

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 039 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=039>)

From: Francis Leake (Sutton, Surrey);

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: 8 April [c. 1578?]

Summary: Francis Leake writes to Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) concerning his acquisition of land from the earl of Leicester and related title disputes.

Archive: Folger Shakespeare Library, Cavendish-Talbot MSS, X.d.428 (46)

Delivery status: to Bess, sent

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

Hands: unknown scribe | archivist | Francis Leake |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 039: Francis Leake

Francis Leake was a relation of Bess's through her mother, Elizabeth Leake (although the exact details of the connection are not known).

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People Associated with Letter 039: 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 039

To the Ryght honorable my very good Ladye the Countes of Shrewsburye

May yt please your Right honorable Ladyshyppe I haue receyved your Lettre tuchynge the Landes I latelye purchased of therle of Lecestre, sometymes parcell of the Monasterye of Croxton/ which dyd coste me xvjli in redye money as Master Iohn dudley knoweth to whose handes I payde the money for the Erles vse; over & besydes xx ...yde for makynge thassurances/ the tytle conserneth nothinge my Coseyne George foliambe but that yt pleaseth hys wyffe to deale with that neyther he nor she hath anye wayes to deale withall/ neyther is he of any kinred vnto you/ ytt ys myne enheritance and he hath no tytle therto, for yf eny haue ynterest therin yt ys a bastard which my late Coseyne Godfrey ffoliam dyd geve his landes in Wygley vnto/ Wherfor I byesyche your Lad...pe to haue consyderacon to my lawfull interest/ I am not wyllinge to ... althoghe the bastarde would... geve me fortye powndes in redye mon[y] for ytt/ I dyd not purchas... vnto that end/ nor I do not knowe any reason to Leade me for to ... eny landes and sell ytt agayne for thalffe money I payed your Ladyship ... to greatt experyens in the lyke/ but I do assewer myselff my Coseyn ... ffoliambes wyffe hath so enformed you/ vnto whome I besyche ... geve no further creditt then she wurthelye deservethe/ ffor the mat[er] betwene Master Pierponnt & me, I fynde he hath prevented me for [I was] fully reysolved to haue compleyned vnto you of his open wron[g] dysordered ...nge/ Assewrynge your Ladyship I haue donered me to do dyvers tymes, as myth dyverse others of as good callyng to haue his tytle dewlye consydered eyther by our cown[sil] or other wayes, I wyll hartely thanke hym for the same, so as ytt maybe ordered before michaelmes next, And that in the meane tyme my pore tenantes mey quyetye enioye theyre comons, for god defend that I showld so assent to satysfye hys gredynes in Leaving my possession that a great nomber of pore men aswell hys tenantes as my tenantes and many freholders there haue quyetye enioyed from the begynnynge/ And for myselff I haue had it xxxiiij yere withowte contradycsyon So do prey god longe to contynewe your happye dayes in health with encrease of honowre./ Sutton thys viijth of Apryll

att your comandment

Fr Leek

Diplomatic view of Letter 039

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

S.^f Francis Leak of Sutton
made a Bar.^t in 1611 Lord Deincourt
1624, & Earl of Scarsdale 1645, &
died at Sutton, in 1655. a great
Royalist, & after y^e Kings Murder went
in Sack cloth, exercised himself in Acts
of Piety, made his Grave many years
before he died, in w^{ch} he laid him down
every Friday.

[Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To the Ryght honorable my
very good Ladye the
Countes of Shrewsburye

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

X.d.428

(46)

[Item number, hand: archivist]

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

May yt please yo^r Right honorable Ladyshyppe I haue receyved yo^r Lettre
tuchynge the Landes I latelye purchased of therle of Lecestre, sometymes
parcell of the Monasterye of Croxton/ w^{ch} dyd coste me xvj^{li} in redye money
as M^r Iohn dudley knoweth to whose handes I payde the money for the
Erles vse; over & besydes xx ...yde for makynge thassurances/ the
tytle conserneth nothings my Coseyne George foliambe but that yt pleaseth
hys wyffe to deale wth that neyther he nor she hath anye wayes to deale
wth all/ neyther is he of any kinred vnto you/ ytt ys myne enheritance
and he hath no tytle therto, for yf eny haue ynterest therein yt ys a
bastard w^{ch} my late Coseyne Godfrey ffoliam dyd geve his landes in Wygley

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vnto/ Wherfor I byesyche yo^r Lad...pe to haue consyderacon to my
lawfull interest/ I am not wyllinge to ... althoghe the bastarde would...
geve me fortye powndes in redye mon... for ytt/ I dyd not purchas...
vnto that end/ nor I do not knowe any reason to Leade me for to ...
eny landes and sell ytt agayne for thalffe money I payed yo^r L ...
to greatt experyens in the lyke/ but I do assewer myselff my Coseyn ...
ffoliambes wyffe s s^e hath so enformed you/ vnto whome I besyeche ...
geve no further creditt then she wurthelye deservethe/ ffor the mat...
betwene M^r Pierponnt & me, I fynde he hath prevented me for ...
fully reysolved to haue compleyned vnto you of his open wron...
dysordered ...nge/ Assewrynge yo^r LL I haue done ...
...red me to do dyvers tymes, as my ...
...th dyverse others of as good callyng ...
... to haue his tyle dewlye consydered eyther by o^r
cown... or other wayes, I wyll h^ar hartely thanke hym
for the same, so as ytt meybe ordered before michaelmes next, And that
in the meane tyme my pore tenants mey quyetye enioye theyre
comons, for god defend that I showld so assent to satisfye hys gredynes
in Leaving my possession that a great nomber of pore men aswell hys
tenantes as my tenants and many freholders there haue quyetye
enjoyed from the begynnyng/ And for myselff I haue had it xxxiiij yere
wth owte contradycsyon So do prey god longe to contynewe yo^r happye
dayes in health wth encrease of honowre./ Sutton thys viijth of Apryll

att yo^r comandment

~ Fr Leek
§

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