

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 051 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=051>)**

From: Mary Percy, countess of Northumberland (Broomhall (Bromehall), Yorkshire);

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: 27 May [1555?]

Summary: Mary Percy, widow of Henry, sixth earl of Northumberland, writes to Bess (Lady Cavendish) about land and cattle disputes involving the letter bearer and one of Bess's servants.

Archive: Folger Shakespeare Library, Cavendish-Talbot MSS, X.d.428 (62)

Delivery status: to Bess, sent

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

Hands: unknown scribe | archivist | Mary Percy, countess of Northumberland |

Version: 1.0

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## **People Associated with Letter 051: Mary Percy, countess of Northumberland**

Mary Percy (née Talbot), countess of Northumberland, was the daughter of George Talbot, fourth earl of Shrewsbury, and therefore aunt to Bess's fourth husband, also George Talbot (sixth earl of Shrewsbury). She married Henry Algernon Percy, sixth earl of Northumberland, in 1524; however, their marriage was not a happy one and the earl left her with no provision after his death in 1537.

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## People Associated with Letter 051: 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 051

To the Ryght worshipfull and my verey Lovyng frende my Ladie Cauendache yeue this/

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After my verrey hertie comendacons vnto yowr Ladiship and whereas one of your sarvantes hathe taken & pounded certane cattell of one nycholas Alessons the beyrer herof furthe of a percell of grounde whiche he hathe taken of one Iohn cowper be the lycence of mayster wennesley your Ladyship's Stuourd at pentryche wherefore these shall be most hertyly to desyre yow to favorable vnto the said nycholas alesson that he may haue his cattell delyvered furthe of the pounce and that he may occupye the ground wherof he hathe layd furthe his money for And the Rather at this my Request And this I byd yow moost hertylye fare well from Bromehall the xxvijth day of Maij

Your Lovynge frende

M Northumberland

## Diplomatic view of Letter 051

[Address Leaf]

### [Address Leaf: Notes]

M Northumberland. Quere. Who this

was, as I can find no Earl of y<sup>t</sup> Name. [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To the Ryght worshipfull  
and my verey Lovyng  
frende my Ladie Caudache  
yeue this/

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[Letter Text]

### [Letter Text: Notes]

X.d.428

(62) [Item number, hand: archivist]

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

After my verrey hertie comendacons vnto yowr Ladiship  
and whereas one of yo<sup>r</sup> sarvantes hathe taken <sup>^&^</sup> pounded  
certane cattell of one nycholas Alessons the beyrer  
herof furthe of a percell of grounde w<sup>che</sup> he  
hathe taken of one Iohn cowper be the lycence  
of mayster wennesley yo<sup>r</sup> L Stuourd at  
pentryche wherefore these shall be most  
hertyly to desyre yow to favorable vnto the  
said nycholas alesson that he may haue his  
cattell delyvered furthe of the ponde and that  
he may occupye the ground wherof he hathe  
layd furthe his money for And the Rather  
at this my Request And this I byd yow  
moost hertylye fare well from Bromehall  
the xxvij<sup>th</sup> day of Maij

Yo<sup>r</sup> Lovyng frende

M Northumberland

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