

Account of Purley on Thames

Frances Anne Hawes letters to the Duke of Newcastle

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Since I did a talk on Frances, Viscountess Vane I have come across this letter from her to the Duke of Newcastle. The letter is in the manuscript section of the British Library. It is best to take a deep breath, and then to read it at a gallop. as the use of the full stop is a grammatical device seldom used by Frances.

My lord

I hope your Grace will pardon this Liberty; since it is so long since I had the honor of Seeing or Consulting with you, and the last time I incur 'd your Graces displeasure, I am feafful of making an application to you, but the motive will plead Excuse on this Occasion, as it is for my Father; who is above fourscore years of age, to be Continued the Allowance he has had for some years from the favour of the Duke of Newcastle. & which ceases on Lord Townsends (? this name is barely readable) Death, without his Grace Continues to him his favour and Protection, which I apprehend a word or line from Your Grace would greatly Contribute towards; I protest (as bad an opinion as your Grace may have of me) if I had Where withal to make it up to my father I would not be this troublesome or Impertinent to take this Liberty, but as I have it not, I could not refrain any method I could think of that could promote my Father's Interest, as a shock at these years might be his Death, and as he has a young family to provide for; I can make no other Apologies to your Grace for this presumption nor could I hope for your Graces favour and forgiveness but from the Goodness of your Heart.

I have the honor to be my Lord with the greatest Respect and regard Your Graces Most Obedient & Most Humble Servant Argyle Street

Thursday 14 August 1760 F.Vane

The writing is badly faded but I was able to make out most of it and her signature is very firm and decisive. The Duke of Newcastle was Prime Minister at the time so it would seem proper for her to address her appeal to him. But much more interesting is that he is also the maternal great-uncle of her husband, Viscount Vane. And in *The Memoirs of a Lady of Quality* it is stated that he directly intervened to have the protection of the Queen of Hungary, that she enjoyed while in Brussels, withdrawn. This happened some thirteen years earlier and is also referred to in a letter that she wrote at the time. It is therefore hardly surprising that she is apprehensive in asking Newcastle for his help.

The children she refers to are the ones that were baptised in Purley between 1743 and 1748 so their ages ranged, at the time of the above letter, from 12 to 17. In the *Memoirs* she mentioned that her father at one point could not help her with a small loan because 'he now has a young family.' It is interesting that in a letter about 16 years later she should use the same phrase.

I was puzzled by the phrase 'if I had Where withal to make it up to my father' but I think that she means if she had enough funds to make up the shortfall that he may suffer.

The letter is also interesting because there is some uncertainty about when her father, Francis Hawes, was born. Given the date of the letter as 1760 and the fact that he then was 'above fourscore years of age' means that he must have been born some time before 1680. She was obviously worried as the next day she again wrote:-

Lady Vane's Compliments to the Duke of Newcastle and begs he will do her the honour to let her know if he received a letter from her yesterday, she took the Liberty of writing to his Grace about her Father. F Vane

I do not know whether Newcastle helped her father but I suspect that he probably ignored her letters.

Ben Viljoen

