

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 008 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=008>)

From: Grace Cavendish (Dowbridge, Derbyshire);

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: 27 June [1589]

Summary: Grace Cavendish (née Talbot) writes to her stepmother and mother-in-law, Bess (countess of Shrewsbury), to thank her for forwarding a letter which Henry Cavendish, Grace's husband and Bess's son, wrote during his travels to Constantinople.

Archive: Folger Shakespeare Library, Cavendish-Talbot MSS, X.d.428 (8)

Delivery status: to Bess, sent

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

Hands: Grace Cavendish | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 008: Grace Cavendish

Grace Cavendish (née Talbot; b.1560?) was one of the daughters of George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, from his first marriage to Gertrude (née Manners; d.1566). Following her father's marriage to Bess (and to serve their interests), on 9 February 1568 Grace was married to Bess's eldest son and heir Henry Cavendish. That is to say, Grace was married to her step-brother, at which point Bess became both her step-mother and mother-in-law. (At the same time, her brother Gilbert married Bess's daughter Mary.) At the time of her 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'. While none of these marital problems are apparent in the single letter we have from Grace to Bess in 1589 (ID 008), we do gain a glimpse of ongoing difficulties in Grace's spoken words of complaint reported in the letter from Edward Talbot to Bess in 1604 (ID 063).

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People Associated with Letter 008: 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 008

To my Lady

I most humbly thanke your Ladyship for your leter from Master Cavendyssh whych I haue returned by thys berer it is the greatest comfort can cum to me to hear he is so well passed so far; of hys longe and dangerus iurnay: at the end wher of I trust in god he is by thys tym; for by anott he left wyth me at hys goinge of hys days iurnays: wherin he hath altered but on day as apper reth by hys letters he was at constantinople the xx of thys month; from whych I besech; almyghty god send hym short and safe return to your Ladyshyps comfort and myn chefly; thus most humbly craueinge pardon for my bould wrytinge thus much vnto your honor of hys iurney whych cannot on day escape me wythout account of hys iurnays I humbly take my leue wyth lyke desier of your Ladyship's dayly blessinge and my prayer for your Ladyship's helth and comfort from dowbridge houlth thys 27 of Iune

your ladyship's most humble and obedyent daughte[r]

Grace Cavendysshe

Diplomatic view of Letter 008

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

Grace Wife of Hen: Cavendish

at y.t time son & heir to S.^r W.^m Caven= dish of Chatsworth who died without

Issue. She was ye 3.^d & youngest D.^r of

Geo. E of Shrewsbury, by his 1 Wife

Gertrude, D.^r of Tho Manners E.

of Rutland. [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To my Lady

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

X.d.428

(8) [Item number, hand: archivist]

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

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

I most humbly thanke your La: for your leter from M^r
Cavendyssh whych I haue returned by thys berer
it is the greatest comfort can cum to me to hear
he is so well passed so far; of hys s^e longe and
dangerus iurnay: at the end wher of I trust
in god he is by thys tym; for by anott he left
wyth me at hys goinge of hys days iurnays:
wherin he hath altered but on day as apper
reth by hys letters he was at constantinople
the xx of thys month; from whych I besech;
almighty god send hym short and safe r
return to your Ladyshyps comfort and myn
chefly; thus most humbly craueinge pardon
for my bould wrytinge thus much vnto your
honor of hys is iurney whych cannot on day
escape me wythout account of hys iurnays
I humbly take my leue wyth lyke desier of

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your La dayly blessinge and my prayer
for your La: helth and comfort from
dowbridge houlth thys 27 of Iune

[significant space]

your la: most humble
and obedyent daughte...
§

[significant space]

Grace Cavendysse

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