the two versions is rectified in the printed volume, and there cannot be a doubt that in every such case the original ms. was again referred to, to settle the disputed reading.

‘One or two illustrations of this may not be unacceptable to the reader. The following are among the observations made by Mr. Dalton on the transcripts of vol. iii. as prepared for press. In Letter viii. was a passage in which occurred the words, “that had of your father certain lands *one* seven years or eight years ago.” Mr. Dalton’s experience as a transcriber appears to have suggested to him that “one” was a very common misreading of the word “over” in ancient mss., and he accordingly suggested that word as making better sense. His surmise turned out to be the true reading, and the passage stands corrected accordingly in the printed volume. In Letter xxiv. there was a discrepancy in the date between the transcript in ancient spelling and the modern version. In the latter it was “the 4th day of December,” whereas the former gave it as the 3rd. On examination it appears that the *modern* version was found to be correct, a Roman “iiij.” having been misread in the other as “ijj.” Thus we have very sufficient evidence that the modern copy could not have been taken from the ancient, but was made independently from the original ms. Another instance of the same thing occurs in the beginning of Letter xli., where the words “to my power” had been omitted in the literal transcript, but were found in the modern copy.

‘Mr. Dalton’s part in the work of transcription appears clearly in several of his observations. One of the transcripts is frequently referred to as “my copy”; and an observation made on Letter lxxxvi. shows pretty clearly that the copy so referred to was the literal one. At the bottom of that letter is the following brief postscript:—“*Utinam iste mundus malignus transiret et concupiscentia ejus*”; on which Mr. Dalton remarks as follows:—“I have added this on *your* copy as supposing it an oversight, and hope it is properly inserted.” Thus it appears that Mr. Dalton’s own transcript had the words which were

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deficient in the other, and that, being tolerably certain they existed in the original, he transferred them to the copy made by Fenn. Now when it is considered that these words are written in the original ms. with peculiarly crabbed contractions, which had to be preserved in the literal version as exactly as they could be represented in type,¹ it will, I think, appear evident that Mr. Dalton could never have ventured to supply them in such a form without the original before him. It is clear, therefore, that his copy was the literal transcript, and that of Fenn the modern version.

‘Again, in Letter xxxi. of the same volume, on the second last line of page 137, occur the words, “that he obey not the certiorari.” On this passage occurs the following query—“The word for ‘obey’ seems unintelligible. Have I not erred from the original in my copy?” Another case will show how by this examination the errors of the original transcripts were eliminated. In Letter xxxiv., at the bottom of pp. 144-5, occurs the name of Will or William Staunton. It appears this name was first transcribed as “Robert Fraunton” in the right or modern version; on which Mr. Dalton remarks, “It is William in orig.” (Mr. Dalton constantly speaks of the transcript in ancient spelling as the “original” in these notes, though it is clear he had not the real original before him at the time he made them). Strangely enough, Mr. Dalton does not suspect the surname as well as the Christian name, but it is clear that both were wrong, and that they were set right in consequence of this query directing the editor’s attention once more to the original ms.’

To this I may add some further evidences of Fenn’s editorial care and accuracy. When the second volume of my first edition was published in 1874, my attention was called, as already mentioned, to the existence at Holland House of the original of one of those letters² which I had reprinted from Fenn. It was one of the letters in Fenn’s third volume, and only one³ other letter in that volume had then turned up. I carefully compared both these papers with the documents as printed, and in both, as I remarked in the Preface to vol. ii., the exact spelling was given with the most scrupulous accuracy, so that there was scarcely the most trivial variation between the originals and the printed text. But a more careful

¹ The following is the exact form in which they stand in the literal or left-hand version :—‘Utia’z iste mu’d maligu^s t’nsir^t & c’up’ia e^s.’

² No. 38 in that edition, No. 52 in this.

³ It was Letter 1 in Fenn’s third volume, No. 18 in my first edition, No. 24 in this.

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estimate, alike of Fenn's merits and of his defects as an editor, became possible when, on the publication of the third volume of the same edition, I was able, as I have already shown, to announce at the last moment the result of a cursory inspection of the originals of his third and fourth volumes. And what I said at that time may be here transcribed :—

‘The recovery of these long-lost originals, although, unfortunately, too late to be of the use it might have been in this edition, is important in two ways : first, as affording an additional means of testing Fenn's accuracy as an editor ; and secondly, as a means of testing the soundness of some occasional inferences which the present Editor was obliged to draw for himself in the absence of the originals. More than one instance occurs in this work in which it will be seen that I have ventured to eliminate from the text as spurious a heading printed by Fenn as if it were a part of the document which it precedes. Thus, in No. 19,¹ I pointed out that the title, in which Judge Paston is called “Sir William Paston, knight,” could not possibly be contemporaneous ; and the document itself shows that this opinion was well founded. It bears, indeed, a modern endorsement in a handwriting of the last century much to the same effect as Sir John Fenn's heading ; but this, of course, is no authority at all. In the same way I showed that the title printed by Fenn, as a heading to No. 191,² was utterly erroneous, and could not possibly have existed in the original ms. This conclusion is also substantiated by the document, which, I may add, bears in the margin the heading “Copia,” showing that it was a transcript. The document itself being an important State Paper, there were probably a number of copies made at the time ; but as no others have been preserved, it is only known to us as one of the Paston Letters.

‘Another State Paper (No. 238),³ of which a copy was likewise sent to John Paston, has a heading which Sir John Fenn very curiously misread. It is printed in this edition⁴ as it stands in the first, *Vadatur* *ƒ. P.*, meaning apparently “John Paston gives security, or stands pledged.” But it turns out on examination that the reading of the original is *Tradatur* *ƒ. P.* (Let this be delivered to John Paston).

‘To return to No. 19, it will be seen that I was obliged to reprint from Fenn in the preliminary note a few words which he had found written on the back of the letter, of which it was difficult to make any perfect sense, but which seemed to imply that the bill was delivered to

¹ No. 25 in present edition.

² No. 230 in present edition.

³ No. 282 in present edition.

⁴ That is to say, in the edition published by Mr. Arber in 1875, when it was impossible to correct the text.

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Parliament in the 13th year of Henry VI. I pointed out that there seemed to be some error in this, as no Parliament actually met in the 13th year of Henry VI. The original endorsement, however, is perfectly intelligible and consistent with facts, when once it has been accurately deciphered. The handwriting, indeed, is very crabbed, and for a considerable time I was puzzled; but the words are as follows:—“Falsa billa Will'i Dallyng ad parlamentum tempore quo Henricus Grey fuit vicecomes, ante annum terciodecimum Regis Henrici vj^{ti}.” I find as a matter of fact that Henry Grey was sheriff (*vicecomes*) of Norfolk, first in the 8th and 9th, and again in the 12th and 13th year of Henry VI., and that Parliament sat in November and December of the 12th year (1433); so that the date of the document is one year earlier than that assigned to it.

‘Again, I ventured to question on internal evidence the authorship of a letter (No. 910)¹ which Fenn had assigned to William Paston, the uncle of Sir John Paston. At the end is the signature “Wyll'm Paston,” with a reference in Fenn to a facsimile engraved in a previous volume. But the evidence seemed to me very strong that the William Paston who wrote this letter was not Sir John's uncle, but his brother. The inspection of the original letter itself has proved to me that I was right. The signatures of the two Williams were not altogether unlike each other; but the signature appended to this letter is unquestionably that of the younger man, not of his uncle; while the facsimile, to which Fenn erroneously refers the reader, is that of the uncle's signature taken from a different letter.

‘It may perhaps be conceived that if even these few errors could be detected in Fenn's work by one who had not yet an opportunity of consulting the original mss., a large number of others would be discovered by a minute comparison of the printed volumes with the letters themselves. This suspicion, however, is scarcely borne out by the facts. I cannot profess to have made anything like an exhaustive examination, but so far as I have compared these mss. with the printed text, I find no evidence of more than very occasional inaccuracy, and, generally speaking, in matters very immaterial. On the contrary, an inspection of these last recovered originals has greatly confirmed the opinion, which the originals previously discovered enabled me to form, of the scrupulous fidelity and care with which the letters were first edited. For the most part, not only the words, but the exact spelling of the mss. is preserved, with merely the most trifling variations. Sir John, indeed, was not a trained archivist, and there are what may be called errors of system in his mode of reading, such as, for instance, the omission of contractions that may be held to represent a final *e*, or the rendering a final dash by *s* instead of *es*. In such things the plan

¹ No. 1033 in present edition.

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that he pursued was obvious. But it is manifest that in other respects he is very accurate indeed; for he had made so careful a study of these mss. that he was quite familiar with most of the ancient modes of handwriting, and, on the whole, very seldom mistook a reading.

‘I may add, that this recent discovery enables me to vindicate his accuracy in one place, even where it seemed before to be very strangely at fault. At the end of Letter iii. of the fifth volume,¹ occurs in the original edition the following postscript:—“I warn you keep this letter close, and lose it not; rather burn it.” On comparing this letter with the original, the Committee of the Society of Antiquaries, some years ago, were amazed to find that there was no such postscript in the ms., and they were a good deal at a loss to account for its insertion. It now appears, however, that this letter was preserved in duplicate, for among the newly-recovered mss. I discovered a second copy, being a corrected draft, in Margaret Paston’s own hand, at the end of which occurs the p.s. in question.

‘It must be acknowledged, however, that Fenn’s mode of editing was not in all respects quite so satisfactory. Defects, of which no one could reasonably have complained in his own day, are now a serious drawback, especially where the original mss. are no longer accessible. Occasionally, as we have seen, he inserts a heading of his own in the text of a document without any intimation that it is not in the original; but this is so rare a matter that little need be said about it. A more serious fault is, that in vols. iii. and iv. he has published occasionally mere extracts from a letter as if it were the whole letter. In vols. i. and ii. he avowedly left out passages of little interest, and marked the places where they occurred with asterisks; but in the two succeeding volumes he has not thought it necessary to be so particular, and he has made the omissions *sub silentio*. For this indeed no one can seriously blame him. The work itself, as he had planned it, was only a selection of letters from a correspondence, and a liberal use of asterisks would not have helped to make it more interesting to the public. Occasionally he even inverts the order of his extracts, printing a postscript, or part of a postscript, in the body of a letter, and placing at the end some passage that occurs in the letter itself, for no other reason apparently than that it might read better as a whole.

‘Thus Letter 37 of this edition² (vol. iii., Letter vi., in Fenn) is only a brief extract, the original being a very long letter, though the subjects touched upon are not of very great interest. So also Letter 171 (Letter xxx. in Fenn’s third volume)³ is a set of extracts. Letter 182 (vol. iii., Letter xxxix., in Fenn)⁴ is the same; and the first part

¹ No. 787 of this edition.

³ No. 205.

² No. 51 of present edition.

⁴ No. 221.

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of what is given as a postscript is not a postscript in the original, but actually comes before the first printed paragraph.

‘In short, it was the aim of Sir John Fenn to reproduce with accuracy the spelling and the style of the mss. he had before him; but as for the substance, to give only so much as he thought would be really interesting. The letters themselves he regarded rather as specimens of epistolary art in the fifteenth century than as a substantial contribution to our knowledge of the times. To have given a complete transcript of every letter, or even a *résumé* in his own words of all that concerned lawsuits, leases, bailiffs’ accounts, and a number of other matters of equally little interest, formed no part of his design; but the task that he had really set himself he executed with admirable fidelity. He grudged no labour or expense in tracing facsimiles of the signatures, the seals, and the watermarks on the paper. All that could serve to illustrate the manners of the period, either in the contents of the letters, or in the handwritings, or the mode in which they were folded, he esteemed most valuable; and for these things his edition will continue still to be much prized. But as it was clearly impossible in that day to think of printing the whole correspondence, and determining precisely the chronology by an exhaustive study of minutiae, there seemed no good reason why he should not give two or three paragraphs from a letter without feeling bound to specify that they were merely extracts. Yet even these defects are not of frequent occurrence. The omissions are by no means numerous, and the matter they contain is generally unimportant in itself.’

I took advantage, however, at that time, of the recovery of so many of the missing originals to make a cursory examination for the further testing of Fenn’s editorial accuracy. Two or three letters I compared carefully with the originals throughout, and in others I made special reference to passages where doubts were naturally suggested, either from the obscurity of the words or from any other cause as to the correctness of the reading. The results of this examination I gave in an Appendix at the end of the Introduction to the third volume in 1875, and such errors as I was then able to detect are corrected in the present edition.

Apart from such corrections, the letters are here reproduced as they are printed in previous editions, only in a better order. Fenn’s text has been followed, where no corrections have been found, in all the letters printed by him except those of his fifth volume. The exact transcript given on the left-hand pages of

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Fenn's edition has been strictly adhered to, except that the contractions have been extended; and even in this process we have always been guided by the interpretation given by Fenn himself in his modern version on the right-hand pages. All the other letters in this publication are edited from the original mss., with a very few exceptions in which these cannot be found. In some places, indeed, where the contents of a letter are of very little interest, it has been thought sufficient merely to give an abstract instead of a transcript, placing the abstract in what is believed to be its true place in the series chronologically. Abstracts are also given of documents that are too lengthy and formal to be printed, and, in one case, of a letter sold at a public sale, of which a transcript is not now procurable. In the same manner, wherever I have found the slightest note or reference, whether in Fenn's footnotes or in Blomefield's *Norfolk*—where a few such references may be met with—to any letter that appears originally to have belonged to the Paston correspondence, even though the original be now inaccessible, and our information about the contents the most scanty, the reader will find a notice of all that is known about the missing document in the present publication.

I wish it were in my power to make the present edition better still. But there have been always formidable obstacles to completeness during the thirty years and more since I first took up the business of editing the letters; and though many of these obstacles have been removed, my energies are naturally not quite what they once were. The publishers, however, have thought it time for a more satisfactory edition, and I hope I have done my best. It remains to say a few words about the original mss. and the places in which they now exist.

Of those at Orwell Park I have already spoken. They are contained in three half-bound volumes, and are the originals of the letters printed by Fenn in his first and second volumes.

In the British Museum are contained, first of all, four volumes of the 'Additional mss.' numbered 27,443 to 27,446, consisting of the originals of volume v. of Fenn's edition which was published after his death, and a number of other letters first printed by me in the edition of 1872-75. The nine

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volumes which follow these, viz. 'Additional mss.,' 27,447-27,455, contain also Paston letters but of a later date, and papers relating to Sir John Fenn's publication. There is also a separate volume of 'Paston letters' in 'Additional ms.' 33,597; but these, too, are mostly of later date, only eight being of the fifteenth century. Further, there are the Roydon Hall mss. (including with, I believe, only two exceptions the originals of Fenn's third and fourth volumes), which are contained in the volumes 'Additional,' 34,888-9. And finally there are two Paston letters (included in this edition) in 'Additional ms.' 35,251. These are all that are in the British Museum. Besides these there are, as above noticed, a few mss. in a volume of the Douce Collection and the other stray mss. in the Bodleian Library at Oxford above referred to. At Oxford, also, though not strictly belonging to the Paston family correspondence, are a number of valuable papers, some of which are included in this edition, having an important bearing on the fortunes of the family. These are among the muniments contained in the tower of Magdalene College. As the execution of Sir John Fastolf's will ultimately devolved upon Bishop Waynflete, who, instead of a college at Caister, made provision for a foundation of seven priests and seven poor scholars in Magdalene College, a number of papers relative to the disputes between the executors and the arrangement between the Bishop and John Paston's sons have been preserved among the documents of that college. My attention was first called to these many years ago by Mr. Macray, through whom I obtained copies, in the first place, of some entries from an old index of the deeds relating to Norfolk and Suffolk, which had already been referred to by Chandler in his *Life of Bishop Waynflete*. Afterwards Mr. Macray, who had for some time been engaged in a catalogue of the whole collection, was obliging enough to send me one or two abstracts of his own made from the original documents even before he was able to refer me to his report on the muniments of Magdalene College, printed in the Fourth Report of the Historical mss. Commission. It will be seen that I have transcribed several interesting entries from this source.

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Further, there are just a few Paston letters preserved in Pembroke College, Cambridge.

What remains to be said is only the confession of personal obligations, incurred mainly long ago in connection with this work. The lapse of years since my first edition of these letters was issued, in 1872, naturally reminds me of the loss of various friends who favoured and assisted it in various ways. Among these were the late Colonel Chester, Mr. H. C. Coote, Mr. Richard Almack of Melford, Mr. W. H. Turner of Oxford, Mr. J. H. Gurney, Mr. Fitch, and Mr. L'Estrange of Norwich. On the other hand, I am happy to reckon still among the living Dr. Jessopp, Mr. Aldis Wright, Miss Toulmin Smith, and Mr. J. C. C. Smith, now a retired official of the Probate Office at Somerset House, who all gave me kindly help so long ago. And I have further to declare my obligations to Mr. Walter Rye, a gentleman well known as the best living authority on Norfolk topography and families, for most friendly and useful assistance in the way of notes and suggestions towards later editions. I have also quite recently received help (confessed elsewhere) from the Rev. William Hudson of Eastbourne, and have further had my attention called to significant documents in the Public Record Office by some of my old friends and colleagues there.

But among the departed, there is one whom I have reserved for mention by himself, not so much for any particular assistance given me long ago in the preparation of this work as for the previous education in historical study which I feel that I received from intercourse with him. I had been years engaged in the public service, and always thought that the records of the realm ought to be better utilised than they were in those days for the purpose of historical research; but how even Record clerks were to become well acquainted with them under the conditions then existing it was difficult to see. For each of us had his own little task assigned to him, and had really very little opportunity, if ever so willing, to go beyond it. Nor was there too much encouragement given under official regulations to anything like historical training; for the Record Office, when