

## **Sir John Fastolf, KG and his cousin Sir John Fastolf, knight.**

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Richard III and Sir John Fastolf, KG have a number of things in common: both were great warriors, neither have any known living descendants, and both have suffered from poor posthumous reputations which are perhaps poorly deserved. In both instances Shakespeare is partly to blame. Fastolf is summarily dismissed in Henry VI part 1 as a coward because he escaped from a hopeless military situation in which many died. When Shakespeare later wrote Henry IV he toyed with Fastolf's name by creating the fictional character of Falstaff, using a variant spelling if the family name occasionally attributable to Fastolf. It has been widely accepted that Shakespeare's lovable rogue Falstaff was originally named Sir John Oldcastle, a man burnt at the stake by Henry V for heresy in 1417. In the end this choice of name was simply too controversial, not least because in the reign of Elizabeth, Oldcastle was being revered as a protestant martyr. A likely explanation for Shakespeare's adoption of the name Falsfaff is that he was well acquainted with an inn called the Boar's Head in Southwark, and knew that it had been Sir John Fastolf's London home. This connection seems to be confirmed by the play Henry V in which Falstaff dies at the Boar's Head Tavern in Eastcheap. By one of those curious coincidences of history the real Sir John Fastolf who lived in the reign of Henry IV, not the KG, but his cousin, had a major dispute with Oldcastle's father-in-law John lord Cobham concerning an alleged debt of 800 marks. Fastolf was so incensed by the case that his anger boiled over at the trial in the King's Bench, and as a result he was found guilty of contempt of court. Duthie in 1907 wildly speculated that it was in support of Fastolf that the Prince of Wales earned himself the famous chastisement which is known to have been meted out to him by Chief Justice Gascoigne.<sup>1</sup> There is no historical justification for such an assertion because this Sir John had no verifiable association with the prince. The case in question saw its origins in 1380 when Sir John's father Hugh Fastolf made a deal with Margaret countess of Norfolk that he would negotiate a good price for the marriage of the son and heir of Sir John de la Pole, whom Margaret held in wardship. Lord Cobham was in on the deal, and was to get anything which Fastolf could wrangle from the bride's parents above the 800 marks.<sup>2</sup>

The earlier Sir John Fastolf has long been shrouded in an obscurity cast by the shadow of his more famous kinsman, but it is the arms of the former knight which are to be found in the cloister of Canterbury Cathedral. The family pedigree has only recently received the attention it deserves, an excellent piece of research which has overlooked some potentially important clues by neglecting to consider the heraldic history of the family.<sup>3</sup> The two Sir John's shared a grandfather in the personage of Alexander Fastolf, burgess of Great Yarmouth in Norfolk, a ship owner whose piratical tendencies must have helped to swell the family fortunes.

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<sup>1</sup> David Duthie. The Case of Sir John Fastolf, London 1907.

<sup>2</sup> Cal Close Rolls R2 vol 1 pg 370.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Hovious. A fleet of Fastolfs. Journal of the Foundation for Medieval Genealogy 2009, vol 3 no 2 pg 83-107.

### **Origin of the Fastolfs.**

Fastolf is a personal name in Old Norse, and there was a thane of that name in Lincolnshire on the eve of the Norman Conquest. There is no reason to link him with the Norfolk family who burst into the historical record in 1280 with Alexander Fastolf who was one of the bailiffs of Great Yarmouth.<sup>4</sup> From this early period the family were also resident at Caistor-on-Sea which lies adjacent to Yarmouth. Altogether Alexander served as bailiff nine times between 1280 and 1296, and he was contemporary with John Fastolf who was bailiff seven times between 1282 and 1304. Matthew Hovious' new pedigree of the family is headed by Alexander Fastolf who was bailiff in 1330 and 1339, but we can with high certainty link him into the pedigree recorded in the Suffolk Visitations for the family of Fastolf of Belaugh.<sup>5</sup> The Belaugh branch being the senior line of the family bore the arms *quarterly or and azure*. Their ancestor Nicholas Fastolf of Caistor is stated as being the eldest son of John Fastolf of Caistor who was living in 1316.<sup>6</sup> Alexander was the second son. Nicholas was Chief Justice of the Common Pleas in Ireland in 1325, bailiff of Yarmouth in 1336, and died before 1347.<sup>7</sup> A tentative reconstruction of the evolution of the family arms would see Alexander as second son differencing the quarterly arms with a bend gules, and his sons adding their own cadency marks to the bend. Hugh bore three escallops argent on the bend, and John bore three crosslets argent.<sup>8</sup>

Over the next century the family continued to tighten its grip on the affairs of the town of Great Yarmouth, growing increasingly wealthy as merchants and shipowners. Alexander's eldest son Hugh (d 1392) acquired a prominence which has warranted an entry in the new DNB. He was closely involved with the Countess of Norfolk and had dealings with the de la Poles of Suffolk. The first occasion when he represented Yarmouth in parliament in 1361 was followed by a growing involvement in national politics and royal administration. He served as deputy admiral of the north in 1362. Great personal wealth and ownership of ships enabled him to work his way into positions of power in London itself, first as a freeman of both the Fishmongers' and the Grocers' Companies, and later as an alderman. He was able to introduce both his brother and his son into the royal court in the 1370s as esquires to the king, and this brought him into contact with Richard the second's friend and tutor Sir Simon Burley, with whom he had some financial dealings.

Hugh was sufficiently associated with an unpopular royal administration to have had his properties both in Yarmouth and in London attacked during the Peasant's Revolt of 1381. Royal favour led to Hugh's appointment as constable of Dover castle in 1385,

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<sup>4</sup> Blomfield Norfolk vol xi pg 322.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Metcalfe (Ed). The Visitations of Suffolk 1561, 1577 & 1612. Exeter 1882, pg 28-9.

<sup>6</sup> Copinger, Suffolk Manors vol 4 pg 9, vol 7 pg 146. Further evidence that Nicholas Fastolf of Caistor and Alexander Fastolf of Yarmouth were brothers comes from a quitclaim made by John son of Alexander Fastolf and John son of Nicholas Fastolf in 1381, see Close rolls Richard II vol 2 pg 494.

<sup>7</sup> For his death, PRO C241/134/69.

<sup>8</sup> A Sir Thomas Fastolf, knight of Kimberley in Norfolk who died in 1384 leaving by his wife Margaret a daughter and heir Margaret, married to John Woodhouse must have been Hugh's eldest son. He also bore three escallops on the bend. See Blomfield's Norfolk vol 2 pg 537, 544. In 1386 Hugh made a quitclaim of his own interest in Kimberley: Norf Rec Office KIM 2 F/1.

sheriff of London in 1387, and later as sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk.<sup>9</sup> He died in 1392 having bestowed the bulk of his remaining landed property, comprising over a thousand acres in sixteen villages, on his eldest son Sir John, who was made executor. The other five sons and one known daughter had already been provided for.<sup>10</sup> A diamond ring which Hugh gave to his second wife Joan Gisors is one of the more significant items in her own will of 1417.<sup>11</sup> It had an inscription “vous aime de tout mon cuer”. She owned tenements in “Fastolf Alley” in the parish of St Stephen Coleman Street and a brewery, and was buried close to her grandfather Simon Dolsely in the parish church of St Mary Bothaw.

### **Sir John Fastolf, knight ( d 1406)**



Sir John of the cloister married a considerable Suffolk heiress, Margery Holbrook, who brought him five manors held by knight's service with responsibility for castle-guard at Dover.<sup>12</sup> Margery was daughter and coheir of Sir John Holbrook who died on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1375.<sup>13</sup> She was 16 when her father died, and already married. John's father Hugh was granted the wardship of Holbrook's lands with John Fastolf acting as a surety, but this was quickly revoked when it was established that none of the lands were held in chief.<sup>14</sup> To his wife's lands must be added the bulk of his father's estate, with manors in Gorleston, Gapton, Bradwell, Belton, Kirkley and Beighton. The manor of Kirkley Fastolfs and probably much of the rest, had been acquired by Hugh, evidently with the intention of establishing a knightly lineage. The manor of Bradwell is known to have

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<sup>9</sup> Beaven, *Aldermen of the City of London*, 1908 pg 197-208 mentions that Hugh had to be excused his duties as alderman due to his responsibilities at Dover.

<sup>10</sup> Patent rolls H4 vol 1 pg 167.

<sup>11</sup> London Court of Husting wills vol 1 pg 419.

<sup>12</sup> These were the manors of Nacton, Langston, Playford, Foxhall and Colville in Rendlesham, plus the manor of Bentley.

<sup>13</sup> IPM Edward III vol xiv no 231.

<sup>14</sup> Fine rolls vol 8 pg 336.

been in the family for several generations, and other members of the family continued to have a presence there.<sup>15</sup>

John must have been placed in a nobleman's household in order to undertake training as a knight. Hugh's links with the Countess of Norfolk would suggest this might have been with the Mowbray family. When he was still a squire in 1367 he was instructed to take ship from Dover with three yeomen and four horses for service overseas.<sup>16</sup> His uncle John had obtained the coveted title of royal esquire to the aged Edward III by 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1374 when he was granted an annuity from the royal receipts from Yarmouth and sent on secret negotiations overseas.<sup>17</sup>

There were between 60 and 170 royal esquires and at any one time about 20 of them were in personal attendance on the monarch, this being done by rotation. Their role was essentially domestic, but an important part of their function was to run errands for the king.<sup>18</sup> The role of king's esquire was quite distinct from that of the royal knights whose main function was military: all were soldiers. By January 1376 Hugh's son John had also become a king's esquire, and in this capacity he was sent on a diplomatic errand as an ambassador to Brittany.<sup>19</sup> His letters of protection clarified that he was John Fastolf the younger, to distinguish him from his uncle. His nominated attorneys were his father Hugh and his uncle John, thus proving conclusively that this king's esquire was Hugh's son, and not his brother.<sup>20</sup> In March 1380 again as John Fastolf the younger, he was appointed collector of the subsidy in Norfolk.<sup>21</sup> By June of the same year he had been knighted and it was as Sir John Fastolf, knight that he served overseas again, once more nominating his father and uncle as attorneys.<sup>22</sup> He was serving as the king's escheator in Norfolk and Suffolk in December 1405, and died a year later on 20<sup>th</sup> November.<sup>23</sup>

Outside the sphere of public duty, he is known to have been the godfather of John, son and heir of Robert Carbonel born in 1383, and as such was cited in the proof of age taken in 1404, when Sir John was residing at Tunstall Manor in Bradeston. The Carbonel children must have been held in wardship to Sir John, which would explain why he was acting as patron of the Carbonel living of West Tofts in 1393.<sup>24</sup>

The only known issue of Sir John by Margery Holbrook was a son Hugh born in 1381 or earlier. Margery died young, in 1387, and was buried in St Nicholas' church Great

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<sup>15</sup> Copinger, *Suffolk Manors* vol v pg 14, 83. The account of Bradwell is here very mixed up, but it is clear that both Alexander and Hugh Fastolf held it, and that it descended through Sir John's heirs.

<sup>16</sup> Patent rolls Edward III vol 14 pg 54

<sup>17</sup> Rymer *Foedera* vol 3 and Close rolls Edward III vol 14 pg 8.

<sup>18</sup> Chris Given-Wilson. *The royal household and the king's affinity*, London 1986, pg 66, 212, 215. A good summary of the role of the chamber knight p 204-215. They were an elite group of 3 to 12 men who were in daily attendance on the king.

<sup>19</sup> PRO E101/317/16 and BL Add 24511 f 89.

<sup>20</sup> Patent rolls E3 vol 16 pg 211. He is described as John Fastolf the younger, and his attorney as John son of Alexander Fastolf.

<sup>21</sup> Fine rolls vol 9 pg 188.

<sup>22</sup> Rymer *Foedera* vol 3, 8<sup>th</sup> June. There is a perplexing entry in the Patent rolls for October 1383 whereby the annuity from the farm of Great Yarmouth which had been granted to John Fastolf, king's esquire to Edward III, was reallocated on account of the decease of the said John. Since John the brother of Hugh is known to have died in 1383 it must be concluded that there were in fact two John Fastolfs who were king's esquires: Patent rolls R2 vol 2 pg 316.

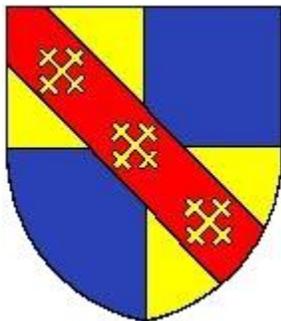
<sup>23</sup> Fine rolls vol 13 pg 1 and IPM vol 19, Henry IV pt 2, no 86-7.

<sup>24</sup> Blomfield *Norfolk* vol ii 257, 262 and IPM vol 18 no 995. Robert Carbonel's wife Elizabeth was the heiress Elizabeth Caston, whose sister and coheir Alice married William Fastolf.

Yarmouth.<sup>25</sup> John later married Elizabeth, who was perhaps the daughter of a burgess of Great Yarmouth. The property which she and her husband owned jointly in Yarmouth is likely to have been her inheritance. Sir John's inquisition post mortem as is so often the case is incomplete, making no mention of his paternal inheritance, perhaps because none of these manors were held by knight's service. His widow Elizabeth must be the lady Fastolf who held land in the Romney Marsh area of Kent in 1412, land that was far away from the main family area of interest and probably assigned to her in dower.<sup>26</sup> Her husband's arms *quarterly or and azure, on a bend gules 3 escallops argent* were carved in the cloister of Canterbury Cathedral during the reign of Henry IV. The same arms were recorded in Nacton church Suffolk by Blomfield, and also in the same church quartering *gules a chevron between ten crosslets or*, which must be the arms of Holbrook, as John Holbrook of Suffolk sealed with these arms in 1361.<sup>27</sup> The arms of Fastolf are in bay 29 of the Canterbury cloister, and the Holbrook shield is in bay 28. Elizabeth Fastolf might have been the donor, but it is far more probable that it was her step-son Sir Hugh Fastolf, knight (c 1381-1417).

Hugh being of age was granted immediate seisin of the lands which belonged to both his parents on his father's death, excepting the dower of his step-mother Elizabeth, whose own date of death is unrecorded.<sup>28</sup> The year of Sir John's death also saw the birth of a son and heir John to Sir Hugh and his wife Matilda daughter of Sir Constantine Clifton, knight. With his cousin Sir John Fastolf, later KG, Hugh joined Henry V's 1417 expedition to Normandy and was present at the retaking of Caen in September that year. This is where he died on 17<sup>th</sup> October, stipulating in his will that he was to be buried in the Carmelite church at Caen until he could be removed to Nacton.<sup>29</sup> He made directions concerning the manor of Bradwell of which he and Sir John were feoffees, and he made Sir John his residuary legatee. Matilda Clifton subsequently remarried Edmund Stapleton and was buried with him at Ingham church where a brass still survives.

### **Sir John Fastolf, KG (1378-1459)**



The famous Sir John was the son of Hugh Fastolf's beloved brother John, who apart from being a king's esquire held various manors in Norfolk, including three in Caistor. Before

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<sup>25</sup> Weever, *Funeral Monuments* pg 863.

<sup>26</sup> *Feudal Aids* vol 6 pg 472. It has not been possible to trace the descent of this land because the 1412 tax only listed the whereabouts by Hundred, and not by place.

<sup>27</sup> *Blomfield Norfolk* vol xi pg 205. The Holbrook seal is Birch no 10779.

<sup>28</sup> *Fine rolls* vol 13 pg 33.

<sup>29</sup> *Norfolk Archaeology* vol 4, 1855 pg 319-20.

he joined the royal household he was an esquire to the Earl of Warwick.<sup>30</sup> His wife was Mary Park, daughter of Nicholas Park, and widow of Sir Thomas Mortimer, son and heir of Sir Robert Mortimer of Attleborough. John Fastolf senior died in 1383, having just been granted free warren in Caistor. His royal annuity from the taxes of Great Yarmouth was rescinded and bestowed elsewhere.<sup>31</sup> John appointed Hugh as his executor, leaving him a cup, and another cup to their sister Ada.<sup>32</sup> There were bequests to two churches in Caistor and to St Nicholas' church in Yarmouth, where he was buried. He left all else to his wife Mary. Their son was not mentioned, being only five years old when his father died, and this demonstrates the difficulty of relying on wills to establish pedigrees.

Mary married for a third time to John Farewell, esquire, of Cowling in Suffolk about whom little is known, except that some time before 1388 he was granted an income from the manor of Great Shelford in Cambs by Anne Countess of Pembroke, and that he died in 1401.<sup>33</sup> Mary chose to represent at least two of her husbands heraldically on her seal in an unusual way.<sup>34</sup> She impaled the Fastolf arms as a wife should in the customary fashion on the dexter side of the shield, but placed on a chief the arms of her first husband Mortimer of Attleborough: *semy de lis*. The arms on the sinister shield, *10 billets 4,3,2,1* are not otherwise recorded. They may have belonged to her third husband. A seal used in Norfolk in 1385 also has the 10 billets and a legend interpreted as "John Bernewell", which could easily be a mistranscription of John Farewell.<sup>35</sup> She died on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1406 and was buried with her first husband at Attleborough. Her son John Fastolf left money in his will to build her a marble tomb on which was to have been her father's arms and those of her three husbands, but it seems that this work was never carried out.

It has been stated that her son John was placed in wardship to the Mowbray family, from whom the Fastolfs held some land by feudal tenure, but it has not been possible to find documentary evidence of such a connection.<sup>36</sup> John was close to his cousin Sir Hugh, whose father Sir John Fastolf might have been involved with his namesake's military training. The future KG was serving as a king's esquire by November 1408 when he was sent to Ireland to serve under Prince Thomas, later Duke of Clarence.<sup>37</sup> He married in Ireland Millicent daughter of Robert lord Tiptoft on 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> January 1409, her husband Sir Stephen Scrope having died 4<sup>th</sup> September 1408. Millicent had been 17 years old when she married Scrope in 1385, to whom she brought the manors of Castlecombe in Wiltshire and Bentley in Yorkshire, and 41 when she married Fastolf, who was then only 29 years of age. John was granted the wardship of his step-son Stephen Scrope.

On 18<sup>th</sup> June 1415 an indenture was drawn up by Henry V addressed to "our well beloved esquire John Fastolf".<sup>38</sup> He was to join the Agincourt campaign bringing with

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<sup>30</sup> Petitions to the Pope ed WH Bliss, vol 38 p 445-65. John was requesting a portable altar, and an indulgence for himself and his brother Hugh.

<sup>31</sup> Patent rolls R2 vol 2 pg 316.

<sup>32</sup> Norfolk Archaeology vol 4, 1855 pg 319-20.

<sup>33</sup> PRO Ancient deeds DE 210/2518 and Blomfield's Norfolk vol xi pg 207.

<sup>34</sup> Birch seals no 11960, from BL Add Ch 14,597. This dates to 1404.

<sup>35</sup> Birch seals no 7423.

<sup>36</sup> In 1401-2 Mary "Fastolf" held her husband's quarter of a knight's fee Reppes, Norfolk from Sir Thomas Mowbray. Feudal aids vol 3 pg 645.

<sup>37</sup> Patent rolls H4 vol 4 pg 41.

<sup>38</sup> Rymer Foedera vol 4, 18<sup>th</sup> June.

him ten men at arms and 30 archers. He was noted for his bravery at the battle, which resulted in him being knighted. Possibly he was actually knighted on the eve of battle. In January 1416 a grateful king rewarded him with a manor near the town of Harfleur.<sup>39</sup> It was to be the first of many French lordships with which he was rewarded. He spent much of his life serving in France between 1412 and 1439. The Duke of Exeter made him governor of the Bastille in Paris in 1421, and after the death of Henry V he served under Henry's son the Duke of Bedford, Regent of France. Bedford made him a knight banneret in 1424 and it was doubtless also at his behest that Sir John became a Knight of the Garter in 1426. In 1429 Fastolf won a famous victory known as the "Battle of the Herrings", but the same year was leading the vanguard in a retreat from the forces of Joan of Arc when his column was attacked and decimated. Lord Talbot who had been in the rear, was captured and became a vociferous enemy of Fastolf whom he blamed for the catastrophe. Thus began the unfounded rumours, picked up by Shakespeare, that he was a coward.

In his retirement Sir John nursed his huge fortune made from the spoils of war and spent much in the Fastolf family home town of Caistor. There he built a magnificent castle, and planned to found a college of priests. He also invested heavily in the nearby abbey church of St Benet at Holme where he built his tomb. He had a strong emotional tie to that religious foundation because it housed his only child, a natural son William who was given as a child to be a monk.<sup>40</sup> When Sir John became a major landholder in the Pays de Caux in Normandy William transferred to the Abbey of Fécamp, and ultimately became its abbot. He predeceased his father in Paris, according to John Fastolf's will.<sup>41</sup> Abbot William would undoubtedly have been a person of some importance in the English administration of France. His predecessor Gilles de Duremort had been a key figure in the trial of Joan of Arc.<sup>42</sup>

The college at Caistor was never built because its endowment was squandered by litigation, but the residue went to Magdalene College, Oxford which houses Fastolf's papers. It is said to be a great untapped resource for the history of East Anglia, because to guarantee title he kept documents showing proof to title which went back centuries. Millicent Fastolf predeceased her husband in 1446 aged 78 and was buried in their tomb at St Benet of Holme. The south isle and Lady Chapel of the Abbey had been rebuilt at Fastolf expense to house their sepulcher. Sir John himself died in 1459 age 79 and was buried beside her. His stepson Stephen Scrope (1397-1472) was an author and translator who had a complex relationship with his parents.<sup>43</sup> He believed himself to have been damaged both physically and mentally while in wardship to Chief Justice William Gascoigne in 1411 to 1413. After Sir John's death Scrope, who had served his stepfather for many years, was highly embittered to have not received anything from the will. His litigation was a big factor in the demise of the Caistor College project, and another consequence was the failure to build the tomb at Attleborough. Despite all this

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<sup>39</sup> Rymer Foedera vol 4 29<sup>th</sup> January.

<sup>40</sup> Dugdale, Monasticon Anglicanum vol 3 pg 81. Cal Papal Registers vol 7 pg 197-200.

<sup>41</sup> The Paston Letters, Ed James Gairdner, vol 3, London 1904, pg 157.

<sup>42</sup> Gilles was Abbot from 1423, became Bishop of Coutances in 1439, when it must be assumed William Fastolf became Abbot of Fécamp .

<sup>43</sup> Oxford DNB, Stephen Scrope.

unhappiness the relationship between Scrope and Fastolf was in many respects a fruitful one which contributed to a growing English interest in classical philosophy.

