

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 113 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=113>)**

From: Bess of Hardwick ([Bromham, Bedfordshire?]);

To: Christian Thynne; Sir John Thynne, Senior;

Date: 25 April 1560

Summary: Bess (Lady St. Loe) writes to Sir John Thynne, builder of Longleat, and his first wife Christian (née Gresham), asking them to spare her 'your plasterer' the one who 'flowered your hall' (that is, decorated with ornate plaster-mould cornicing, decked flowers). Bess requests that either he be sent directly to her in London, or that he report to James Crompe at Chatsworth.

Archive: Longleat House, Thynne Papers, Thynne Book 57 pp. 129-30

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

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

Hands: unknown scribe | archivist | Bess of Hardwick |

Version: 1.0

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## People Associated with Letter 113: 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.

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## **People Associated with Letter 113: Christian Thynne**

Christian Thynne (née Gresham) was the daughter of Sir Richard Gresham, mercer and mayor of London, and his wife, Audrey (née Lynne; d.1522). In 1549, she married Sir John Thynne (1512/13-1580), builder of Longleat. The couple had three sons and three daughters.

## People Associated with Letter 113: Sir John Thynne, Senior

Sir John Thynne (1512/13-1580), was the eldest son of Thomas Thynne and his wife, Margaret (née Eynns). He entered the service of Edward Seymour, Viscount Beauchamp, in 1536 and served as his steward until 1552. Thynne also became a member of the Mercers' Company in London and allied himself with the most powerful mercer family by his marriage to Christian, daughter of Sir Richard Gresham. He married for a second time in 1566 or 1567 - to Dorothy Wroughton - and had a number of children with both wives. Thynne's connections brought him wealth, which enabled him to commence what he is perhaps best known for - his building projects, namely Longleat House in Wiltshire (one of the most important examples of Tudor architecture). Bess was directly influenced by Thynne in her own building projects, evidenced by her correspondence with him.

Other letters associated with Sir John Thynne, Senior:

15 March [1550s?] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=200>)

31 March [1550s] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=198>)

[February 1558] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=111>)

25 February 1558 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=112>)

27 August 1567 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=114>)

## Normalised view of Letter 113

To the right worshipfull and my verey good frende Sir Iohn Thyn Knight

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After my verey hertie commendacions vnto you good Sir Iohn Thyn and to my Lady, Thies are even so to desire you to spare me your plaisterer that flowred your halle whom I wolde gladly have furthwith to be sent either to my howse at Chattesworthe whiche way Master Hyde can instructe hym Or elles to London that I may sende hym downe with all spede my selfe and what enterteiment you thinke convenient he shall have besides his charges in going thither Praing you to aduertise me by this bearer whether I may truste to hym or not And by whiche way he will goo that at his commyng he may goo in hande with suche workes as I shall appointe by my lettres And if he doo goo presently the next way Let hym enquire for my servaunte Iames Crompe who shall appointe hym what is there to be donne I vnderstande also by Lacy that Master Crouche hath very skilfull men for that purpose I pray you yf your man can not be had to spede me yet some oother where wherin you shall doo me greate pleasure for that my howse is moche imperfit in that respecte and lacke mete men for the same and thus bolde of yours Take my leave of you for this tyme ffrom Bromham the xxvth day of Aprill 1560

your assuryed frende

Elyzabeth. Seyntlo

I pray you send your latter of ansore to lacy to brysto and so with my comendations to you and my lady ones agayne I bede you fare well

## Diplomatic view of Letter 113

[Address Leaf]

To the right worshipfull  
and my verey good frende  
S<sup>r</sup> Iohn Thyn Knight

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[Letter Text]

### [Letter Text: Notes]

129 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

Cavendish, also St Lo ~~Cavendish also Saint Lo~~ [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

After my verey hertie commendacions vnto you good S<sup>r</sup> Iohn  
Thyn and to my Lady, Thies are even so to desire you  
to spare me your <sup>^</sup>plasterer<sup>^</sup> mason that flowred your halle whom  
I wolde gladly have furthwith to be sent either to my  
howse at Chattesworthe whiche way M<sup>r</sup> Hyde can instructe  
hym Or elles to London that I may sende hym downe  
with all spede my selfe and what enterteyment you  
thinke convenient he shall have besides his charges in  
going thither Praing you to aduertise me by this  
bearer whether I may truste to hym or not And by  
whiche way he will goo that at his commyng he may  
goo in hande with suche workes as I shall appointe  
by my *lettres* And if he doo goo presently the next way  
Let hym enquire for my servaunte Iames Crompe  
who shall appointe hym what is there to be donne  
I vnderstande also by Lacy that M<sup>r</sup> Crouche hath  
very skilfull men for that purpose I pray you yf  
your man can not be had to spede me yet some  
oother where wherin you shall doo me greate pleasure  
for that my howse is moche imperfit in that respecte and  
lacke mete men for the same and thus bolde of yo<sup>rs</sup>  
Take my leave of you for this tyme ffrom Bromham  
the xxv<sup>th</sup> day of Aprill 1560

your assuryed frende

# Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

Elyzabeth. Cauendyssh <sup>^Seyntlo^</sup>

I pray you send your latter of ansore  
to lacy to brysto and yf and so w<sup>t</sup>  
my comen to you and my lady  
ones agayne I bede you fare  
well

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