

# Margery Brews and John Paston III

Margery Brews (??-1495) and John Paston III (1444-1504). Married 1477.

Margery Brews was the daughter of Elizabeth and Sir Thomas Brews of Topcroft, Norfolk. Nothing is known of her before her engagement, including the year of her birth.

John Paston III was the son of Margaret and Sir John Paston I. (John Paston II was the older brother of III.) In addition to being involved in managing the family estates, he had a military career during the War of the Roses. He was in command at the siege of Caister in 1469; he was wounded at Barnet in 1471; he fought at the battle of Stoke in 1487 and was knighted on the field.

Margery and John had two sons, born in 1478 and 1479.

The seven letters below were written in early to mid-1477 and deal with their upcoming marriage. The first two are from the bride's mother, Elizabeth Brews, to the groom. The third and fourth are from the bride herself to the groom. The fifth is from the Brews' family clerk, Thomas Kela, to the groom; the order of this unclear. The sixth is from the bride's father to the groom's older brother, John II, then the head of the family, since his father John I, had died in 1466. The seventh is from the groom's mother to the bride's mother, trying (successfully, as it turned out) to get over some kind of obstacle that had arisen.

I have used a modern spelling, though I have not changed the wording. In the first letter from Margery to John III, I also show the original spelling, to give a sense of that.

## Letter from Elizabeth Brews to John Paston III

Unto my right worshipful cousin, John Paston, be this letter delivered etc.

Right worshipful cousing I recommend me unto you etc. And I sent my husband a bill of the matter that ye know of, and he wrote another bill to me again touching the same matter; and he would that ye should go unto my mistress your mother, and assay if you might get the whole £20 into your hands, and then he would be more glad to marry with you and will give you £100. And, cousin, that day that she is married, my father will give her 50 marks. But an we accord, I shall give you a greater treasure, that is, a witty gentlewoman, and, if I say it, both good and virtuous; for if I should take money for her, I would not give her for £1000. But, cousin, I trust you so much that I would think her well beset on you, and ye were worth much more.

And, cousin, a little while after that ye were gone, come a man from my cousin Derby and brought me word that such a chance fell that he might not come on the day that was set, as I shall let you understand more plainly, when I speak with you

etc. But, cousin, an it would please you to come again what day that ye will set, I dare undertake that they shall keep the same day; for I would be glad that, an mine husband and ye might accord in this marriage, that it might be my fortune to make an end in this mater between my cousins and you, that each of you might love other in friendly wise etc.

And, cousin, if this bill please not your intent, I pray you that it may be burnt etc.

No more unto you at this time, but Almighty Jesus preserve you etc.

By your cousin, DAME ELIZABETH BREWS

### **Letter from Elizabeth Brews to John Paston III**

Cousin, I recommend me unto you, thanking you heartily for the great cheer that ye made me and all my folks the last time that I was in Norwich. And ye promised me that ye would never break the matter to Margery unto such time as you and I were at a point. But you have made her such advocate for you that I may never have rest night nor day, for calling on me to bring the said matter to effect, etc.

And, cousin, on Friday is Saint Valentine's Day, and every bird chooseth him a make [*mate*], and if it like you to come on Thursday at night, and so purvey you that ye may abide there till Monday, I trust to God that we may so speak to my husband, and I shall pray that we shall bring the matter to a conclusion etc. For, cousin,

It is but a simple oak

That is cut down at the first stroke

for ye will be reasonable, I trust to God, which have you ever in his merciful keeping etc.

## Letter from Margery Brews to John Paston III

\_Unto my ryght welebelovyd Voluntaryn, John Paston, Squyer, be this bill delyvered, &c.\_

Ryght reverent and wurschypfull, and my ryght welebeloved Voluntaryne, I recomande me unto yowe, ffull hertely desyryng to here of yowr wefare, which I beseche Almyghty God long for to preserve un to Hys plesur, and 3owr herts desyre. And yf it please 3owe to here of my wefear, I am not in good heele of body, nor of herte, nor schall be tyll I her ffrom yowe;

For þere wottys no creature what peyn þat I endure,  
And for to be deede, I dare it not dyscure.

And my lady my moder hath labored þe mater to my ffadur full delygently, but sche can no mor gete þen 3e knowe of, for þe wech God knowyth I am full sory.

But yf þat 3e loffe me, as I tryste verely that 3e do, 3e will not leffe me þerefor; for if þat 3e hade not halfe the lyvelode þat 3e hafe, for to do the grettest labur þat any woman on lyve myght, I wold not forsake 3owe.

And yf 3e commande me to kepe me true wherever I go,  
I wyse I will do all my myght 3owe to love and never no mo.  
And yf my freends say, þat I do amys,  
Þei schal not me let so for to do,  
Myne herte me bydds ever more to love 3owe  
Truly over all erthely thing,  
And yf þei be never so wroth,  
I tryst it schall be better in tyme commyng.

No more to 3owe at this tyme, but the Holy Trinite hafe 3owe in kepyng. And I besech 3owe þat this bill be not seyn of none erthely creatur save only your selffe, &c.

And thys letter was indyte at Topcroft, with full hevy herte, &c.

By your own,

MARGERY BREWS.

Right reverend and worshipful and my right well-beloved Valentine, I recommend me unto you full heartily, desiring to hear of your welfare, which I beseech Almighty God long for to preserve you unto his pleasure and your heart's desire. And if it please you to hear of my welfare, I am not in good heal of body nor of heart, nor shall be until I hear from you.

For there wots no creature what pain that I endure,  
And for to be dead, I dare it not discure [*discover*]

And my lady my mother hath labored the matter to my father full diligently, but she can no more more get than ye know of, for the which God knoweth I am full sorry.

But if that ye love me, as I trust verily that ye do, ye will not leave me therefor; for if that ye had not have the livelihood that ye have, for to do the greatest labor that any woman alive might, I would not forsake you.

And if ye command me to keep me true wherever I go,  
Iwis I will do all my might you to love and never no mo.  
And if my friends say I do amiss, they shall not me let so for to do,  
Mine heart bids me evermore to love you.  
Truly over all earthly thing.  
And if they be never so wroth, I trust it shall be better in time coming.

No more to you at this time, but the Holy Trinity have you in keeping. And I beseech you that this bill be not seen of none earthly creature save only of yourself etc. And this letter was indite at Topcroft with full heavy heart, etc.

By your own M.B.

### **Letter from Margery Brews to John Paston III**

Right worshipful and well-beloved Valentine, in my most humble wise I recommend me to you etc. And heartily I thank you for the letter that ye sent me by John Beckerton, whereby I understand and know that ye be purposed to come to Topcroft in short time, and without any erand or matter, but only to have a conclusion of the matter between my father and you. I would be most glad of any creature alive so that the matter might grow to effect. And there as you say, an ye come and find the matter no more toward you than ye did aforetime, ye would no more put my father and my lady my mother to no cost nor business for that cause a good while after, which causes mine heart to be full heavy; and if that ye come and the matter take to none effect, then should be much more sorry and full of heaviness.

And as for myself, I have done and understand in the matter that I can or may, as God knoweth. And I let you plainly understand that my father will no more money part withal in that behalf but £100 and 50 mark, which is right far from the accomplishment of your desire. Wherefore, if that ye could be content with that good, and my poor person, I would be the merriest maiden on ground. And if ye think not yourself so satisfied, or that ye might have much more good, as I have understand by you afore, good, true, and loving Valentine, that ye take no such labor upon you as to come more for that matter, but let it pass, and never more to be spoken of, as I may be your true lover and bedewoman during my life.

No more unto your at this time, but Almighty Jesus perserve you both body and soul etc.

By your Valentine  
Margery Brews

## Letter from Thomas Kela Brews to John Paston III

Unto my right worshipful master, John Paston, Square, be this bill delivered, etc.

Right worshipful sir, I recommend me unto you, letting you know, as for the young gentlewoman, she oweth you her good heart and love, as I know by the communication that I have had with her for the same.

And, sir, ye know what my master and my lady have proferred with her 200 marks. And I dare say that her chamber and arrayment shall be worth 100 marks. And I heard my lady say that, an the case required, both ye and she should have your board with my lady 3 years after. [?? *The original is "iij yer aftur."*]

And I understand by my lady that she would that ye should labor the matter to my master, for it should be the better.

And I heard my lady say,

That it was a feeble oak  
That was cut down at the first stroke

And ye be beholding unto my lady for her good word, for she has never ... [?? *The original is "preysyd you to mech."*]

Sir, like I promised you, I am your man, and my good will ye shall have in worded and deed etc.

And Jesus have you in His merciful keeping etc.

By your man  
THOMAS KELA

## Letter from Sir Thomas Brews to John Paston II

Right worshipful and my heartily well-beloved cousin, I recommend me unto you, desiring to hear of your welfare, which I pray God may be as continual good as I would have mine own. And, cousin, the cause of my writing to you at this time is, I feel well by my cousin John, your brother, that ye have understanding of a matter which is in communication touching a marriage with God's grace to be concluded between my said cousin your brother and my daughter Margery, which is far commoned [*i.e. has come far*] and not yet concluded, nor not shall nor may be till I have answer from you again of your good will and assent to the said matter, and also of the obligations which that I send you herewith for, cousin, I would be sorry to see either my cousin your brother or my daughter driven to live so mean a life as they should do if the £120 should be paid of their marriage money.

And, cousin, I have taken myself so near in leaving of the said £120 that, whereas I had laid up £100 for the marriage of a younger daughter of mine, I have now lent the said £100 and £20 over that, to my cousin your brother, to be paid again by such easy days as the obligation which I send you herewith specifies. And, cousin, I were right loath to bestow so much on one daughter that the other her sisters should fare the worse; wherefore, cousin, if ye will that this matter shall take effect under such form as my cousin your brother hath written unto you, I pray you put thereto your good will, and some of your cost as I have done of mine more largely than I purpose to do to any twain of her sisters, as God knoweth mine intent, whom I beseech to send you your liefest heart's desire.

Written at Topcroft the 8 day of March etc.

By your cousin, Sir T. Brews, Knight

## From Margaret Paston to Dame Elizabeth Brews

Right worshipful and my chief lady and cousin, as heartily as I can recommend me to you. Madam, liketh you to understand that the chief cause of my writing to you at this season is this. I wot well it is not unremembered with you the large communication that diverse times had been had touching the marriage of my cousin Margery your daughter and my son John, of which I have been as glad, and now latewards as sorry, as ever I was for any marriage in mine life. And where or in whom the default of the breach is I can have no perfect knowledge; but, madam, if it be in me or any of mine, I pray you assign a day when my cousin your husband and ye think to be at Norwich towaard Sall, and I will come thither to you, and I think ere you and I depart that the default shall be know where it is, and also that, with your advice and help and mine together, we shall take some way that it shall not break; for if it did, it were none honor to neither parties, and in chief to them in whom the default is, considering that it is so far spoken.

And, madam, I pray you that I may have perfect knowledge by my son Yelverton, bearer hereof, when this meeting shall be, if ye think it expedient, and the sooner the better in eschewing of worse. for, madam, I know well, if it be not concluded in right short time, that as for my son, he intendeth to do right well by my cousin Margery and not so well by himself, and that should be to me, nor I trust to you, no great pleasure if it so fortun'd — as God defend, whom I beseech to send you your liefest desires.

Madam, I beseech you that I may be recommended by this bill to my cousin your husband, and to my cousin Margery, to whom I supposed to have given another name by this time. Written at Mautby on Saint Barnaby's Day [*June 11*].

By your MARGARET PASTON

From *The Paston Letters* a famous collection of family documents and letters dating between 1429 and 1489, and an invaluable source of social history of the era. The letters are, in sequence, 790, 791, 415, 416, 792, 773, and 226 in the edition, *Paston Papers and Letters of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Norman Davis, Oxford University Press, 2004. The modern spelling version for the first and fifth letters were done by myself. The rest are from *The Paston Letters: A Selection in Modern Spelling*, ed. Norman Davis, Oxford University Press 1983.

There is quite a bit more correspondence about the marriage negotiations in *The Paston Letters* – #304 from John II to his mother; 374 and 378 from John III to his mother; 376 and 378, which are private memoranda made by John III — mostly having to do with the property and the dowry.