

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 128 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=128>)

From: Bess of Hardwick (Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire);

To: Elizabeth I;

Date: 9 January 1602/3

Summary: Bess (dowager countess of Shrewsbury) writes to Elizabeth I concerning her granddaughter, Arbella Stuart's troublesome conduct. Bess asks that Arbella 'may be placed elsewhere, to learn to be more considerate', either employed as an attendant to the queen or given to someone in marriage.

Archive: Hatfield House, Cecil Papers, 135/112, fols 146r-146*v

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

Letter features: seal, red wax, embossed with Bess's arms featuring the Hardwick cross (a saltire engrailed, in chief three eglantines, surmounted by a countess's coronet) Ribbon/floss – no.

Letter packet - tuck and fold

Hands: Scribe B | unknown scribe | archivist | Bess of Hardwick |

Version: 1.0

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Bess of Hardwick's Letters

People Associated with Letter 128: 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.

People Associated with Letter 128: Elizabeth I

Elizabeth I (1533-1603), queen of England and Ireland, was the only child of King Henry VIII (1491-1547) and his second wife, Anne Boleyn (c.1500-1536). Her reign is one of the most famous in British, and indeed all of European history and, as she was in her own time, she remains an icon for that age. She succeeded to the throne after the death of her half-sister, Queen Mary, in 1558. With regard to Bess's life, the latter had recently married William St. Loe when Elizabeth became queen. In 1559, St. Loe was named captain of the guard to the queen, and in the same year Bess was appointed as a gentlewoman of the privy chamber. Bess was, however, dismissed due to the queen's anger over her alleged involvement in a clandestine marriage between Katherine Grey and Edward Seymour, earl of Hertford. Nonetheless, the two women continued to have an amiable and significant relationship throughout Elizabeth's reign - evidenced by the correspondence between them. Notably, Elizabeth served as mediator between Bess and her fourth husband, George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, during their marriage breakdown in the 1580s and even intervened on Bess's behalf.

Other letters associated with Elizabeth I:

4 June 1577 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=221>)

25 June 1577 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=172>)

17 March 1577/8 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=120>)

29 January 1602/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=129>)

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Other letters associated with Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire

- 1 Dec [c.1564] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=30>)
- 20 Jan [c.1565] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=31>)
- [1574?] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=41>)
- 3 Aug [1580s?] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=205>)
- 2 Aug 1584 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=150>)
- 4 Aug 1584 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=119>)
- 18 Feb [1591?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=233>)
- 21 Sep 1592 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=163>)
- 11 Mar 1593 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=160>)
- 19 Sep 1594 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=1>)
- 20 May 1595 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=124>)
- 27 Feb 1596 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=16>)
- 11 Aug 1597 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=46>)
- 28 Feb [1598?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=187>)
- [c.1600] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=7>)
- 2 Jun 1600 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=125>)
- 6 Oct 1600 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=126>)
- 28 Apr 1601 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=127>)
- 21 Dec 1602 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=44>)
- 18 Jan 1603 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=139>)
- 29 Jan 1603 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=129>)
- 2 Feb 1603 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=130>)
- 6 Feb 1603 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=131>)
- 21 Feb 1603 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=132>)
- 3 Mar 1603 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=134>)
- 10 Mar 1603 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=135>)

Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

- 18 Apr 1603 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=140>)
- 31 Jan 1604 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=161>)
- 12 May 1604 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=63>)
- 18 Jun 1604 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=45>)
- 4 Jul 1604 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=21>)
- 16 Dec 1605 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=242>)
- 15 Jan [1606] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=180>)
- 7 Mar 1606 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=49>)
- 13 Feb 1607 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=14>)
- 25 May [1607] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=3>)
- 22 Jun 1607 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=34>)
- 27 Jun [1607] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=4>)
- 30 Nov 1607 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=179>)
- 31 Dec 1607 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=35>)

Normalised view of Letter 128

To the Quenes most excellent Magesty

9. January 1602 Countess of Shrewsbury dowager to the Queen.

Most Gratius Souereigne./ I cannot sufficiently in words expres the infinite and great comforte I haue continually reseued by your Majesties most princely fauors to me, & now by your Majesties most gratus letter & message sent by Sir Henry Broukhorne, who will particulerly informe your Majestie of all things here./ his presisenes at his first comming to kepe the offence from me, till he had priuatly talked with Arbell did make me dobtfull yat your Majestie had som suspition in me; but when I considered your Majesties great wisdom in it, I did in my harte most humbly thank your Majestie for commaunding yat course to be taken./ These matters were vnexpected of me, being altogether ignorant of hir wayne doings, as on my saluation & allegeance to your Majestie I protest. Notwithstanding hir vanitie, I rest most certeyn of hir Loyall and dutifull mind to your Majestie/ But seing she hath bene content to here matters of any moment & not to imparte them to me, I am desirus & most humbly besech your majestie yat she may be placed elsewhere, to lerne to be more considerate, & after yat it may pleas your majestie eyther to accept of hir service about your Majesties most Royall person, or to bestoe hir in mariag which in all humilitie & dutie, I doe craue of your Majestie for I cannot now assure my self of hir, as I haue donne./ The Almightye god for euer preserue your Majestie and confounde your enemies./ from Hardwyck the ixth of Ianuary. 1602.

your Majesties/

most humble saruant and subiect.

EShrouesbury

Diplomatic view of Letter 128

[Address Leaf]

To the Quenes most
excellent Magesty
§

9. Januar: 1602
Countess of Shrewsbury dowager
to the Queen.

[Overleaf]

[Overleaf: Notes]

146* [Foliation, hand: archivist]

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

112 [Item number, hand: archivist]

146 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

Most Gratius Souereigne./ I cannot sufficiently in words
expres the infinite and great comferte I haue continually
reseued by your Ma.^{ties} most princely fauors to me, & now
by your Ma.^{ties} most gratius letter & message sent by S.^r
Henry Broukhorne, who will particulerly informe your
Ma.^{tie} of all things here./ his presisenes at his first comming
to kepe the offence from me, till he had priuatly talked wth
Arbell did make me dobtfull y^t your Ma.^{tie} had som suspicion
in me; but when I considered your Ma.^{ties} great wisdom in
it, I did in my harte most humbly thank your Ma.^{tie} for
commaunding y^t course to be taken./ These matters were ~
vnexpected of me, being altogether ignorant of hir vayne ~
doings, as on my saluation & allegeance to your Ma.^{tie} I protest.
Notwth standing hir vanitie, I rest most certeyn of hir ~
Loyall and dutifull mind to your Ma.^{tie} / But seing she hath
bene content to here matters of any moment & not to imparte

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

them to me, I am desirus & most humbly besech your ma.^{tie} y^t
she may be placed elsewhere, to lerne to be more considerate,
& after yt it may pleas your ma.^{tie} eyther to accept of hir service
about your Ma.^{ties} most Royall person, or to bestoe hir in mariag
w^{ch} in all humilitie & dutie, I doe craue of your Ma.^{tie} for I
cannot now assure my self of hir, as I haue donne./

The Almightye god for euer preserue your Ma.^{tie} and confounde
your enemies./ from Hardwyck the ixth of Ianuary.

^1602.^

your Ma.^{ties} /

most humble saruant and
subiect.

EShrouesbury

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