

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 015 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=015>)

From: Lady Frances Cobham (Cobham, Kent);

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: 21 October [1564]

Summary: Lady Frances Cobham writes to tell Bess (Lady St. Loe) about the expected delivery of her child. She sends sewing materials: a 'bassted' sleeve (that is, tacked to the right width) and material for a 'caylle' (that is, a caul, a kind of netted cap or head-dress worn by women) following a recent courtly fashion.

Archive: Folger Shakespeare Library, Cavendish-Talbot MSS, X.d.428 (16)

Delivery status: to Bess, sent

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

Hands: Lady Frances Cobham | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 015: Lady Frances Cobham

Frances Brooke (née Newton), Lady Cobham (b. after 1530, d.1592), was a member of Elizabeth I's privy chamber for most of her reign and became Baroness Cobham in February 1560 on her marriage to William Brooke, tenth Baron Cobham. She was a politically active courtier, close to the queen and had good relations with Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, as well as the Cecils (Frances's daughter married Robert Cecil in 1589). She was also a long-standing friend of Bess, perhaps owing somewhat to their both being members of Elizabeth I's original privy chamber in 1559. Their friendship is mentioned by Thomas Morgan, an agent of Mary Queen of Scots, who in 1586 warned the Scots Queen to be wary of Frances because of her bond with Bess (the Scots Queen had become Bess's notorious enemy by this point) (Salisbury MSS, 3.137). The friendship was one that extended across decades.

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People Associated with Letter 015: 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.

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Normalised view of Letter 015

to mi good cosyn the ladi seantelo

i haue openyd your letter mi good ladi to me uery wellcom as ffrome her i loue dearely and most desyr to see/ i wlode yow had as good caus to com to ley in thes partes as i colde wyshe and thene yow shulde be as grete a stranger in darbi shere as now yow ar in london/ i am now at cobham wher i intende god wyllynge to be browght a bed i loke a weke before sente anderous day/ i pray praye for me i know i shall sped much the better for a good womanes prayer/ i haue bassted the scleue of that wydenes that wyll best contente the quyne/ the lenth all wrott wyllbe shourte innoufthe/ i know the wyllbe well leked the ar fyne and strange/ i haue heyr sent yow inclosed the brede and lenthe of a caylle for the quyne of the same worke for the shyrte wyth the scleues/ yow may sendyt up unmade/ for that the faysshynge ys much altered senes yow were heyr x yarde ys innoufe for the roauffes of the neke and handes/ thys wyshynge to yow and yowrs as to mi selef i leue wyth mi louynge and fryndely commendatyons to your selfe wyth the lyke to yow frome mi lorde/ frome cobham the xxi of october//

bi your louynge cosyn and assuered frynde euer

F Cobham

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Diplomatic view of Letter 015

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

Eliz: Wife of W.^m Brook
Lord Cobham Letter to Lady
Saintloo her Cousin, afterwards
Countess of Shrewsbury, in Q. Eliz
time. Curious. [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

to mi good cosyn the
ladi seantelo

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

X.d.428
(16) [Item number, hand: archivist]
171 [Old foliation/item number, hand: archivist]
127 [Old foliation/item number, hand: archivist]

i haue openyd your letter mi good ladi to me uery
wellcom as ffrome her i loue dearely and most desyr
to see/ i wlude yow had as good caus to com to ley in
thes partes as i colde wyshe and thene yow shulde
be as grete a stranger in in darbi shere as now yow
ar in london/ i am now at cobham wher i intende
god wyllynge to be browght a bed i loke a weke before
sente anderous day/ i pray e praye for me i know
i shall sped much the better for a good womanes
prayer/ i haue bassted the scleue of that wydenes
that wyll best contente the quyne/ the lenth all
wrott wyllbe shourte innoufthe/ i know the wyllbe
well leked the ar fyne and strange/ i haue heyr
sent yow inclosed the brede and lenthe of a caylle
for the quyne of the same worke for the shyrte wyth
the scleues/ yow may sendyt up unmade/ for that
the faysshynys much altered senes yow were
heyr x yarde ys innoufe for the roauffes of

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the neke and handes/ thys wyshynge to yow
and yowrs as to mi selef i leue wyt mi louynge
and fryndely commendatyons to your selfe wyt the
lyke to yow frome mi lorde/ frome cobham the xxi of
october//

bi your louynge cosyn and assuered frynde euer

F Cobham

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