The Devonshire Collection Archives

GB 2495 DF11

Papers of Elizabeth Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire (1757-1824)

([1782] – c.1820)

Catalogued by Louise Clarke; revised by Fran Baker, Chatsworth House Trust

Administrative/Biographical History:

Elizabeth Christiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, society hostess and patron of the arts, was born Elizabeth Hervey in 1757 at Horringer, Suffolk. Her parents were Frederick Augustus Hervey, 4th Earl of Bristol (1730-1803), and Elizabeth Davers (1730-1800). She was known for most her life as Lady Elizabeth Foster, Bess to her friends.

She spent her formative years in semi-poverty abroad and in Ireland, where her father was the Bishop of Derry. In 1776, she married John Thomas Foster (b. 1747), with whom she had two sons, Frederick (b. 1777) and Augustus (b. 1780). The marriage was an unhappy one and the couple separated in 1780; Foster retained custody of their sons, and did not allow the boys to see their mother for 14 years.

In 1782, while lodging with her aunt in Bath, she met William Cavendish, 5th Duke of Devonshire, and his wife Georgiana. After only a few weeks of acquaintance she moved in with them. There was much speculation about the nature of their relationship. Foster certainly became mistress of the 5th Duke, and the closest friend and confidante of Duchess Georgiana.

In December 1784 she became pregnant with the Duke's child. Using her health as a pretext, she went to Naples and gave birth in secret to Caroline Rosalie on 16 August 1785. Subsequently travelling to Provence in France, she persuaded the elderly Comte St Jules to accept paternity of Caroline, and returned to Britain in July 1876.

She gave birth to a second child, Augustus Clifford, in France on 26 May 1788. There was some doubt about whether the Duke of Devonshire was the father of this child as Foster was also having an affair at this time with Charles Lennox, 8th Duke of Richmond.

In 1790, Bess succeeded in having her children brought from France to live in the nursery with the three legitimate Cavendish children.

She accompanied the Duchess of Devonshire in her exile to the continent in the early 1790s, where the Duchess gave birth to Eliza Courtney, her child by Charles Grey, in 1792.

The Duchess died in 1806, making Foster her executrix and sole guardian of her papers. To the outrage of all, Foster married the Duke of Devonshire on 19 October 1809. She was widowed a mere two years later and began living by herself in Piccadilly Terrace, London. Styling herself Elizabeth, Duchess of Devonshire, she entertained in a regal manner and made several new friends, including Lord Byron.

In 1816 Duchess Elizabeth moved permanently to Rome and began a new career as a liberal patron of the arts, and of archaeologists in particular. Her final years were spent in the company of Cardinal Hercule Consalvi, secretary of state to the Vatican, who shared her passion for the arts. She funded the excavation of the Forum for 11 years, and the city of Rome recognized her efforts with a medal struck in her honour. She died in Rome on 30 March 1824, and her body was interred in the Cavendish vault in Derby Cathedral.

Elizabeth Foster was a witness and participant in Whig politics between 1784 and 1809 and, as Elizabeth Cavendish, an active patron of Rome's classical heritage between 1813 and 1824. Her diaries, although rewritten several times, provide valuable insight into the period. An acknowledged beauty, she was irresistible to a variety of men and women. She was frequently labelled artificial and duplicitous, but she retained the love and trust of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, for twenty-five years, and afterwards the unceasing companionship of Cardinal Consalvi.

Principal source: Amanda Foreman, 'Cavendish [née Hervey; other married name Foster], Elizabeth Christiana, duchess of Devonshire (1757-1824)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). By permission of Oxford University Press.

Custodial History:
Most of the material in the collection was created or accumulated by Elizabeth Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire. Its exact archival history is unknown.

Source of Acquisition:
The material was extant in The Devonshire Collection prior to 1 August 2011.

Scope and Content:
This small collection consists of personal papers of Elizabeth Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire. It should be viewed alongside letters sent to and from the Duchess which are catalogued as part of the 5th and 6th Dukes' correspondence series (GB 2495 CS5 and CS6).

The correspondence in the collection includes a small number of letters sent to Elizabeth Cavendish by Lady Sydney Morgan, c.1820; verses sent by Lady Caroline Ponsonby to Elizabeth Cavendish's daughter, Caroline St Jules; and a letter thought to have been sent to Elizabeth Cavendish by Henry Richard Fox, 3rd Lord Holland.

There are eight volumes of later, typescript, transcripts of journals kept by Elizabeth Foster dating from 1782-1799, before her marriage to the Duke of Devonshire.

Finally, there is a single music programme for a performance that was dedicated to Elizabeth Cavendish.

System of Arrangement:
The archive has been arranged into the following series:

DF11/1: Correspondence of Elizabeth Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, c.1800-c.1820
DF11/2: Transcripts of journals kept by Elizabeth Cavendish (originals dated 1782-1799)
DF11/3: Other Papers of Elizabeth Cavendish

Conditions Governing Access:
The collection is open for consultation. Access to the archive at Chatsworth is by appointment only. For more information please visit: https://www.chatsworth.org/art-archives/access-the-collection/archives-and-works-of-art/.

Conditions Governing Reproduction:

Copies of material in the archive can be supplied for private study and personal research purposes only, depending on the condition of the documents.

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Extent:
1 box

Language of Material:
English

Preferred Citation:
Devonshire MSS, Chatsworth, DF11/1/1 etc.

Related Material:
Other papers of or relating to Elizabeth Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, can be found in: the correspondence of William Cavendish, 5th Duke of Devonshire, and his wife Georgiana (GB 2495 CS5); and the correspondence of William Spencer Cavendish, 6th Duke of Devonshire (GB 2495 CS6).

DF11/1	***Correspondence of Elizabeth Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire*** **[c.1800-1820]**		***Series***
	This series contains a small quantity of correspondence of Elizabeth Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire. It should be viewed alongside letters sent to and from the Duchess which are catalogued as part of the CS5 and CS6 series. 11 letters		
DF11/1/1	Letters to Elizabeth Cavendish, Dowager Duchess of Devonshire from Lady Sydney Morgan A small number of letters sent to Elizabeth Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, by Lady Sydney Morgan c.1820. The letters are undated, and the attributed date based on context. 9 letters	c.1820	Item
DF11/1/2	Letter sent to [Elizabeth Cavendish], Duchess of Devonshire by [Henry Richard Fox, 3rd Lord Holland] The letter is undated by year. 1 letter	16 October [c.1810]	Item
DF11/1/3	Verses sent by [Lady Caroline Ponsonby] to [Caroline] St Jules 1 item	[c.1800]	Item
DF11/2	***Transcripts of Journals of Lady Elizabeth Foster***	***[originals 1782 – 1799]***	***Series***
	This series contains later typescript transcripts of the journals of Elizabeth Foster, later Elizabeth Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, for the dates 1782-1799. The transcripts held at Chatsworth are a partial selection of Lady Elizabeth's journals as the covering dates for all the journals is 1782-1824, with gaps between 1784-1788 and 1794-1795. 8 volumes		
DF11/2/1	Transcript of the Journal of Lady Elizabeth Foster 1 volume	29 December 1782 - August 1783	Item
DF11/2/2	Transcript of the Journal of Lady Elizabeth Foster 2 volumes	21 August 1783 - February 1784	Item
DF11/2/3	Transcript of the Journal of Lady Elizabeth Foster	29 November 1788 - 2 January 1790	Item

1 volume

DF11/2/4	Transcript of the Journal of Lady Elizabeth Foster 1 volume	3 January 1790 - 19 August 1790	Item
DF11/2/5	Transcript of the Journal of Lady Elizabeth Foster 1 volume	19 August 1790 - 22 September 1792	Item
DF11/2/6	Transcript of the Journal of Lady Elizabeth Foster 1 volume	21 October 1792 - 19 August 1793	Item
DF11/2/7	Transcript of the Journal of Lady Elizabeth Foster 1 volume	29 October 1793 - 10 September 1799	Item

DF11/3 Other Papers of Elizabeth Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire 1819 Series

This series contains only one item: a music programme for a performance that was dedicated to the Duchess.

1 item

DF11/3/1	Pamphlet for a music performance dedicated to Elizabeth Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire Programme for a performance that was dedicated to the Duchess. 1 item	1819	Item