

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 117 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=117>)

From: George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury (Sheffield, Yorkshire);

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: 23 October 1585

Summary: George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, writes an angry letter to his wife, Bess (countess of Shrewsbury), amidst their marital discord, with accusations that 'there cannot be any wife more forgetful of her duty & less careful to please her husband than you have been'.

Archive: Longleat House, Talbot Papers, MS 1, fols 194r-95v

Delivery status: to Bess, not sent (i.e. a draft or contemporary copy)

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

Hands: unknown scribe | Nathaniel Johnston | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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Bess of Hardwick's Letters

People Associated with Letter 117: 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>)

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

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>)

Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

26 August [1584] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=116>)
14 October [1585] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=229>)
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>)

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

People Associated with Letter 117: 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

Other letters associated with Sheffield, Yorkshire

27 Aug 1567 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=114>)
3 May 1571 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=29>)
8 Aug 1574 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=73>)
7 Jun 1575 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=74>)
19 Jun [c.1575?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=77>)
[Oct 1575?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=218>)
13 Oct 1575 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=217>)
29 Mar 1576 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=103>)
27 Jun [1576?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=110>)
18 May [1577?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=109>)
1 Aug 1577 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=85>)
17 Mar 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=120>)
14 May 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=188>)
29 Dec 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=123>)
17 Jan 1580 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=190>)
13 May 1580 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=194>)
21 Jun 1580 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=78>)
31 Jan 1581 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=228>)
31 Jan 1581 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=227>)
28 Nov 1581 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=104>)
28 Jan 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=144>)
28 Jan 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=162>)
8 Feb 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=195>)
6 May 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=146>)
6 May 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=145>)
10 Jun 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=105>)

Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

24 Nov [1582?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=204>)

7 Feb 1583 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=148>)

4 Aug 1584 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=119>)

19 Dec 1590 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=231>)

14 Apr [1600?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=2>)

Normalised view of Letter 117

The Copie of my lettre to my wief the xxiiijth of October 1585

They offences & faltes that you haue committed against me which noe good wief would doe, wher admonitions sufficient to all men to be advised in their mariage, & though you desire to be chardged particulerlie to thende you maie knowe your faltes I nede not to expresse them they are manifest to the worlde and yf I would hidd them your behaviour and conditions hath laid them open. ther can not be anie wief more forgetfull of her dutie & lese carfull to please her husbände than you haue bene, nor anie more bounden nor haue receiued greater benefittes by her husbände then you. the particuleres I will not expresse but doe leave them to the time till that god will send you his grace to mak you confesse them in that I loued you & did manie good thinges for you and was loth that the world should see your behavioure it maie be Iudged thus I woulde still so haue continued if you had not sought all meanes both at home & abroad to offend me ther nedes not manie wordes, I haue sene throwlie into your devises & desires your vnsatiable gredie appetite did bewraye you. your owne living at my handes could not content you, nor yet a great part of mine, which for my quietnes I could haue bene contented to haue gaven you but this was short of the mark you shott at & yet do. your faire wordes are mo bete for me, they haue they showe & trust they haue had though the appeare butifull yet they are mixed with a hidden poison. but assure yourselfe I will avoide so near as I can my owne harme. I am & wilbe pleased with hir Majestes ordre (though it semed harde) for you best knowe that your living was never ment to your children during my lief, but seing it fals out so, you must be likewise contented with that for your maintenance & pament of your debtes that her Majestie hath assigned which is a great portion & none of your callinge hath the like. You chardg me with an vntrute that I doe enter into your livinge meaninge your childrens to it semethe. I content my self with her Majestes order & intendeth to holde th vCli lande by yeare during our lives. you wer euer in miserie but yet sufficientlie furnished to buy landes for your children. Marie youu nowe wante the helpe & so shall do that you had to paie for it I in force not your children to sell land but yat your wilfulnes & their pride be such as cannot be mainteyned what without salle of your lande. I do not reioyse in it nor assuredlie I am not sore for it ./ / I mervell to see your earnestnes, as you pretend by your lettres to be with me. you can not forget ther was bookes drawn by our counsell and about the agreement I did met your children before the Lord Chancellour & the Lord of leicester and all your griefes were their recited, aswell the release of my sute commensed against your Children & sheruntes for my goodes & sclanderous Rumors spred by them of me in divers partes of this realme, for whom noe good wif would once opon her mouth. as for our cohabitation with having all your living at my disposition during the same and divers other thinges as by the bookes appereth to which I answered them as I will answere you, that if ever I thinke good to tak you againe (for you went awaie voluntarilie not turned

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

awaie by me as you saie, (and when I sent for you, you said I should send twise for you, or you would come,) I will haue both together with out any exceptid either of significacion of your part or of mine, But herof you make noe recitall in your lettres that you are contented that I shall haue the disposition of your lyvinge. but assure your self the one without theother I will neuer haue. they Malicious mindes that your children doe beare to me I cannot awaie withall it can not be but you must favoure your children, therfor howe dangerous it wher of me to be compassear about with you & them when after me you shall leape into my seate, the most ignorant maie Iudge and here I ende protesting before the Almightye god that I doe not this for anie malice to you or anie partie, but that in my ould age, I do fear my securitie & quietnes & would not haue it troubled during my lief./ Sheffield this xxiiijth of october 1585

Diplomatic view of Letter 117

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

E of Shrewsbury to
the Contess 1585
20 Oct [Later editorial note, hand: Nathaniel Johnston]
1585. Oct 23. [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

The Copie of my *lettre* to
my wief the xxiiijth of
October 1585
§

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

194 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]
385 [Old foliation, hand: Nathaniel Johnston]
XX [hand: Nathaniel Johnston]
X [(left-hand margin), hand: Nathaniel Johnston]

They offences & faltes that yo^u haue committed against me w^{ch} noe good
wief ~~would~~ would doe, wher admonitions sufficient to all
men to be advised in their mariage, & though you desire to be
chardged pticulerlie to thende yo^u maie knowe your faltes
I nede not to expresse them they are manifest to the worlde
and yf I would hidd them your behaviour and conditions hath
laid them open. ther can not be anie wief more forgetfull
of her dutie & lese carfull to please her husbande than yo^u
haue bene, nor anie more bounden nor haue receiued great^r
benefittes by her husbande then yo^u. the *particuleres* I will
not expresse but doe leave them to the time till that god
will send yo^u his grace to mak yo^u confesse them in that I loued
yo^u & did manie good thinges for yo^u and was loth that the world
should see your behavioure it maie be Iudged thus I woulde
still so haue continued if yo^u had not sought all meanes
both at home & abroade to offend me ther nedes not manie

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

wordes, I haue sene throwlie into your devises & desires
your vnsatiable gredie appetite did bewraye yo^u. your owne
living at my handes could not content yo^u, nor yet a great
part of mine, w^{ch} for my quietnes I could haue bene contented
to haue gaven yo^u but this was short of the mark yo^u shott at
& yet do. your faire wordes are mo bete for me, they haue
they showe & trust they haue none had though the appeare
butifull yet they are mixed wth a hidden poison. but assure
yo^r selfe I will avoide so near as I can my owne harme. I am &
wilbe pleased wth hir Ma^{tes} ordre (though it semed harde)
for you best knowe that your living was never ment to
your children during my lief, but seing it fals out so, yo^u
must be likewise contented wth that for your maintenance
& pament of your debtes that her Ma^{tie} hath assigned
w^{ch} is a great portion & none of your callinge hath the
like. You chardg me wth an vntruthe that I doe enter into
your livinge meaninge your childrens to it semethe. I content
my self wth her Ma^{ts} order & intendeth to holde th[deletion] vC^{li}
lande by yeare during our lives. you wer euer in miserie
but yet sufficientlie furnished to buy landes for your
children. Marie yo^u nowe wante s the helpe & so shall do
that yo^u had to paie for it I in force not yo^r children
to sell land but y^t yo^r wilfulnes & their pride be
such as cannot be mainteyned what wth out salle of your
lande. I do not reioyse in it nor assuredlie I am not
sore for it ././

[page break]

I merv^{ll} to see your earnestnes, as yo^u pretend by you lettres
to be wth me. yo^u can not forget ther was bookes drawn by our
counsell and about the agrement I did met yo^r children
before the L Chancellour & the L of leicester and all
your griefes were their recited, aswell the release of
my sute commensed against yo^r Children & sheruntes for
my goodes & sclanderous Rumors spred by them of me
in divers partes of this realme, for whom noe good wif
would once opon her mouth. as for our cohabitacoⁿ wth

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

having all your living at my disposition during the
same and divers other thinges as by the bookes appereth
th to w^{ch} I answered them as I will answeare yo^u, that
if ever I thinke good to tak yo^u againe (for you went awaie
voluntarilie not turned awaie by me as yo^u saie, (and
when I sent for yo^u, yo^u said I should send twise for yo^u,
or yo^u would come,) I will haue both together wth out any
exceptid either of significacoⁿ of your part or of mine,
But herof yo^u make noe recita^l in your ~~lettres~~ *lettres* that
yo^u are contented that I shall haue the dispositioⁿ of
your lyvinge. but assure your self the one wth out
theother I will neuer haue. they Malicious mindes that
your children doe beare to me I cannot awaie wth all
it can not be but yo^u must favoure yo^{ur} children, therfor
howe dangerous it wher of me to be *compassear* about wth
yo^u & them when after me yo^u shall leape into my seate,
the most ignorant maie Iudge and here I ende *protesting*
before the Almightye god that I doe not this for anie
malice to yo^u or anie *partie*, but that in my ould age,
I do fear my securitie & quietnes & would not haue it ~
troubled during my lief./ Sheffield this xxijth of october
1585

[Overleaf]

[Overleaf: Notes]

195 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

387 [Old foliation, hand: Nathaniel Johnston]

Version: 1.0