

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 101 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=101>)

From: Bess of Hardwick;

To: Francis Whitfield;

Date: 20 October [c. 1560]

Summary: Bess (Lady St. Loe) writes to her servant Francis Whitfield with instructions for the battlement at Chatsworth. A postscript asks him to 'tell Bess Knolles and Frank that I say if they play their virginals that they are good girls'.

Archive: Folger Shakespeare Library, Cavendish-Talbot MSS, X.d.428 (84)

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

Letter features: papered seal, embossed Ribbon/floss – no. Letter packet - tuck and fold

Hands: Bess of Hardwick | Francis Whitfield | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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Bess of Hardwick's Letters

People Associated with Letter 101: 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

Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

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.

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

People Associated with Letter 101: Francis Whitfield

Francis Whitfield was one of Bess's servants from the time of her marriage to Sir William Cavendish (1508-1557), and following.

Other letters associated with Francis Whitfield:

14 November [1552] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=99>)

Normalised view of Letter 101

To my saruante francys wyttfelde

my ladis letter for my nagges

francy I wyll nott now haue the pourche boched seyng I haue bene att so greatt charges I thynke yet nott materyall yf the batelmente for the sydes be made thys yere or no for I am sure the batelmente moust be sett oupe after the porche be couered and yf yet be so then wyll yett be dreye and the battylmente may be sett oup att any tyme. the batylment for the teryte wolde deface the wolfe pourche for yett ys nether of one begenes moldyng nor of one stone. yett of bothe do I lyke batter the creste beyng of the same stone. I am contented you shall haue the nage comende me to my aunte lynycar fare well francys yn haste as a peryrs the xx of october

your mystrys

E Seyntlo

tyll besse knolles and franke thatt I saye yf they pley ther uergenalles that the are good gerles

I thynke Iames Crompe ys att houll

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Diplomatic view of Letter 101

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

Elizabeth Lady Saintlow (D.^r of John Hardwick
of Hardwick Esq.^{er}) afterwards Countess of
Shrewsbury. She Built Chatsworth, Hardwick,
& Oldcotes, in Derbyshire. [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To my saruante
francys wyttfelde

my ladis letter for my nagges

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

X.d.428

(84) [Item number, hand: archivist]

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

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

francy I wyll nott now haue the
pourche boched seyng I haue bene
att so greatt charges I thynke yet
nott materyall yf the batelmente
for the sydes be made thys
yere or no for I am sure the
batelmente moust be sett oupe after
the porche be couered and yf yet
be so then wyll yett be dreye and
the battylmente be may be sett
oup att any tyme. the batylment
for the teryte wolde deface the
wolfe pourche for yett ^{ys} nether of
one begenes moldynge nor of one
stone. yett of bothe do I lyke
batter the creste beyng of the

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

same stone. I am contented you
shall haue the nage comende
me to my aunte lynycar fare
well francys yn haste as a
perys the xx of october

your mystrys

E Seyntlo

tyll besse knolles and franke thatt
I saye yf they pley ther uergenalles
that the are good gerles

I thynke Iames Crompe ys
att or houll

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