

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 040 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=040>)

From: Elizabeth Leake;

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: [c. 1565]

Summary: Elizabeth Leake asks her daughter, Bess (Lady St. Loe), to lend her son (Bess's brother, James Hardwick) money for the acquisition of land and thanks Bess for kindness shown towards her half-sister, Margaret (née Leche).

Archive: Folger Shakespeare Library, Cavendish-Talbot MSS, X.d.428 (48)

Delivery status: to Bess, sent

Letter features: Seal intact - no. Ribbon/floss – no. Letter packet - tuck and fold

Hands: unknown scribe | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 040: Elizabeth Leake

Elizabeth Leake (of Hasland, Derbyshire) was Bess's mother. Her parents were Thomas Leek of Hasland (younger son of William Leek and Catherine, daughter of Sir Thomas Chaworth) and his wife Margaret (daughter and heir of William Fox of Chesterfield). She had two siblings: a brother, John, and a sister, Bess's aunt, Marcella, married to George Lynacre. She had eight children: a son and four daughters, who included Bess, from her first marriage, to John Hardwick (d. 1528), and three more daughters from her second marriage, to Ralph Leche. We know she drank ale at Chatsworth House in November 1552 (Chatsworth House, Hardwick MS 1, Bess and Sir William Cavendish's Account Book) and on 22 April 1556 she stood as godmother to Bess's youngest daughter Mary Cavendish. In letters from the 1560s we find her at Chatsworth with her daughters and grandchildren: she writes to her daughter, Bess's half-sister, Elizabeth Leche that the pox has compelled her to send her grandchildren to Chatsworth and, around the same time, James Crompe reports to his mistress Bess that her mother, aunt Lynacre and 'all the children' are well at Chatsworth (Folger X.d.428 (47) and ID 018).

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People Associated with Letter 040: 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 040

To my ryght hertilie beloued doghttar ladie sayntlo geue thesse wyth spide

Good doghtter I make me hertye commendations vnto you [S]endinge you my Delie blessinge good doghtter I hertilie [t]hanke you of your great candnesse shude to my [do]ghtter margrett which shie can neuer be abell to ...eseue butt throwe preyer doghtter I perseue that my son stands in greate nide of moneye for pementes he had to make doghtter seing my sun and you cannot a grie of the price of the land at awdewarke it were muche to my comforth if you wolde be so good to lende so muche moneye as you thinke it to be worthe and if the money be not paide be the daye a poyntede the land to be full boght and solde to you doghtter if you be mynded to bye me sones land in holl and I a suer you it is verye good land and better then awdewarke and the tenentes hansum men and the land stands vppon coule which I thinke is verye good for you doghtter if my sone sell this land it were muche to my comforth that you sholde haue it before anie other therfor I hertilie preye you good doghtter sum what to streyne your selfe for my sake doghtter the truthe is that sir francis leake is in hand with my sone to bye land in sonderye places which wolde be great discomforthe to me that he sholde haue it good doghtter if you wyll helpe me sone or bargine for anie money he must haue it be twyhte this and sondeye or eles it wyll doo smale peasure thus fare you well this present wedensdaye

be your louinge mother

Elizabeth liche

Diplomatic view of Letter 040

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

Two Letters of Eliz: Leache or

Leake Widow of Tho Leak of Lowsland

Esq.^r & [deletion] ^{^grand^} mother to Lady St. Low

[Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To ryg ^{^my^} ryght hertilie

beloued doghttar ladie

sayntlo geue thesse

ȳ wyth spide

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

X.d.428

(48) [Item number, hand: archivist]

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

23 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

Good doghtter I make me hertye commendations vnto you

...endinge you my Delie blessinge good doghtter I hertilie

...hanke you of your great candnesse shude to my

...ghtter margrett w^{ch} shie can neuer be abell to

...eseue butt throwe preyer doghtter I perseue that

my son stands in greate nide of moneye for pementes

he had to make doghtter seing ^{^my sun and^} you cannot a grie of the
price of the land at awdewarke it were muche to my

comforth if you wolde be so good to lende so muche

moneye as you thinke it to be worthe and if the

money be not paide be the daye a poyntede the land to be

^{^full^} boght and solde to you doghtter if you be mynded to bye

me sones land in holl and I a suer you it is ve^r ye good

^{^land^} and better then awdewarke and the tenentes hansum

men and the land stands vppon coule w^{ch} I thinke is

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verye good for you doghtter if my sone sell this land it
were muche to my comforth that you sholde haue it before
anie other therfor I hertilie preye you good doghtter
sum what to stre a yne your selfe for my sake doghtter
the truthe is that sir francis leake is in hand wth my
sone to bye land in sonderye places w^{ch} wolde be great
discomforthe to me that he sholde haue it good doghtter
if you wyll helpe me sone or ba^r gine w^{ch} - ^for^ anie money
he must haue it be twyخته this and sondeye or eles
it wyll doo smale peasure thus fare you well
this present wedensdaye

be your louinge mother

Elizabeth liche

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