

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 010 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=010>)

From: Henry Cavendish (Coldharbour, London, Greater London);

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: 6 November [c. 1585]

Summary: Henry Cavendish writes to his mother, Bess (countess of Shrewsbury), denying reports that he came to London 'to play at dice, to seek ease and dalliance, or for any other vain delight'; instead he claims to seek 'virtue, and honor in arms'.

Archive: Folger Shakespeare Library, Cavendish-Talbot MSS, X.d.428 (10)

Delivery status: to Bess, sent

Letter features: Seal intact - no. Ribbon/floss – no.

Hands: archivist | Henry Cavendish |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 010: Henry Cavendish

Henry Cavendish (1550-1616) was Bess's eldest son and heir from her marriage with Sir William Cavendish (d.1557). Following his mother Bess's marriage to George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury (and to serve their interests), on 9 February 1568 Henry was married to the earl's daughter from his previous marriage, Grace (née Talbot). That is to say, Henry was married to his step-sister, at which point the earl became both his step-father and father-in-law. (At the same time, his sister Mary was married to the earl's second son Gilbert.) At the time of the marriage, Grace was only eight years old, and eighteen-year-old Henry was immediately sent on a tour of Europe, from which he did not return until 1572. The marriage was not a success on any level: the couple never produced a child and Henry was notorious for his adulterous affairs, numerous illegitimate children, financial debts and, in April 1605, for openly calling his wife a 'harlot'. A glimpse of these ongoing difficulties can be found in the letter from Edward Talbot to Bess in 1604 (ID 063). Henry undertook a number of expeditions and journeys during his life, and his trip to Constantinople in 1589 is recorded in the memoir of his servant Fox and mentioned in ID 008. Henry regularly served as MP and sheriff for Derbyshire, yet he was troublesome as a son and subject of England. He was poor with money, failed in his military ventures and, to Bess's shame, was involved in a plot to liberate his niece, Arbella Stuart, from Bess's care at Hardwick Hall in December 1602. Bess eventually disinherited him in her will.

Other letters associated with Henry Cavendish:

[c. 1570] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=9>)

4 November 1570 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=226>)

6 December 1605 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=207>)

31 December 1605 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=11>)

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

People Associated with Letter 010: Bess of Hardwick

Born Elizabeth Hardwick (in c.1521/2, d. 13 February 1608), the woman known to posterity as Bess of Hardwick married four times during her life, as a result of which her name changed from Hardwick to Barlow (or Barley), Cavendish, St Loe and then finally (when she was countess of Shrewsbury and then dowager countess) Talbot. As one of the five children of John Hardwick (1495-1528) of Hardwick, Derbyshire, and his first wife, Elizabeth (née Leake), Bess had three sisters (Mary, Jane and Alice) and one brother (James). The Hardwicks were established Derbyshire gentry who had inherited a modest manor house and c.400 acres in and around Hardwick. But when John died in 1528, and their lands were seized by the crown, Bess faced hardship. Bess's mother quickly remarried but her new husband, Ralph Leche of Chatsworth, Derbyshire, brought little land or money to the marriage, and three more daughters were born (Bess's half-sisters Elizabeth, Jane and Margaret). Little else is known of Bess's childhood but, while still young, she was married for the first time, to Robert Barlow (or Barley) of Barlow, Derbyshire, sometime in or before 1543. Barlow died in 1544 and Bess received a small inheritance. In 1547 she married the twice-widowed Sir William Cavendish, treasurer of the king's chamber. Bess and Cavendish had eight children, six of whom survived: Frances (1548), Henry (1550), William (1551, from whom the dukes of Devonshire are descended), Charles (1553, from whom the dukes of Newcastle and Portland are descended), Elizabeth (1554) and Mary (1556). Probably due to a mixture of affection and shared social ambition, Bess's second marriage was happy and fortuitous. She was now moving in courtly circles and experiencing (for the first time) considerable wealth. In 1549 Cavendish and Bess bought the estate of Chatsworth, which was held jointly in both their names and which he and then Bess, following Cavendish's death in 1557, ambitiously rebuilt. Soon after her second husband's death, and sometime before Elizabeth I's accession (in 1558), Bess married Sir William St Loe, a wealthy widower of ancient noble pedigree. St Loe was captain of the guard to the young queen and in addition to further improving Bess's finances, he also brought her into the queen's inner circle and she served briefly as a gentlewoman of the queen's privy chamber (in 1559). The marriage seems to have not been without affection; however, the two would have spent most of it apart - he serving the queen in London and Bess mostly at Chatsworth. Upon St Loe's death (probably in 1565), Bess inherited most of the estate. In 1567 Bess married for a final time, to George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, one of the richest and most powerful men in England. To consolidate the union of their fortunes, the couple had Bess's eldest son, Henry, marry Shrewsbury's daughter (from his previous marriage), and Shrewsbury's eldest son, Gilbert (later the seventh earl), marry Bess's daughter, Mary. Also around this time, Shrewsbury was appointed to be the keeper of Mary Queen of Scots (from 1568-84). At first, relations between Bess and the Catholic Scottish queen seem to have been amicable; however, relations deteriorated all around as Bess's marriage to Shrewsbury broke down in the 1580s. An infamously nasty and highly public legal battle over estates ensued and finally the courts resolved that Shrewsbury provide Bess with a sizeable income from 1587 onwards (Shrewsbury died in 1590). In 1582, Bess took charge of the upbringing of her orphaned granddaughter, Arbella Stuart (1575-1615), claimant to the English

Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

and Scottish crowns. In 1587, Bess undertook her remarkable building works at Hardwick: the house now known as Hardwick Old Hall was complete by 1591; next to it, the extraordinary building now known as Hardwick New Hall was complete by 1599 and is one of the greatest architectural ventures of Elizabethan England. It was at Hardwick that Bess spent most of the remainder of her life, much of it devoted to caring for and managing Arbella, who came to loathe her existence in Derbyshire and devised several bizarre plans for her escape (to Bess's great distress). Bess also quarrelled with her eldest son, Henry, and disinherited both him and Arbella in her will. She left most of her estate to her beloved and faithful son, William Cavendish, who continued her great dynasty into the seventeenth century.

Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

Other letters associated with Coldharbour, London, Greater London

6 May 1568 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=238>)

17 Jan 1580 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=190>)

18 Jun [c.1600?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=6>)

Normalised view of Letter 010

Maye yt please your Honor I receyved a letter from your Ladyship by my brother Wyliam: and whear as your Ladyship wrytes yt ys sayed with you that, I am gonne onely vp to London to playe at dyse, the sayer, or speaker of yt in tyme, wyll be asshamed of hys occupacyon, and eyther be noted commonly for false, or els bewar how he crepeth into every mans Iudgement, and mynde, whear he ys not made pryvye nor can led to counsell. ffor me, I lyttle regarde reportes, nor studdy to please every man, I haue attayned to please those I seeke, If I please your Ladyship for others I lyttle esteme to please thear fantasyes, and wyll lesse every daye, knowyng I am as ffree borne, as any other, and therefore thynke I dooe well yf I please my selfe, which by Godes Grace I wyll asshuredly, shortely dooe, and showe whearfore my commynge vp was, neyther to playe at Dyce, to seeke ease and dallyance, or for any other vayne delyghte, but to seeke vyrtú, and honor in Armes, which by hys lycence that yeldes all thynges I am resolute to ffolloe knowyng nottwithstandyng that yt wyll be yll spoken of, and letted s by my ffriendes, not for my good, but for envy. But by that meanes I shall staye some Babelyng tounes from talkyng of my playe, and cause them to sharpen thear wyttes to devyse some other great faulte in me, more I thynke in my conscyenc[e] to trowble your honor, then to mend any yll in me, ys ther, deyfke. My studdy ys to please your Ladyship and so I endeavor my selfe dayly; and for my playe your Ladyship shall hear, yf you hear the trewth, shall be altered, and I gyven to other playe. that many myslykes, though, most fytt for a gentleman. Thus humbly cravyng your Ladyship's dayly blessyng I end prayyng to God to send your Honour longe lyffe and good healthe Coleharbert the vjth of November

Your Ladyship's most bounden Humble and obedyent sonne.

Henry Cavendyshe

Diplomatic view of Letter 010

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

He was Eldest son of S:^r W^m Cavendish
& died at Tutbury where he was settled
without Issue, in 12.th of Oct.^r 1616. [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

X.d.428
(10) [Item number, hand: archivist]
95 [Old foliation/item number, hand: archivist]
21 5 7 [Old foliation/item number, hand: archivist]

Maye yt please your Honor I receyved a lettar from your .La. by
my brother Wylim: and whear as your .La. wrytes yt ys sayed w^t you
that, I am gonne onely vp to London to playe at dyse, the sayer, or speaker
of yt in tyme, wyll be asshamed of hys occupacyon, and eyther be noted
commonly for false, or els bewar how he crepeth into every mans
Iudgement, and mynde, whear he ys not made pryvye nor can led to counsell.
ffor me, I lyttle regarde reportes, nor studdy to please *[deletion]* every man,
I haue attayned to please those I seeke, If I please your .La. for
others I lyttle esteeme to please thear fantasyes, and wyll lesse
every daye, knowyng I am as ffree borne, as any other, and therefore
thynke I dooe well yf I please my selfe, w^{ch} by Godes Grace I
wyll asshuredly, shortely dooe, and showe whearfore my commynge vp
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any other vayne delyghte, but to seeke vyrtú, and honor in Armes,
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envy. But by that meanes I shall staye some Babelyng tounge
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Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

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[significant space]

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Humble and obedyent sonne.
§

[significant space]

Henry Cavendyshe

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