

Paston Footprints PaR Project Appendix

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Project Title: Touching Past Lives: Sensorial Spectatorship in the Paston Footprints Project

Brief Description: The Paston Footprints Project investigates the social, physical and psychological benefits of heritage performance through a multi-site ethnographic and performance-based research study of embodied and sensorial spectatorship in the heritage industry.

Type of Output: Performances and Practical Workshops

Venues: Oxnead Hall, Norfolk, Norwich Castle Museum, Norfolk, Mannington Hall, Norfolk

Production season trailer:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5OvTcZq5xI&ab_channel=PastonFootprints

Original Performances:

Robert Paston's Whirlpool of Misadventures, Oxnead Hall Performance (June 2018)

Robert Paston's Cabinet of Curiosities, Norwich Castle Museum Performance (July 2018)

Margaret Paston's Women of the Roses, Mannington Hall Performance (August 2018)

Index of Contents

Copy of 300 word statement:	2
Introduction and Context:	2
Research Questions:	3
Methods:	3
Performance Outputs:	4
Audience Research	4
Further Dissemination	5
Bibliography	5-7
Appendix	8-39
Letter of Support from Paston Footprints Project	8-9
<i>Robert Paston's Whirlpool of Misadventures</i>	10-19
<i>Robert Paston's Cabinet of Curiosities</i>	20-28
<i>Margaret Paston's Women of the Roses</i>	29-39

REF 300 word statement: The HLF £374K funded Paston Footprints 600th year anniversary of the extensive collection of letters of a powerful Norfolk family from the 14th to the 18th centuries, uses sensory, experiential methods to invite members of the public to, literally as well as figuratively, feel and touch the past through interactive, creative responses to history. The Paston Footprints project particularly investigated how a ‘sense of place’ can support the development of shared values amongst local communities, and how artistic responses and performances of heritage sites and stories can ‘provide symbols of the glue that bonds people to place’ (Smyth, 2015). Beginning in 2016, Dr Maples wrote, directed, and performed in immersive site specific performances at Oxnead Hall, Mannington Hall, the Norwich Castle Museum, while also facilitating participatory workshops targeting distinct communities, and presenting a research symposium on Immersive Heritage Performance at Senate House in London. The performances included diverse methods of audience feedback and evaluation interviews with the project’s heritage partners. She is currently creating a series of dramatized audio guides on new ‘Paston Country’ walking tour routes in Norfolk, delayed by COVID-19, to be launched in May/June 2021. Her research includes mixed methods of qualitative audience and performance-based research investigating embodied spectatorship in the 2018-2021 Norfolk-based Paston Footprints 600 festival. The project performance and audience feedback illustrated how the use of haptic and participatory methods impact audience experience of heritage sites, particularly enhancing empathic and imaginative responses and relationships to the past through the use of performative storytelling and site specific performance work. The project investigates how performative methods and historical verbatim text can create more complex understandings of local heritage for members of the public.

Introduction & Context: For the Paston Footprints 600 project, Maples created a series of heritage performances at locations across Norfolk with Heritage Lottery Funding and additional Arts Council England Funding. The performance-based-research examined the use of verbatim historical text from the Paston letters to critically engage the public in historical debates; while, also experimenting with the use of sensorial and environmental immersive performance techniques to engagement to enhance heritage audience members’ feeling of ‘touching the past’ and ‘walking in the shoes of history’. The fundamental question of this research was how to use experiential methods of site-specific performance, staging, and script development to involve the audience but also create heritage performance that facilitates imaginative responses to history, while also enabling critical thinking amongst heritage publics. We had significant heritage partnerships involved with the project and delivered each of the performances schedules for each month. The playscripts by Holly Maples were created in consultation with dramaturgical advice from Dr Karen Smyth, the Paston Footprints Project PI and medieval scholar. The scripts were created using verbatim testimony from historical material of the time period and the Paston family letters (including both published and unpublished letters held at the British Library). The use of historical verbatim testimony in the scripts was to, as much as possible, use the voices of the historical characters to tell their stories and draw audience members attention to the “heritage” of the productions. Each performance was located in different areas of rural and urban Norfolk, attracting different types of local and national publics. Dr Maples also conducted workshops on dramatizing historical letters and immersive heritage performance techniques with primary and secondary students, community heritage societies (primarily made up of retirees), and Paston Footprints project volunteers. The workshops (approx.. 120 participants) occurred in Bacton, North Walsham, Mannington, and Norwich between 2016-2019.

Research Questions: Heritage Performance encourages audience members to not only witness historic narratives, but experience, embody, and ‘touch’ a localised past. According to the sociologist Mark Auslander the tactile and experiential nature of reenactments, living history museums, and other historic performance practices, allow spectators to create an ‘intimate traffic’ between their contemporary experience and that of ‘previous epochs and persons’ (Auslander, 2016). The tactile, experiential and sensorial nature of heritage performance creates an intimate relationship between past and present bodies, commingling private experience with communal and/or national heritage. The increasing tension between members of the community who feel left behind by globalisation and those advocating for an open and inclusive society are often played out through emotionally charged representations of the nation’s past, and yet, paradoxically, advocates of heritage performance claim that the combined personal and public nature of the practice offers a powerful device to stimulate social community cohesion in uncertain times (see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). This claim, however, is highly contested, and studies into Heritage Performance’s impact upon audiences remain underdeveloped. This project fills that gap by investigating the social, physical and psychological benefits of heritage performance through a large-scale, ethnographic and performance-based research study of embodied spectatorship in the Norfolk-based Paston Footprints festival. This project asks how the sites, sounds, and bodies of the past are not only witnessed through heritage performance, but experienced, felt, and touched. It asks how this experience of ‘touching the past’ (Auslander, 2013) might affect individual lives in the present.

Central to the research is the question of how we examine not only the *content* but the *experience* of heritage performance and its impact on spectators’ lives through innovative methods of audience research. A study of heritage performance audiences must take into consideration the various, and often conflicting, needs of the heritage industry partners, academic researchers, community volunteers, and multiple publics participating in the activities. The project addresses these concerns by positioning them within contemporary debates about the social function of heritage performance and its importance to local, national, and international communities.

The project asks the following research questions:

Q1. How does a concentration on sensation (such as touch, taste, smell, sound and sight) influence audience members’ response to heritage performance?

Q2. How can researchers use performance-based research as an investigative method to examine audiences’ response from within the *act* of spectatorship?

Q3. What are the perceived social and personal benefits (or detriments) experienced by members of the public through their involvement in participatory heritage performance?

Q4. How does an embodied sense of place support, or detract, from the development of shared values and community amongst spectators in heritage performance?

Methods: To answer the research questions, this project develops a creative/critical methodology which crafts performance-based research events for the festival designed to experiment upon, interrogate, and elicit answers to my core research questions. I will then contextualize my findings from the performance based research through the use of significant ethnographic and sociological field-work on the festival’s audiences. The desire amongst heritage organisations and their funders to engage with more diverse audiences through

participatory, tactile, and creative methods is admirable, nevertheless, research into this growing trend has been under-theorised. By examining how sensorial experience and affect impact upon spectators' understanding of self, identity, and community, this project can make a significant contribution to the understanding of not only heritage performance, but also of social anthropology, human geography, and to the growing field of audience research in theatre studies.

Performance Outputs: Our June production of "Robert Paston's Whirlpool of Misadventures" took place as a promenade production at Oxnead Hall in Norfolk. A site specific immersive heritage performance, the production traveled throughout the extensive grounds of the stately home and concentrated on the 17th century Paston characters and the increasing financial ruin of the first Earls of Yarmouth, which led to the end of the family, the auctioning off of their belongings, and the discovery of the Paston letters. This production was the most ambitious and elaborate of the three events, and not only travelled through a large territory of grounds including the Paston family church where a number of their family members were buried, but also was the only production that had ticket sales and members of the public came solely for the theatrical performance and was not occurring during a larger heritage or museum-led event. For us, this performance was the most rewarding in terms of the development of full scale theatrical production, yet arguably the later events allowed us to reach a larger range of audience members who do not normally attend theatrical productions.

The July performance was designed to stage debates and contradictions found in the Paston Treasure painting (c. 1670), dramatizing the 2018 exhibition created in partnership with Yale University and the Norwich Castle Museum. Maples created an immersive performance in a museum gallery space "Robert Paston's Cabinet of Curiosities," for ticketed museum guests, designed to both experiment with form and expand the range of types and contexts of heritage performance audiences.

In August the final site-based work was performed at a Paston Footprints event at Mannington Hall in North Norfolk, on the 15th century Paston family, *Margaret Paston's Women of the Roses*, concentrating on the powerful women and untold female stories of the late middle ages. This performance was a part of a larger festival day, which targeted a lot of families and young audiences. The production was a collaboration with professional actors and musicians and a small number of university student actors and the generosity in mentoring of the student performers and building their skill levels and knowledge of the genre exceeded our expectations. We also were fortunate to collaborate with members of BBC East and make a short promotional film of the Pastons for schools and create short character studies on the Pastons for future use. The BBC also filmed audience feedback at the Norwich Castle Museum and Mannington Hall which has helped with the documentation of our performances and their impact on the public.

Audience Research: My research questions audience/performance engagement further, particularly evaluating how this exchange may transform heritage audiences' reflections on history and heritage. To study this phenomenon, I conducted a multi-modal investigation of audience members' engagement with heritage through immersive and participatory means. My study not only investigated how audience members participated in the various types of sensorial, haptic, and participatory techniques during the production, but targeted the post-production evaluations to examine how audience members reflect on how these techniques

impact their interpretation of, and relationship to, local heritage. These included audience observation by research members during productions, interviews, performer testimonials, and feedback forms. I have included a selection of these for each production in the appendix.

Further Dissemination: In September, 2018 Dr Maples and Dr Smyth hosted a research symposium at Senate House on Immersive Heritage Performance, with 12 artist-researcher presenters and 40 attendees from academic institutions and heritage organisations. The projects of this symposium are currently being edited into a book, *Touching Past Lives*, (Routledge Press, forthcoming).

Dr Maples also has an article on the audience research and methodologies from the Oxnead Hall production, ‘Touching Past Lives: The Limits of Evaluating Immersive Heritage Performance Audiences’ currently at press in Snyder-Young, Dani & Omasa, Matt (eds), *Researching Audience Impact* (Routledge, 2021).

In August 2021 (pandemic guidelines permitted) Maples will lead further workshops in Norwich on historical verbatim storytelling for the final stage of the Paston Footprints project.

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To Whom It May Concern,

10 Jan 2019

We are pleased to confirm support and project partnership of Dr Holly Maples on our HLF funded *Paston Footprints600* project from 2018-2020. Dr Maples heritage performances and public engagement events are essential for the success of our mission to record, interpret and celebrate the Paston Heritage. Our aim is to bring together local enthusiasts, new volunteers and audiences of all ages through interactive and multi-disciplinary arts heritage events. Holly's contribution as a collaborative partner and leader of the theatrical events for the Festival, including, in 2018, her performances at Oxnead Hall, Mannington Hall, amongst other heritage sites, public engagement workshops and re-enactment activities which headlined the launch of our heritage activities. Dr Maples events are important in their ability to showcase Norfolk's story to wider audiences emphasising its significance to the nation's social, political and cultural history. Her 2018 events gathered new audiences to our programming and provided interest and engagement in the Paston family history for new communities throughout Norfolk. All eligible outputs are protected by creative commons copyright.

Dr Maples' has been a key stake holder in the Paston Footprints project, providing advice and support in all drama events on the project. She attended initial planning meetings of the festival team, had direct consultations with the Director and Co-director (Dr Smyth of the University of East Anglia and Dr Knee, chair of the Paston Heritage Society), undertook surveys of performance venues, and engagement activities with public volunteers including training re-enactors. Dr Maples has worked with the full support of the Paston Footprints Foundation partners. Dr Maples audience research has been key to our further development of events after our summer 2018 festival. She was provided access to all the festival event audiences (with their consent) throughout the Paston Festival and provided us with key early public feedback reports on our activities assisting in the development of programming for the final two years of the project. We arranged a shared data agreement between Brunel University and the University of East Anglia, allowing for joint, and duplicate impact case studies by both institutions on the project. Dr Smyth, PI of the Heritage Lottery Funded Paston Footprints, is also a Co-I on the AHRC bid, and Dr Maples and her team have had the full support of the Paston Footprints Foundation partners.

The Paston Heritage Society (PHS) has existed for nearly 25 years. Initially, the society was based in the village of Paston, Norfolk and focused on local community projects. A play exploring the Paston story was staged in the Great Barn in Paston. Various publications have emerged and local people have taken the parts of reenactors, to bring alive the medieval world for schools, communities and churches across North Norfolk. More recently the PHS has engaged with larger projects – The HLF's All Our Stories project, a Dig and Sow archaeology project and a major exhibition on the Pastons in partnership with the Norfolk Record Office. The PHS continues to explore opportunities to bring the Paston story to wider audiences through publications, events, poetry, art, talks, drama and collaborative ventures.

Dr Maples performance events, training sessions, and development of audio walking tours have greatly assisted our mission to reach diverse audiences and enhance public understanding of the Paston letters. The Paston festival in 2018 was designed to celebrate the 600th anniversary of the first Paston letter of 1418, with a multi-sited festival including dramatic, artistic and creative interpretations. There will be a year long exhibition with accompanying workshops and talks at Hungate Medieval Art Centre in Norwich city centre. The 2018 festival was part of a Heritage Lottery Funded 3 year project (running from 2017-2020) entitled '600 Paston Footprints', which aims to uncover and make accessible more of the remarkable story of Norfolk's Paston Family and their world-famous letters, with a special focus on 10 key centres in Norfolk that tell different parts of the

Paston story. These ten research ‘hubs’ will culminate with the identification of ten heritage walks, the audio walking tours will occur in various locations, rural and urban, from private large historic homes to public church spaces. The hubs have been selected on the basis of frequency of mention in the Letters and the existence of original buildings with a Paston significance. Dr Maples events have proved to be important parts of our activities. Furthermore, in 2020 and 2021, we will be creating a range of digital platforms, where recordings of the research and development activities and performances, augmenting public accessibility and engagement all with important contributions from Dr Maples.

Dr Maples events in 2018 were linked with a major art exhibition, staged first at the University of Yale, USA and then at Norwich Castle Museum. Her contributions at Oxnead Hall, Mannington Hall and the Norwich Castle Museum furthered international partnerships on the Paston project. The Norwich Castle Museum are also important partners of Paston Footprints, and have agreed to host the audio walking tour research and development sessions at the Castle as a part of their in-kind contribution to Paston Footprints. Norwich Castle is commencing a multi-million pound restoration project and has shown interest in exploring more immersive experience technologies in their new Castle Keep exhibitions.

Dr Maples continues to contribute to our project in 2020-21 with her development of theatrical audio walking tours for our Paston “hubs” which will further our mission for longstanding benefits to the community from the Paston Footprints project into the future. The walking tours will be freely accessible to download through our website and available after the end of the HLF Paston Footprints celebrations end in 2021. Our collaboration with Dr Maples has proved valuable for our project mission.

Yours sincerely,



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Paston Heritage Society Chair

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Robert Paston's Whirlpool of Misadventures

Verbatim Historical Theatre

Robert Paston Whirlpool of Misadventures opening:



Intro in the Barn:

H: The story of the rise of the Paston family has often been told.

Abbie: 'There was one Clement Paston and he was a good plain husband, and live upon his land that he had in Paston, and kept thereon a plough all times in the year.'

Chris: Then followed a long succession of struggles,

Dora. difficulties

Ben: and triumphs which brought the descendants of Clement Paston to opulence and power.

Camryn: The fights and wrangles and disputes;

Shams: the sieges of Gresham, Hellesdon and Caister.

Rebecca P (Sarah E): The shrewd capable calculating wives, seeing to affairs in Norfolk while their husbands and sons waited at Court, hoping for a chance word with the King.

Robert P: But this is the story of the End of the Pastons. The sudden collapse of the family at the end of the 17th century, so soon after Robert Paston, First Earl of Yarmouth, achieved the long sought power and place from King Charles II.

Sarah L: To tell Robert's story, we return to 1660 with the Restoration of the Monarchy.

Robert Paston introduction to the audience:



Robert Paston: (*addresses the audience as his wife*) My darling, if ever flesh was tired out it is I that have taken more pains at Court than an horse. My Lord Chancellor Clarendon decided I was the very man to plea for two and a half million pounds needed for the King to finance the new war against the Dutch. They sought out ‘honest worthy men, looked upon as lovers of their country and great fortunes, and unsuspected to have designs at Court’. Rebecca, you should have heard my speech, where I said that they needed such a sum to strike terror into the enemy. My voice rang out to Parliament that day: ‘The machine of war requires strong hinges to play upon and would show us ill managers who to save a stake would venture the loss of the game.’

Phanaticks (*members of the ensemble in the audience gossip with them*): Paston, whose belly bares more millions than Indian carracks, and contains more tons.

Robert Paston: The King told me, ‘Sir Robert Paston, your kindness to me at this time I’ll never forget. If my favour and respect may ever manifest itself in you, you are sure of a friend in me’. My dear, the service I have done the King is so great that I am looking on in a capacity of not being denied anything in his Majesty’s power. Pray God send us a merrie meeting and that all things may go well which is desired. The King’s visit to Norfolk is upon us, and with all in our power we will improve Oxnead to be fitting of a King’s visit. Let us build a banquet hall, let us improve upon the foundations, and with the plate, and the provisions, I will spend three times the dowry of an Earl’s daughter to entertain the King!

Oh my darling, I am more than confident when this business is settled, I shall have a lusty bidder that will in eight or ten years free us of all debt whatsoever.

(Audience follow members of the ensemble to Garden Maze, en route they overhear conversation over the King’s visit, while music plays they are confronted with company members moving in the distance)



Sensorial/Haptic Experience in the Staging

Excerpt from Script:

Paston: I will commission a portrait with gifts from abroad showing to the wide world the treasure of the Pastons.

(Actors bring around Grapes, Shells, Precious Jewels, Rich Tapestries, and a Lobster in and amongst the audience as they itemize the costs of the goods, as if for auction. With music accompaniment)



H: Inventory of Jewelry July 30th 1663

(Halcyon Days song continues through jewelry list)

An onix stone ring set round with diamonds and rubies £20

A blackamore in a sardonix set round with diamonds £10

A ring with a blackamore head & turbett set with 8 diamonds £15

A sardonix ring with 6 diamonds and a white head £15
 A plain gold ring with a white and black agate £1
 A free stone with diamonds round it £10
 A ring with a dark emerald £1
 An emerald ring with a face on it £10
 28 rings about 15s a piece £21
 A diamond ring with 3 great stones and four or more small stones £52
 A diamond hatband £5
 A turkey stone with two diamonds £10
 A ruby ring set round with rubies and 2 diamonds £16
 A long ruby and 2 table diamonds £10
 And a prized opal with the sun set round with diamonds £10
 Total fortune in jewels £587

H: Fortune favoured Sir Robert as a loyal friend of the new King. However, with money and spending being the fashion of the age, 1671 would prove to be a particularly expensive year at Oxnead.



Passing of Letters to cast members and with the audience

(Audience leave barn space, in front of the courtyard to bridge location Margaret Paston elopement section)

Margaret Paston (handing letter to audience member): Pray you, deliver this letter to Henry Rumbold, an ensign to Tangier.

Margaret Beddingfeld (intercepts letter from audience member and takes it to Rebecca Paston): Your ladyship, I was desired to keep this to myself, but I thought it might be a failure of friendship to conceal any thing I knew in this case, for wounds can never be healed till they be searched to the bottom.



Harry Rumbold: Margaret Paston's friends have discovered all. Margaret, your family at Oxnead will surely apply all possible vigilance and care that we should not come together.

Rebecca Paston: My dear sir, my daughter is sorry for her folly and this business is now at an end. Go back to Tangier and do not seek out my daughter any longer.

Harry Rumbold: Your ladyship, I am resolved never to quit this business, unless I should hear from Margaret's own mouth that she is repented of what she has done. Only then will I desist and never trouble her more. I have nothing but my life to lose, and that I am resolved to sacrifice.

Environmental/Spatial relationship in the Site Specific Show

Alchemy Sequence

(Audience move to Alchemist location in front of water)



Thomas Henshaw (*Looking off in the distance as if in contemplation. Muttering to himself away from the audience as if reciting his secret formula*): You are first by a strong graduated fire to draw out all the humid part of your subject; in the rectifying of which you will have first a strong armoniacke spirit which by his description is just ours, then change your receiver and take the middle part of this humidity by itself and likewise the phlegme by itself. Then take the feces remaining in your retort, grinde them very small in a marble, put them into a body with a blind head, power on them of your middle part till it swim two fingers over, set them on warm ashes for 24 to 48 hours, till you see your liquor tinged, then decant neatly and power on fresh till you see the liquor no more tinged. When you have good store of the tinged

liquid, digest it *in balneo* for four days, then distille by degrees in sand and you will bring over the sulphur. You will find the greatest volatile pearly *terra foliate* which will all turn into a liquour. Jack Clayton told me last night that our doctor tells him by grindning all armoniacke he can create a sulphure as red as rubies and at last we have our Red Elixir!

(Henshaw notices Audience)

Henshaw: Greetings fellow members of the Royal Society. As you know we are in the pursuit of Alchemy, along with our honoured fellow members, Robert, Earl of Yarmouth, Christopher Wren, and our illustrious colleague and friend, Sir Isaac Newton. Unlike the lowly pursuit of chemistry which is growing in fashion amongst the baser sort of the populace, the genuine alchemist is absolutely firm in his belief that the emotional and spiritual state of the individual experimenter is involved intimately with the success or failure of our pursuits. We have made great progress in our pursuit of the Philosopher's Stone. Our redeemed member, Elias Ashmole, has discovered a lightning stone fallen from the sky, for Intellects and Spirit of virtuous beings never communicate with mortals without a special grace of Divinity, through the Philosophers Stone. In the words of the illustrious Ashmole, "By the Magical and Prospective Stone it is possible to discover any Person in what part of the World forever, although never so secretly concealed or hid; in Chambers, Closets, or Caverns of the Earth: For there it makes a strict Inquisition. In a Word, it fairly presents to your view even the whole World, wherein to behold, hear, or see your Desire. More it enables man to understand the language of Creatures, (*takes a moment to look at the surroundings*) as the Chirping of Birds, Lowing of Beasts (*gestures towards cattle in the distance*), etc. To Convey a Spirit into an image, which by observing the Influence of heavenly Bodies, shall become a true Oracle; And yet this as E.A. assures you, is not any way Necromantical, or Devilish; but easy, ponderous easy, Natural and Honest.



In brief, by the true and various use of the Philosophers Prima Materia (for there are diversities of Gifts, but the same Spirit) the perfection of Liberal Sciences are made known, the whole Wisdom of Nature may be grasped; And (Notwithstanding what has been said, I must further add) there are yet hid greater things than these. In fifteen kingdoms had our Red Stone existed and we can, I believe, we can discover it once more!

Funeral Scene



(Audience hear music coming from the church, cast members hand out funeral cards to audience members, Rebecca and Margaret Paston greet them at Church door as if coming to attend Robert Paston's funeral, singing ends when audience are seated in the church, the Funeral begins)

Church:

Song (Holly):

O, let me forever weep:

My eyes no more shall welcome sleep.

I'll hide me from the sight of day,

And sigh my soul away.

He's gone, his loss deplore,

And I shall never see him more.

Margaret Paston (to her brother William during song): This makes me see the inanity of following Courts and makes me thank God that fortune has condemned me to lead a private life in which perhaps I have suffered less disquiet than you, sir.

William Paston: Perhaps if my dear father had contented himself with the wholesome air of Oxnead without troubling him with State affairs and following the Court, then our mother would not now be a widow.

Rev Hildeyard (Holly): "It is comfortable and glorious for a Christian to consider the joys of heaven; but when it is remembred that before his entrance into them, he must twice put off the old man, once with its lusts of the flesh, and afterwards with the flesh of mortality, it is good to remember that we must all lie down in the dust, and in the dishonour of the grave, is a great ally to all delight we have in the expectation of the glories above. But witness the spectacle before us; none can reverse the sentence, no man can escape the doom."



Rebecca Paston: I speak on this sad day a portion of the sermon by Dr. John Hildeyard for his great friend, and my loving husband. ‘If honourable birth and ingenuous education, if courage and greatness, loyalty and piety, if anything could have been given immunity against a sad day, this sad scene of sorrows had not been the entertainment of this assembly. We, with joy in our countenances, would welcome the arrival amongst us of the Right Honourable Robert Earl and Viscount Yarmouth Baron of Paston.

Audience Feedback:

Audience Comments (feedback gathered from written feedback forms on the day, surveymonkey feedback, as well as audience members feedback provided in person with performers after every show, and a few emails were sent personally to Dr Holly Maples and responses gathered when emailing audience members about future events) :

We so enjoyed Oxnead Hall (I think you had all the audience in the 'palm of your hands', especially at the church during the funeral service!). It made us go to the exhibition at Norwich Castle as well and also to Paston Church.

We will plan to spend the day at Mannington and immerse ourselves in your company!!

You and all your company are to be congratulated on last evenings performance at Oxnead ...it was absolutely wonderful ...magical.

I especially loved the attention to detail with the fruit and flowers representing the jewels and treasures, the handing out of petitions and the invites to the funeral made us feel part of the story.

You know how much I loved the costumes and feel inspired to sit at my sewing machine as soon as possible ! Loved the griffin seal on the inviteI would love to get one to use at Mannington...for letter writing, when you have a moment could you let me know where you bought it from ...thanks Penny, Paston Heritage Society

I have just got home from this afternoon's performance and wanted to congratulate you and everyone concerned with the wonderfully creative and well presented story of Robert Paston's final years. It was brilliant.

This is just the kind of thing that the Norwich Society's 800 or so members would have been interested in and if you ever repeat the event or do anything similar in Norfolk and would like it to be promoted, please do let me know and we will include it in our fortnightly newsletter.

We did organise a tea at Oxnead Hall last year which proved very popular (despite being three times the price of your performance!). If it would be of any help in the future, I think it might be useful for us to consider organising a group visit to any future Norfolk performance.

-- Paul Burall, The Norwich Society

"Congratulations on a wonderful performance last night. I thought the play was extremely well written, directed and performed and was thoroughly enjoyed by those who saw it." Beverley Aspinall

Selection of Feedback Reports:

Q9 What did you like about the entertainment event? What did you dislike about the entertainment event?

We thought it was incredible, the use of the gardens and church was an inspired touch. Thoroughly enjoyed such great involvement and everyone in the church seemed spellbound. Unbelievable experience. Well done

Q10 Is there anything else you'd like to share about the entertainment event?

Going to Norwich Castle next week to see the exhibition, so thanks for informing and bringing history to life

Q11 How did the movement around the grounds of Oxnead Hall effect your experience of the performance?

It enhanced it, especially seeing the actors moving in the garden. Surreal, as if we had stepped back in time

Q9 What did you like about the entertainment event? What did you dislike about the entertainment event?

Nothing at all to dislike.

With reference to 8 above - not sure you can have degrees of unique!

Q10 Is there anything else you'd like to share about the entertainment event?

The musicians were splendid, as were the actors.

Q11 How did the movement around the grounds of Oxnead Hall effect your experience of the performance?

Moving round the grounds of the Hall added enormously to the performance and ending in the church with Robt's funeral was extraordinary. Everyone in the audience behaved as though they really were attending a funeral.

Q9 What did you like about the entertainment event? What did you dislike about the entertainment event?

I really liked the link to Oxnead Hall and progressing through the grounds. It took me a little time to get into it. I felt I got the gist of the background when we were in the barn. The story became clearer as we moved outside.

Q10 Is there anything else you'd like to share about the entertainment event?

I felt really involved especially with the actors mingling with us as we moved around.

Q11 How did the movement around the grounds of Oxnead Hall effect your experience of the performance?

It really helped to provide a context for the performance. Sitting in the church was really emotional. The weather and the cows really helped!

Q9 What did you like about the entertainment event? What did you dislike about the entertainment event?

unique is unique! can't have a qualifying word enjoyed the whole evening very much- liked it all

Q11 How did the movement around the grounds of Oxnead Hall effect your experience of the performance?

Definitely enhanced it. I liked the occasional asides to the audience. Brilliant to have the funeral in the church, and not to have Robert with the final 'line up'. I wish I had known about wine in the Orangery before the play, but found it afterwards!

Q9 What did you like about the entertainment event? What did you dislike about the entertainment event?

I enjoyed the in-character asides, the distribution of letters and how much work had gone into tying or sealing them up, the costumes, the instrumental music and singing, the setting and the subject matter. I didn't dislike anything.

Performer Feedback

Doing this type of theatre has been a tremendous experience for me personally and I must say I was surprised and delighted by audience reactions. One often finds when visiting heritage buildings and sites, that historical dramas or recreations, whilst usually educational on at least some level, tend to have limited entertainment or engagement value, so what you learn is not so well retained.

In contrast to this, our presentation about Robert Paston's unfortunate series of misadventures drew a visibly and consistently enthusiastic response from all three of our audiences on this occasion, and I was proud to be part of it. At least one couple told me that it had not felt at all "touristy", but they rather felt able to indulge in a genuine sense of being transported through time to another era. Another young man said he had hugely enjoyed the interactive quality of the experience, as audience members were communicated with directly and ably and swiftly guided from place to place throughout by the characters, sometimes being encouraged (without any obligation whatsoever) to join in the action like extras in a film. I believe that the correct balance was achieved through the use of skilled and experienced theatre professionals rather than simply historians and people wearing funny clothes using dumbed down scripts.

After seeing these effects firsthand, I am absolutely convinced that this kind of razor-sharp site-specific theatre, when as well researched and professionally presented as this, can really raise the game for important sites and has enormous potential for enhancing visitor enjoyment and education in ways rarely seen across the spectrum of heritage-oriented experiences. It really raises the bar.

Kenneth Jay, Sir Robert Paston

Email: kennethjay777@gmail.com

Robert Paston's Cabinet of Curiosity (Norwich Castle Museum)



Note: The Paston Treasures production was nominated for a Norfolk Heritage Award in 2019.

Paston Treasures Painting:



Performing the Paston Treasures Exhibition (17th century Collecting as a performance of Power, Status, and Empire building)

Opening Section

(Audience gather in the Norwich Castle Museum foyer, listening to music. Rebecca and Margaret Paston enter and greet audience)

Rebecca Paston: My lords and ladies of the King's company, we right welcome you to Oxnead Hall for the visit of his most noble majesty, Charles II. We invite you to see Sir Robert Paston's best closet in the new building, designed and created in honour of the King's visit.

Margaret Paston: The Paston Treasure is well known for its display of my grandfather and lord father's fame for loyalty to the crown, virtuosity and their dedication to natural philosophy. Indeed our collection is a compliment to the Nation as well as the family. As the great Thomas Pecke described, to the Noble, Sir William Paston:

Your Recreation is to feed your Eyes,
With the most select Things, the Globe comprise,
I know the Medium to let you see
A wonder; England's choicest Rarity.
Advance to the reflecting Looking-Glass:
There you may view, the Fam'd Meceoena's Face.

Rebecca: We invite you to explore my husband and son's dedication to the Royal Society of Alchemists and the Royal Adventurers Company. Welcome to Sir Robert Paston's Cabinet of Curiosities, please follow us. *(Audience broken in half to follow the Rotunda round to Alchemy and Colonialism installations)*





Postcolonial Viewpoint on 17th century Collecting



Royal Adventurers Section (audience come upon Shams and Chris in conversation)

Harry Rumbold: Marvel at the globe! The world is round and we can now experience it for ourselves, not just know that this is the case.

William Paston: Indeed. Explorers send fast ships now to the Indies, the Americas, and the Orient. We are living in a true age of discovery.

Harry Rumbold: Where in the vast world shall we investigate? (*The two look at map and globe to plan where to travel. They notice the audience and William Paston addresses them...*)

William Paston: 'Greetings fellow explorers, welcome to another Royal Adventures Meeting. We have long and fully resolved with Ourself to extend not only the boundaries of Empire, but also the very arts and sciences. Therefore We look with favour upon all forms of learning, but with particular grace We encourage philosophical studies, especially those which by actual experiment attempt either to shape out a new philosophy or to perfect the old.'



Harry Rumbold: Indeed, if our gentlemen shall more condescend to engage in commerce, and to regard the Philosophy of Nature then we can take advantage of our charter to assist in the improving Natural Knowledge by seeking out information about people, animals and things from the great ends of the Earth.

William Paston: The first of these since the King's return, has bin carry'd on with great vigour, by the foundation of the Royal Adventurers Company: to which as twin sister of the Royal Society, we have reason as we go along to wish all prosperity.

Harry Rumbold: In both these institutions begun together, our King has intimated the two most famous works of the wisest of the antient Kings: who at the same time sent to Ophir for gold, and compos'd a Natural History, from the cedar to the shrub observations and inventions scattered up and down the world.

William Paston: We can use this opportunity for profit as well as science. The Royal Adventurers Society could have use and enjoy mines of gold and silver which are or shall be found in all or any of those parts. We also may supply the American colonies with negro servants. We find that blacks are the most useful appurtenances of a Plantation and perpetual servants.

Harry Rumbold: Sir, I would pause before condoning the trafficking of countrymen of my complexion into the miserable situation of those who are barbarously sold into captivity, and unlawfully held in slavery.

William Paston: My dear sir, with what ease it will be to our kingdoms to have many of the lazy and idle people set to work and trained up as servants? Indeed, we can sell slaves to Gentlemen in the West Indies for £17 each. A most profitable venture indeed.

Harry Rumbold: I must observe your country's conduct has been uniformly wicked in the East –West Indies –and even the coast of Guinea. The grand object of English navigators, indeed of all Christian navigators –is money, money, money.

William Paston: A greater division of mankind is made by the skinne than by any other part in the body that is into white and black.

Harry Rumbold: Enough, it is a subject that sours my blood, and I am sure will not please the friendly bent of your social affections. I mention these only to guard my friend against being too hasty in condeming the knavery of a people who, bad as they may be, possibly, were made worse by their Christian visitors.

William Paston: Ladies and gentlemen, my reasoning is based in Science of the Natural Philosophers and the Royal Society, not profit alone. Indeed, examine our questionnaire sent to trading posts and travellers, calling for all ingenious men, such as consider the importance of cementing philosophical spirits to supply information about climate, geography, flora, fauna, and local inhabitants.

(Interactions with audience *Questions and Answers Section*)

Integrating Research into the Script:



(Harry Rumbold receives a letter and then calls across to Margaret)

Harry Rumbold: Margaret, your family at Oxnead have discovered all. They will surely apply all possible vigilance and care that we should not come together.

Rebecca Paston: My dear sir, my daughter is sorry for her folly and this business is now at an end. Go back to Tangier and do not seek out my daughter any longer.

Harry Rumbold: Your ladyship, I am resolved never to quit this business, unless I should hear from Margaret's own mouth that she is repented of what she has done. Only then will I desist and never trouble her more. I have nothing but my life to lose, and that I am resolved to sacrifice.

Margaret Paston: (*coming towards HR and RP*): My dear heart, they cannot stop us. I will be your martyr, if I should suffer the reproach and contempt of my friends, all this would for your sake be but a pleasure and a glory to me.

Rebecca Paston: Peg, desist in this. My ladies, remove my daughter to a place of protection from this outlandish behaviour not fitting a lady of quality.

Harry Rumbold: I declare my eternal constancy and fidelity, madam. Take heart and we shall be together hereafter.

Margaret : Mother, I have £4000 well secured to me in my grandfather's will, and that money you cannot deny me. I can marry whosoever and whenever I please once I achieve my majority.

Ensemble 1: I have a great tenderness for Sir Robert and my Lady. I would not add to their grief to state that they can little lose £4000 at present. Not any one that has heard this lamentable story hath any pity for their daughter, Margaret Paston. Come follow me to view their collection, say not a word of what I have told you.



(*Music then turns into instrumental and keeps playing a second loop*)

Rebecca: Your majesty, honoured guests, welcome to our Theater of treasures. The world of wonders in one closet shut.

Once one is captured by the immeasurable charm of art,/ what need is there to set full sail upon the shipwrecking surface of the sea,/ In order to survey whatever marvels this vast world contains?/ What is the delight in eagerly traversing so many lands?/ A single theater that displays everything it its classes/ Can serve as a stand-in for the globe in its entirety an accomplishment.

William: The tables being spread and sideboards richly adorned with Plate, please may your Majesty take note of some of the more Remarkable Pieces.

Camryn: We present our world of curiosities, cabinets and jewels.

(Music continues with second verse with Rebecca Paston singing)

Inventory: (actors go round asking people to value the objects, bragging about how fine the collection is)

One mother of pearle bottle, each side the fashion of a swan with a silver and gilt foote, and a silver and gilt statue upon the top.

A mother of pearle dish, all set in scollops, with silver and gilt foot, a cristall ball standing upright in the midle, carved.

A shell cup set in a carved and silver gilt frame and foot and cover, a piece of crystall in the midle of the cover, set with a silver and gilt knobb in the midle.

A cristall cup, with a silver and gilt foot and ledge, a crystall cover with a silver and gilt knob in the midle.

A black Indian botle set in silver, with a chaine.

A red speckle shell standing upon a silver foot.

A mother of pearle flower pott, inlaid in a silver and gilt frame.

A boy gilded, with a socket for a candle in his hand.

A shell standing on a dolphin, silver and gilt, with a silver and gilt figure upon the top.

A shell, engraven with the story of Atalanta, standing upon an eagle's foot of silver.

A gilded horse in a trotting posture.

One amber cabinet broken

One amber cup broke.

Margaret: Had a representative from the crown not plunder'd it from my grandfather by Trunk full, we would have welcomed his majesty with greater plenty.

William Paston: Shh...

(The Paston's frieze in tableau)



Audience Feedback Report:

Norwich Castle Museum (July 27th, 2018)

Note: 60 attendees on the day to the event. We had a feedback form and a Paston Footprints researcher of the team conducted interviews at each performance.

One surprise was how many audience members in discussion and on feedback forms mentioned how much they liked the fact that the show concentrated on women. This was slightly accidental, as it was performing the story of the Norwich Castle exhibition, but due to casting, we decided to not include Robert Paston, but instead have his wife, Elizabeth Paston and her daughter and son be the main characters in the story (alongside alchemists and Royal Society members and other ensemble characters). The fact that so many audience members mentioned the fact that we were women led, shows perhaps that they are not expecting female stories in heritage dramas.

40year old audience member “It was great to see the powerful women featured. The alchemy section was great fun as well, we loved the use of the herbs and tools that we could hold and look at!”

70+ year old female audience member “I don’t know why I’m giggling. I guess it feels like I had a mini roll in the show because the actresses spoke directly to me in the show. You know I’m giggling because at my age, let’s just say I’ve been an OAP for a long time, I don’t know get to do new things too often. I’ve never had a role before!”

“This was the first time I had experienced this theatre style. Loved it. Feel you are on a journey of discovery, rather than just witnessing and suspending disbelief. You are up close and personnel (can see props so much better, and actually touch them - it makes them more real, and your experience is tactile as well as visual. You feel included in the action. The movement involved is also key I think, helps you feel you are witnessing different episodes, and seems to be a cross between theatre and film - as you get different stage locations!”

Karen Smyth, UEA

“A key highlight for the immersive experience of the performance was that moving around the space, it really gave the sense of going on a journey, with the different vignette settings. Great with the two entrances/exits in the ‘theatre in the round’ part – helped convey the sense of coming and going. The 1st one we could hear the other part of the group on the other side. At first felt a little distracted, but that quickly passed. It gave the sense that we were back in time, with us having a glimpse into life as other activities took part around us. The 2nd performance when we were all one group, felt a more kind of dip in and out. Both interesting experiences.”

“Acoustics excellent in the space. And having dual awareness of past and present, it felt ‘naughty’ for so much activity and noise and music to be happening in the Museum. But it also felt a kind of VIP experience, that we were stepping back in time in this much larger space that tries to take us there with objects, but we were getting a real live performance! Past and present boundaries effectively blurring.”

“The singing was outstanding. Though I nearly fell off my chair and jumped out of my wits when you stared singing just behind my chair. I had been so engrossed in the other actors had no idea you were just behind me!”

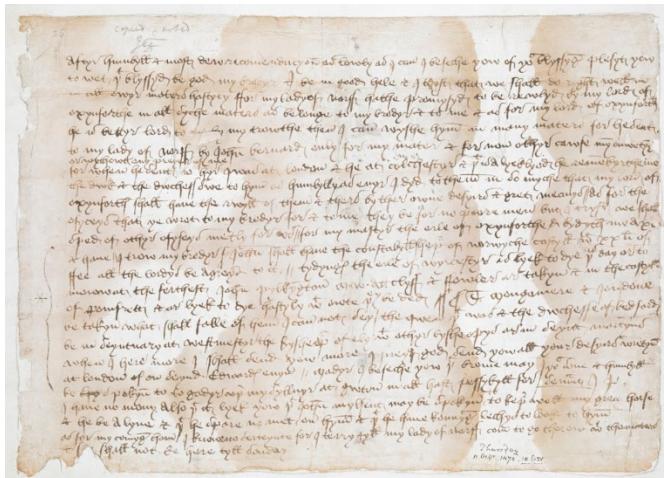
“I chatted to the musicians afterwards. Was fascinated to learn that the first piece was a new kind of music at the time, deliberately for group dancing rather than couples’ dancing. And that the function of the closing piece was to encourage us to reflect on the loneliness and passing of time, some kind of narrative voice to explain how the music is functioning might help people to understand how to relate. Maybe you don’t agree – the musical tone is universal after all!”

“What the musicians said to me afterwards I think is key – that often groups don’t do the performances that well and certainly don’t integrate the music so successfully. I agree, the two performances I’ve seen have been superbly done – you walk away feeling that you’ve experienced a bit of Paston family life. It touches my heart so much to see the dusty manuscripts that I’ve been reading for so long being brought to life and seeing diverse audiences interact with the story.”

Margaret Paston's Women of the Roses

Gender and Staging Under-represented Historical Voices

Focusing on women's stories with concerns over marriage rights, inheritance rights, neighborly and family disputes, defending households and manors while husbands are away, battles for property, the plague, and other domestic issues carried out by women in the backdrop of the War of the Roses



John Paston III to Margaret Paston letter, 1470

Introduction



(*Margaret Paston is forcefully thrown out of the doors of Mannington Hall, she calls out to those removing her...*)

Margaret: You ought to have compassion for those wrongfully dispossessed of their property.

Rival 1: This land is Lord Moylens.

Margaret: His lordship is a dishonest villain. We have a rightful claim to Gresham manor, and what right have you to remove a lady from her home?

Rival 2: You are a foolish woman. And tell your husband in London that Lord Moylens has taken back what is rightfully his.

Margaret: You are a company of ruffians, and do not care what you do.

Rival 3: You Pastons have no right to the land you seek. You are nothing but upstart churls, and you will be sorry every day you remain near Gresham.

(Margaret storms off behind the house, Lord Moleyns men address the audience)



Precarities of women left to defend manor houses

(Margaret removes herself in fear, she speaks to the Audience as she faces the back of the house...)

Margaret: I would be sorry to live as close to Gresham as I do, until this business between Lord Moylens and my husband is resolved. We must protect ourselves from Lord Moylens' men. We need to get some crossbows and windlasses to bend them with. And bolts! The houses here are so low that no one can shoot out with longbows, even if we might have ever so much need. We must write to your son, John, immediately.

Agnes Paston: I believe that you could get such things from Sir John Fastolf who is a good friend to us in this business.

Margaret: Moylens' men are afraid we will take possession of Gresham again by force, and they have made great preparations inside the house, I am told. They have made bars to bar

across the doors, and loopholes in every quarter of the house. My house! And, they dare to tell me they could abduct me and imprison me in the castle whenever they wish!

Agnes Paston: My husband should have safeguarded us against this possibility. Judge William Paston was respected and honoured throughout Norfolk, while my son, though hard working and valued in the Law Courts of London, is still too green in judgement to defend against these vicious and slanderous attacks. Lord Moleyns attacks at Gresham are just one faction against the Paston family.



Marriage issues

Agnes Paston: My cousin, Elizabeth, I am concerned by this distressing state of affairs. Good you know that few amongst us would have dared insult the Paston name so openly when my lord husband, Judge William was alive. The Vicar of Paston agreed that the road in the village be diverted to give our manor house at Paston more privacy, and since his death I find only disputes and bad feeling in the village from all sides.

Elizabeth Clere: You must labour to gain more power and place in the land and then the villagers cannot touch you.

Agnes: We need more support in the land. I had hoped my daughter Elizabeth might be well matched, but...

Elizabeth Paston: Mother, I asked my brother to persuade Sir William Oldhall for my hand in marriage, and John requests an answer about your will in this business.

Agnes: Elizabeth, I told you not to speak of it. You and your brother's unseemly haste in this matter may cause Sir Oldhall to react unfavourably to the match. You must rely on me to act according to your honour and advantage.

Elizabeth Paston: Yes, mother. (*Elizabeth is distressed*)

Agnes: Take heart. If John believes that Sir Oldhall's land is clear as to title, in so far as I perceive you are well-disposed towards it, I will consider myself content.

Elizabeth Clere: My lady, your family will make good matches on all sides. Just yesterday, my kinsman Wroth saw your grand-daughter Margery and praised her, saying she was a fine young woman.

Agnes: Pray, entreat him then to find her a good marriage, if he knows of any.

Elizabeth Clere: Indeed, I took that liberty, and he claims to know someone worth 100 marks a year, who is the son my Lady of York's chamberlain.

Agnes: How old is this gentleman?

Elizabeth Clere: He is but 18.

Agnes: With the world the way it is, it may be good to get Margery settled with one so close to the counsel of the Duke of York. I will enquire of my son about it. What do you think of the business, Margaret?



Elopement

(Music Love Song, sentimental)

Margery Paston: Pray my friends, please keep this letter close to your heart. I pray to God every day to send me such a person to be my mate in this world who will respect and faithfully and genuinely love me above all other creatures on this earth. For I believe that worldly goods are transitory and marriage lasts for the term of one's life, which for some people is a very long time. (*Agnes moves to return to Margery's side...*) My grandmother returns, pray remember to keep this secret. I believe, as I know you do, that love is important above all things. We do not need to follow my father's motto: Omnia pro pecunia facta sunt (all things are done for money).



The War of the Roses

Agnes: The finishing wars with France and the new Queen have done little to end the troubles in the country.

Rebel 1: The law serveth nought else these days but for to do wrong.

Rebel 3: It would seem that the King has had false counsel, for his lands are lost, his merchandise lost, his commons destroyed, the sea lost, France is lost, and himself so poor that he may not pay for his meat nor drink.

Rebel 4: The King owes more than ever did King in England, and yet daily his traitors that be about him wait wherever thing should come to him by his law, and they ask it from him.

Rebel 3: My Lord of York has presented a bill to the King and desires many things that are the will of the common people.

Elizabeth Paston: I am uneasy, mother. The people are riotously disposed and the elections in the county and temperature of the time is not peaceable.

Agnes: Elizabeth, I told you not to meddle with what was none of your concern.

Elizabeth Cleere: She is right, cousin. The enemies be so bold that they come up to the land and play them on Caister sands and in other places as homelily as they were Englishmen.

Agnes: They come to Caister? I must look into this.

(Agnes leaves with the letters of business, Elizabeth Cleere goes to follow her and is stopped by Elizabeth Paston)



The Plague

Plague Procession Reprise (Elizabeth Cleere brings a letter to John)

Plague music throughout scene instrumental

Procession of Villagers: Crux Christi salva me. Zelu domus tuae liberet me. Crux vincit, Crux regnat, Crux Imperat per signum, Crucis libera me, Domine, ab hac Peste. Deus meus, expelle Pestem a me, et a loco isto, et libera me. In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum, cor et corpus meum. Ante Coelum et Terram Deus erat, et Deus potens, est liberare me ab ista Peste. Crux Christi potens est ad expellendam Pestem ab hoc loco, et a corpore meo. Bonum est prestoari auxilium. Dei cum silentio, ut expellat Pestem a me....

Elizabeth Cleere: My dear cousin, there seems to be the worst occurrence of the pestilence in this year of our lord 1479, than I have seen in my life. There is a huge mortality and death of people not just in the City, but also in many other parts of the realm.

John Paston III: Our family has been afflicted with grief. Sure tidings have come to Norwich that my grandmother is dead.

Margaret Paston: Your brother, Walter, has also been taken by God.

Elizabeth Cleere: And my lady, I bring even more sad tidings. Your other son, John the Elder, has been stricken by the pestilence as well.

Margaret: Alas, he wrote but last week of his fear of sickness and his poor lodgings in London. If he had only fled the city as his uncle did.

Petrarch Song: Alas what lies before me? Whither now Am I to be whirled away by the force of fate? Time rushes onward for the perishing world And round about I see the hosts of the dying, The young and the old; nor is there anywhere In all the world a refuge, or a harbor Where there is hope of safety. Funerals Where'er I turn my frightened eyes, appall; The temples groan with coffins, and the proud And humble lie alike in lack of honor The end of life presses upon my mind, And I recall the dear ones I have lost, Their cherished words, their faces, vanished now, The consecrated ground is all too small To hold the instant multitude of graves.

John III: My brother is buried in the White Friars at London. I did not think that it would have been so, and if it had been his will to lie at Bromholm, I would have brought home my grandmother and him together.

Margaret: Dearest John the Younger, I pray you will not go to London, and if you must, that you depart from that dangerous place as quickly as possible, for it a city of such pestilence that has taken both your grandmother and brother.

John III: Right worshipful Mother... please it you to understand that whereas ye willed me by pains to hasten out of the foul air that I am in, I must put my faith in God, for I must remain in London for a season. And in good faith, I shall never while God sends me life, dread more death than shame. But thanks be to God, I hear the sickness is well ceased there, and my business putteth away my fear.



Women and the Law

Margery Brewes Paston: Madam, while John is in London, I think it best if I would go myself to my Lady of Norfolk and plea our cause. If we can regain Caister Castle, our fortunes are saved.

Margaret: Very well, if you could control your tongue and speak no harm of your uncle.

Margery Brewes Paston: I trust that I should say nothing to my Lady's displeasure, but only to your profit. I understand that my Lady Norfolk is near weary of her part in this. It would be even better, if you yourself came before my Lady, beseeching her to take our part. I think that we will have a conclusion. Our possession of Caister is in our hands. For she would fain be rid of it, if she could save her honour.

Margaret: Should I speak for our family then?

Music begins War of the Roses theme instrumental

Elizabeth Cleere: Indeed, for experience has shown us that one word from a woman will do more than the words of twenty men.

Margaret: (*beat*) My cousin, you speak the truth.

(*Margaret steals herself to go and save the family fortune once again*)



Audience Feedback Report:

Voting Tubes (asked which did they enjoy the most)

Sight – 41 tokens

Sound – 28 tokens

Touch – 7 tokens

Emotions – 18 tokens

46 individual feedback sessions out of 250 audience members:

Sight:

Costumes - people remarked on how fascinated they were with the costumes, felt a real privilege to get up so close to them, unlike a stage you could be close enough to see the detail. Other remarks about costumes included ‘top quality’, ‘movie set like’, like an RSC production’.

Setting – the visual landscape attracted 2nd most remarks. That it was great to move round the garden, that the actors coming through the crowd and acting in front and behind gave a real sense of moving plot twists. Other remarks ‘beautiful stage props, ie the house and gardens! Felt like a period drama what with the setting. Felt special that it was taking place where a Paston would have been, even if its been modernised. A few people did remark some of it

was hard to hear, as they had to sit down and therefore couldn't be close to the action – extreme heat weather affected some too much.

Action – seeing the women brandish the swords was great fun. Another remarked, when we say the ladies all dolled up like that, we thought we were going to get a namby pamby Pride and Prejudice, weak women men-smitten performance. Thrilled to see how active the women were. I wouldn't mind my kids growing up like that!

Sound:

Many remarked on the 3D sound effects. Ie, with actors and actresses appearing from all sides. Felt enclosed (another said circled, another said enveloped) in the performance. They were ralking kind of funny, like old people, but not too much so we could still understand them. Liked that.

Music was great both as backdrop and as main part of the action. Very talented musicians. Old music I thought would be hotiy toity or chants, or something like that. It was actually quite a surprise, really suited the drama, worked very well.

The music was an unexpected bonus. Even if we couldn't always follow all of the dialogue, it set the tone and mood.

I liked the instrument players – having seen them talk about the musical instruments in the house and then see them at use in the performance, it was like the education bit brought to life.

Music helped us feel like we were stepping back in time. Helped us believe we were really looking at the Pastons!

Touch

One 8 year old girl excitedly said she got to touch a sleeve, and it was soft and squishy and she wanted to wear a dress like that, mother remarked she wouldn't mind too.

Having been round the stalls, touching the quills, the wood stuff, the dyed wools, the medieval letter, it set up expectations for the performance. It was like we were being lulled back into the period.

I was one of the lucky ones! I got the roses! These are going home and will take pride of place, I'll tell everyone I was given them by a medieval Paston!

I love my pilgrim badge. Never knew anything like this before. I feel like a child getting a reward, I have a little bit of history to take home.

Emotions

Most remarked how sad they felt for the plague victim.

One person - Seeing her lying on the ground really brought home not just the physical suffering, but how much fear there must have been as they didn't know all the science bit. No wonder they turned to prayers and herbs, I would have had! I never had really thought about what I would do in the situation before, even though I've read many years ago about the plague.

Number of people who remarked on how moved they were by hearing the story of the women Pastons.

It's not often you hear about so many things women did.

This was a real eye opener. I knew a bit about the Pastons, we did a bit at school and I've read some local history. All I knew about the women was that Agnes was rather violent and Margaret loved John, and the whole Valentine letter. But hey, there are many more women in the story and even if a bit of dramatic licence has been used, you get the sense these were the characters, as they say behind every great man is an even greater woman (and I am saying that in my wife's earshot deliberately)

Multiple people requested could we have a family tree that focuses on the women please?

I had a 'draw your Paston' activity for young children. They drew Margaret the most!

Other feedback activities (non drama related):

I had a range of fascimilies and editions, and other items, like quill pen, some Paston treasure objects, some photographs of sites and buildings inc 3D shots. The fascimilies were 40% interacted with MORE than any other object (more in the sense of who lifted them, and they spent 3 times longer with them than with any other item, and had nearly twice as many questions about the letters than any other aspect. People wanted to see if they could read them, and then people wanted to hear me read them, to hear what the 'Old English' sounded like. Children giggled at the idea this is what they would have sounded like, and I translated some of their facourite modern sayings (by asking them questions about what tv they liked, what films, what toys, what games) and then I said what they had said in Middle English. That was the most favourite activity for adults and kids alike!

Bear in mind – my object range was limited regarding senses, in that due to severe allergies, I couldn't have any herbs etc – I reckon that would have raised much interest too, but I couldn't try that out.

Numerous comments about the high quality of the production, how priviledged people felt they had got to see the drama, that it had really made their day, that they felt sorry for all the people who had missed out today. Many asked for their praises to be passed on to the actors.

Undoubtedly the heat affected turnout, (there were about 250 people across the day). It also affected ability for people to stay the whole performance, that's how I caught them in my slightly cooler tent afterwards for this feedback!

Performer Feedback on Mannington:

ACTING STYLE

With the audience present, the acting style required felt more like oratory. In contrast with stage acting, where the focus (for me) is usually about developing and deepening the relationships with the other characters for the audience to observe, here the central relationship to be developed was with the audience. The aim/motivation/intention for me often fell to persuading the audience of my point of view, to being on my side, to recruit them. This required a clear and expressed point of view/opinion about what you were speaking about, and understanding/depth to the relationships that you were speaking about - all useful things for developing one's acting skills - but the active task put the audience centre-stage in a way that encourages the performer to adapt and take risks. I enjoyed this aspect immensely and audience feedback was most rewarding when they accepted the call to be a part of the action and responded imaginatively (and sometimes unexpectedly) to offers. I enjoyed being kept on my toes about how to incorporate these into the performance. Audience feedback received

included appreciation for the keepsakes that were handed out, and admiration for our stamina and energy in the heat, but that was specific to the particular weather situation on the day.

DEVELOPMENT

What I would be interested in developing further is the pulling out of parallels between the historical issues and present day politics and social issues and to use these to broaden perspectives and encourage compassion and empathy. For example, what struck me part-way through the project was how some of the themes from the Mannington show (eg being seized and taken away from home, being removed from property, having belongings taken away, being deemed ‘unworthy’ to own certain properties or to be in a particular place, being ‘upstarts’, etc) were relatable to issues such as immigration and deportation, of choosing where one lives, of being told one does not have the right to remain, etc. The juxtaposition, at a purely human level, of the impact that such situations have on one’s emotions and frame of mind could be an interesting and socially useful entry point into developing tolerance and broadening outlooks. It would also be interesting to develop the feminist aspects of the narrative as a means of challenging prevalent expectations of women’s stories.

WHAT I GOT FROM WORKING ON THE PROJECT

Personally, as a British East Asian actor with a love for British history, it was a very rare and treasured opportunity to play an English historical character in period setting. I had been worried about how it might be received, particularly in regions where communities are somewhat less multicultural than London, but it was a huge testament to the possibility of openness and acceptance for diverse representation that my inclusion passed without comment and that filled me with much hope for the future.

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