

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 116 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=116>)

From: Bess of Hardwick (Chancery Lane, London, Greater London);

To: George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury;

Date: 26 August [1584]

Summary: Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) writes to her husband, George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, amidst marital discord, beseeching him to 'give me liberty to come unto you', and claiming 'how I haue deserved your indignation is invisible to me'.

Archive: Longleat House, Talbot Papers, MS 2, fols 267r-68v

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

Letter features: Seal intact - no. Ribbon/floss – no. Letter packet - accordion

Hands: Scribe A | archivist | Nathaniel Johnston | Bess of Hardwick |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 116: 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 116: George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury

George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury (c.1522-90), was the eldest and only surviving son of Francis Talbot, fifth earl of Shrewsbury (1500-60), and his first wife, Mary (d.1538). In 1538, at the age of sixteen, he took up the title of Lord Talbot, until he succeeded to the earldom after his father's death twenty-two years later. In 1539 he married his first wife, Gertrude (née Manners; d.1566/7), with whom he had seven children: four daughters and three sons. Early on he acquired a number of honours stemming from his family's well-established prominence in the north: knight bachelor (1547), member of the council of the north (1549), knight of the Garter (1561), and lord lieutenant of Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire (1565). Following the death of his first wife, he married Bess, then the widow of William St Loe (c.1520-65?), in 1567. At this point Shrewsbury was one of the wealthiest men in England, derived from his estates and also business adventuring in farming, shipping, coal-mining, glassworks and lead extraction and production. Soon after his marriage to Bess, however, he was appointed keeper of Mary Queen of Scots, a custodianship he would hold from 1569-84. Shrewsbury prided himself on his loyalty to Elizabeth I, but he soon found her reluctant to provide sufficient diet money to keep Mary and her retinue. This, in addition to the monies needed for expensive building projects (at Worksop and Chatsworth), and his eldest son Gilbert's debts led to serious financial anxiety for Shrewsbury. Furthermore, he was forced to remain with Mary at all times and was therefore losing his place at court. As Shrewsbury's stresses grew and he became increasingly irascible, his marriage with Bess broke down spectacularly amid quarrelling to do with family finances and the allocation of estates. Scandal and mutual bad-mouthing soon became very public and the queen herself intervened, eventually dictating that Shrewsbury pay Bess a regular income (from 1587), while the two lived apart. Shrewsbury was an ill man for many years and suffered with a severe rheumatic condition, what he referred to as 'gout', which contributed to his terrible handwriting. He died in the company of his mistress, Elinor Bretton, at Sheffield Manor, on 18 November 1590, after being administered a mercury cure. His son Gilbert Talbot succeeded him as the seventh earl of Shrewsbury.

Other letters associated with George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury:

28 June [1568?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=64>)

[December 1568] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=65>)

13 December [1568] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=66>)

[1569?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=67>)

[1570s?] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=184>)

[c. 1570] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=9>)

[1570] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=178>)

[1570s] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=203>)

[c. 1570] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=68>)

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4 November 1570 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=226>)
4 November 1570 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=171>)
[c. 1571] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=70>)
[c. 1571] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=69>)
[1574?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=72>)
[1574?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=71>)
8 August 1574 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=73>)
[c. 1575?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=76>)
[c. 1575] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=75>)
[1575-7] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=245>)
7 June 1575 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=74>)
June 19 [c. 1575?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=77>)
20 February 1575/6 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=165>)
19 November [1576?] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=115>)
[1577] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=183>)
[1577] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=182>)
18 May [1577?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=109>)
4 June 1577 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=221>)
25 June 1577 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=172>)
14 May 1578 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=188>)
[30 June 1578?] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=83>)
2 August 1578 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=197>)
28 December 1578 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=193>)
13 February 1578/9 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=166>)
28 February 1578/9 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=174>)
22 June 1579 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=189>)
17 January 1579/80 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=190>)
13 May 1580 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=194>)
21 June 1580 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=78>)
11 September 1580 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=154>)
10 October 1580 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=79>)
8 February 1581/2 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=195>)
4 August 1584 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=119>)

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14 October [1585] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=229>)

23 October 1585 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=117>)

9 June 1586 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=176>)

4 August 1586 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=202>)

[April 1587] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=186>)

Normalised view of Letter 116

To my Lord my husband the earle of Shrouesbury./

My Lord the innocency of my owne harte ys such and my desyar so infenyt to procuer your good conceat as I wyll Leauē noe ways vnsought to attayne your fauor, which Longe you haue restrayned from me./ and in all dutys of a wyffe I beceach you not to rune with asetteled condemnatyone of me for my harte can not accuse yt, sh... a gaynst you, nether ys ther any thyngē alleged agaynst me that dyssarueth seperatyone./ my Lord how I haue rendred your happynes euery ways weare superfluvs to wryte, for I take god to wettnys my Lyffe should evar haue ben adventured for you, and my harte notwithstanding what I haue suffered thyrstes after your prosperety, and desyers nothyngē so much as to haue your Loue./ alas my Lord. what benyfits yt you to seake my troble and desolatyon, or wherin doth yt sarue you to Lett me Lyue thus absent from you, yf you wyll saye because now you Loue me not I know my Lord that hatred must growe of somthyngē, and how I haue deserved your yndignatyon, ys vnvisible to mes yf you wyll say I or myne haue touched you in dutye of alleadgeence, fyrst I proteast ther ys no such thyngē, and what can you haue more then that her magesty Iustefyed you and vs, the Lords of the connsyll I and my sonnes cleare you or how can yt in reason be thought I should forgett my selfe so greatly being your wyffe, and my daughter wyffe to your eldest sonne./ My Lord I beceache you geue me Leberly to come vnto you, I doubt not but in euery partecular so to satsfyue you as my innocency wyll manyfestly appeare and then I trust you wyll quiett my harte receuinge me into your fauor, for you only may doe yt./ so I end beceaching the almyghty god to prosper you, and blesse me with hys grace and your fauor./// from my Loging in chanserye Lane thys xxvjth of august.//

your humble wyffe most faythfull

EShrouesbury

Diplomatic view of Letter 116

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

Aug 26.

[Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

1584

(according to

David Durant

the Old Hall

Bleashy

Nottingham

28.8.76) [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To my Lord my husband the
earle of Shrouesbury./

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

267 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

317 [Old foliation, hand: Nathaniel Johnston]

X [hand: Nathaniel Johnston]

~~Copied~~

?1584 (according to Althorp MSS under

Miss Lloyd's Memoires of the

Countess of Shrewsbury

See David Durant's letter

to BMA of 28.8.76) [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

My Lord the innocency of my owne harte ys such and my desyar so infenynt to procuer
your good conceat as I wyll Leaue noe ways vnsought to attayne your fauor, w^{ch}
Longe you haue restrayned from me./ and in all dutys of a wyffe I beceach you
not to rune wth asetteled condemnatyone of me for my harte can not accuse yt, sh...
a gaynst you, nether ys ther any thyngge alleged agaynst me that dyssarueth
seperatyone./ my Lord how I haue rendred your happynes euery ways weare
superfluvys to wryte, for I take god to wettnys my Lyffe should evar haue ben
adventured for you, and my harte notwth standing what I haue suffered
thyrstes after your prosperety, and desyers nothyngge so much as to haue your

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Loue./ alas my Lord. what benyfits yt you to seake my troble and desolatyon, or wherin doth yt sarue you to Lett me Lyue thus absent from you, yf you wyll saye because now you Loue me not I know my Lord that hatred must growe of somthyng, and how I haue deserved your yndignatyon, ys vnvisible to mes yf you wyll say I or myne haue touched you in dutye of alleadgeence, fyrst I proteast ther ys no such thyng, and what can you haue more then that her mag:^{ty} Iustefyed you and vs, the Lords of the connsyll and I and my sonnes cleare you or how can yt in reason be thought I should forgett my selfe so greatly being your wyffe, and my daughter wyffe to your eldest sonne./ My Lord I beceache you geue me Leberly to come vnto you, I doubt not but in euery partecular so to satysfye you as my innocency wyll manyfestly appeare and then I trust you wyll quiett my harte receuinge me into your fauor, for you only may doe yt./ so I end beceaching the almyghty god to prosper you, and blesse me wth hys grace and your fauor./// from my Loging in chanserye Lane thys xxvjth of august.//

your humble wyffe most
faythfull

EShrouesbury

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[Next Page: Notes]

268 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

319 [Old foliation, hand: Nathaniel Johnston]

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