

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 012 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=012>)

From: Richard Cavendish (Grimston End, Suffolk);

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: 12 July 1570

Summary: Richard Cavendish writes to Bess (countess of Shrewsbury), asking her to take his niece into her service.

Archive: Folger Shakespeare Library, Cavendish-Talbot MSS, X.d.428 (12)

Delivery status: to Bess, sent

Letter features: Seal intact - no. Ribbon/floss – no. Letter packet - slit and band

Hands: Richard Cavendish | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 012: Richard Cavendish

Richard Cavendish (c.1530-1601), was probably a long-time acquaintance of Bess through her marriage to Sir William Cavendish (d.1557). By the late 1560s he was carrying messages to the court for Bess's fourth husband, George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury. This service brought him into contact with the influential Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, who took a liking to him. Cavendish also carried proposals from Leicester to Mary Queen of Scots regarding her marriage to Thomas Howard, fourth duke of Norfolk, and subsequently gained notoriety during the Norfolk's trial and fall (also related to dealings with the Scots queen).

Other letters associated with Richard Cavendish:

19 November [1576?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=115>)

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People Associated with Letter 012: 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

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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.

Normalised view of Letter 012

To the Ryghthonorable hys synguler good Lady the Countes of Shrewsburye.

Pleaseth yt your Ladyshypp that as I acknowledge my selfe wholly indettyd vnto yow, as well for your woonted curtesye to my selfe, as your honorable Lettres in the behalfe of my brother to Master Gerard, so have I nowe an humble sute vnto yow, wherof I crave such acceptatyon as your Ladyship may convenyently admytt/ which ys thys that where my brother (havyng hys eldest daughter aboute the age of xviiij yeares) ys very desyrous for a tyme to place hyr in servyce with yowr Ladyship (by reason of such honorable report as he hath receyved of yow)/ so yt woold please your Ladyship the rather at my humble sute to receyve hyr into your servyce/ trustyng at yf you vouchsave so to doo, neyther the condytyons of the Mayden, neyther hyr parentes mayntenance of hyr in your servyce shall move your Ladyship forthynke your curtesye in thys behalfe./ Thus commendyng my humble servyce both to my Lord and your Ladyship I shall not cease to pray for your glad prosperytye./ ffrom Grymston haule in Suffolke thys xijth Iuly./ 1570./

Your Ladyshypps to commaunde

Rychard Cavendysse

Diplomatic view of Letter 012

[Address Leaf]

To the Ryghthonorable hys synguler
good Lady the Countes of
Shrewsburye.

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

X.d.428

(12) [Item number, hand: archivist]

53 [Old foliation/item number, hand: archivist]

69 [Old foliation/item number, hand: archivist]

Pleaseth yt yo^r Ladyshypp that as I acknowledge my selfe wholly
indettyd vnto yow, as well for yo^r woonted curtesye to my selfe,
as yo^r honorable *Lettres* in the behalfe of my brother to M^r Gerard,
so have I nowe an humble sute vnto yow, wherof I crave such
acceptatyon as yo^r L. may convenyently admytt/ w^{ch} ys thys that
where my brother (havyng hys eldest daughter aboute the age of xvij
yeres) ys very desyrous for a tyme to place hyr in servyce wth yowr
L. (by reason of such honorable report as he hath receyved of yow)/
so yt woold please yo^r L. the rather at my humble sute to receyve
hyr into yo^r servyce/ trustyng at yf you vouchsave so to doo, neyther the condytyons of the
Mayden, neyther hyr parentes mayntenance
of hyr in yo^r servyce shall move yo^r L. forthynke yo^r curtesye
in thys behalfe./ Thus commending my humble servyce both to
my Lord and yo^r L. I shall not cease to pray for yo^r glad
prosperytee./ ffrom Grymston haule in Suffolke thys xijth
Iuly./ 1570./

[significant space]

Yo^r Ladyshypps to commaunde

Rychard Cavendysshe

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