

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 130 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=130>)**

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

To: Sir Robert Cecil; Sir John Stanhope;

Date: 2 February 1602/3

Summary: Bess (dowager countess of Shrewsbury) writes to Sir John Stanhope and Sir Robert Cecil, concerning her granddaughter, Arbella Stuart's declaration to do with secret dealings for a match between her and the earl of Hertford's grandson (see letter ID 141). Bess is confident Hertford himself had no knowledge of the match. Touching Arbella's new (and fictional) lover admitted to in her declaration, Bess writes that 'these strange courses are wonderful to me & cannot but greatly grieve me'. She thinks a commandment from the queen may be the only way of getting Arbella to tell the whole truth.

Archive: Hatfield House, Cecil Papers, 135/129, fols 169-70

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

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

Hands: Sir Robert Cecil | archivist | Scribe C | Scribe B | Bess of Hardwick |

Version: 1.0

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# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

## People Associated with Letter 130: 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.

## People Associated with Letter 130: Sir Robert Cecil

Robert Cecil, first earl of Salisbury (1563-1612), leading administrator, politician and courtier, was the only son of William Cecil, Lord Burghley. Like his father, he held a number of important positions, including secretary of state, lord high steward to Queen Anne of Denmark (King James I's wife), lord treasurer and master of the wards.

Other letters associated with Sir Robert Cecil:

20 May 1595 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=124>)

2 June 1600 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=125>)

6 October 1600 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=126>)

28 April 1601 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=127>)

[January] 1602/3 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=136>)

18 January 1602/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=139>)

6 February 1602/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=131>)

21 February 1602/3 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=133>)

21 February 1602/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=132>)

3 March 1602/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=134>)

13 April 1603 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=140>)

## People Associated with Letter 130: Sir John Stanhope

John Stanhope, first Baron Stanhope (c.1540-1621), appears as a courtier at the Elizabethan court in the late 1570s. His first wife Mary (née Knolles) died in 1567 and her inheritance reverted to her sister, which may have put Stanhope in financial straits. In 1589 he married Margaret Mackwilliams (c.1565-1640), a relation of William Cecil, Lord Burghley. At the same time, he also became associated with the Cecils and was appointed master of the posts in 1590. Bess's son-in-law/stepson Gilbert Talbot, seventh earl of Shrewsbury, was thwarted by Stanhope's influence at court during his feud with the Stanhopes of Nottinghamshire. Stanhope continued to rise under Elizabeth I and was knighted and appointed treasurer of the chamber in 1596, and he became vice-chamberlain of the household and a privy councillor in 1601 (posts he remained in at the accession of James I).

Other letters associated with Sir John Stanhope:

[January] 1602/3 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=136>)

21 February 1602/3 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=133>)

3 March 1602/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=134>)

# 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>)
- 9 Jan 1603 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=128>)
- 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>)
- 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>)

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- 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 130

January 1602 The Countess of Shrewsbury to Master ViceChamberlain and me/

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I vnderstand hir Majesties gracious pleasure by your letters, and rest infinitely bounde to hir Highnes for hir Majesties gracious favor to me./ I will followe your directions so nere as I can./ To my great greif I see with what vanytie, base and lewde instrumentes this inconsiderat yong woman hath ben abused, as by danbridge and others not vnknowne to you, whoe bare hir in hande for my Lord of Hartfords grandchilde./ I protest before the lyving god, I think his Lordship as cleyr from this practize, as they that never harde of hir./ some of the plotters hereof by vndoing hir, thought to bring me to my end with greif, yf not by violence, as (vppon good groundes) I think, and not vaynly./ lately I suspected she had some other like matter in hand, whereof I advertized hir Majestie./ since then, I have still perswaded hir to manyfest all to hir Highnes, and to crave pardon. but I coulde not prevayle, neyther learne more, then I formerly advertized vntill the receipt of your letter, which according to hir Highnes pleasure I shoed hir to make hir looke into hir great follies, and to se that hir Majesties pleasure was she shoulde impart to me any matter of practize what soever./ Your letter together with my earnest perswasions prevayled so farr, as that she hath sett downe with hir owne hand this declaration fraught with vanytie./ such as it is I have sent it hereinclosed, but I coulde not by any possible meanes prevayle with hir to sett downe the matter playnly, as I desired she woulde in fewe lynes./ These straunge courses ar wonderfull to me & can not but greatly greive me to se howe wickedly she hath ben abused./ yf I can learne more I shall advertize, but I thinke it must be some streyt Commaundement to hir from hir Majestie to declare the truthe & all circumstaunces otherwise I doubt she will not, she protestes nothing shall force hir to yt, but I think she wilbe better advised vppon newe Commaundment, seing she hath ben brought to sett downe somuch alreddie which is more then I loked for./ vppon these circumstaunces, you in your wisdomes maye have some Coniecture whoe the partie ys. by what meanes she hath ben wrought./ theyr malice to me was so great, that they respected not hir vndoing, but what should I complayne of theyr malice when they forgett theyr dutie so greatly to hir Majestie. What truth there is in this newe matter I knowe not./ I have fownde hir to swarve somuch from truth, and so vaynly led in the first practize that I can not give any credit to hir./ yt maye be the matter is not so farr proceeded as she makes showe, and that it is but a practize as the former was, but I can not but doubt the worst./ I have often heretofore in tyme of infection restrayned resort from my house (as at this present the Cuntrie hereabouts is infected with agues, smale poxe & mesells and the plauge not farr ofe, which pretence of restaynt I tooke.) but I see yt is increased by some lewde and idle persons, or rather by this vnadvised yong womans letters./ I have not had in my howse above too persons more then my ordinary howsholde, and those but for three or foure dayes./ I was more carefull and somewhat more precise in looking to the safetie of my house for that I was tolde in playne

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termes she coulde goe awaye at hir pleasure and agaynst my will, which I made sure she shoulde not./ These newe matters faling out, maye make some alteration of hir Highnes pleasure for hir staye here./ in a straunge place she can not have those meanes of the sudden to send & here, but what it shall please hir Majestie to Commaunde me, to the vttermost of my power, I will doe my best service, though it be to the shortning of my dayes./ I have auncient gentlewomen in my house which ar much with hir, and gentlemen and others of good suffytientie./ by hir owne servantes she hath Conveyed & received letters & hath corrupted some of myne./ I presently mean to part with myne to give example to the rest./ Even to the last hower of my lyfe, I shall think my self happie to doe any acceptable service to hir Majestie whose happie and blessed Raigne, the Almightye, long Continewe and ever prosper./ And so wishing to you, all honor and happines, I will take my leave./ ffrom my poore house Hardwick this second of ffebruarie 1602./

your euer assured louing frend

EShrouesbury

## Diplomatic view of Letter 130

[Address Leaf]

Ian: 1602  
The confession  
of Owen Tydd.<sup>f</sup>  
The Countess of  
Shrewsbury to  
M<sup>f</sup> ViceCh: and me/

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[Overleaf]

### [Overleaf: Notes]

170 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

[Letter Text]

### [Letter Text: Notes]

129 [Item Number, hand: archivist]

169 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

I vnderstand hir Ma.<sup>ties</sup> gracious pleasure by your letters, and rest infinitely bounde to hir Highnes for hir Ma:<sup>ties</sup> gracious favor to me./ I will followe your directions so nere as I can./ To my great greif I see w<sup>th</sup> what vanytie, base and lewde instrumentes this inconsiderat yong woman hath ben abused, as by danbridge and others not vnknowne to you, whoe bare hir in hande for my Lo: of Hartfords grandchilde./ I protest before the lyving god, I think his Lo:<sup>p</sup> as cleyr from this ~ practize, as they that never harde of hir./ some of the plotters hereof by vndoing hir, thought to bring me to my end w<sup>th</sup> greif, yf not by violence, as (vppon good groundes) I think, and not vaynly./ lately I suspected she had some other like matter in hand, whereof I advertized hir Ma:<sup>tie</sup> ./ since then, I have still *perswaded* hir to ~ manyfest all to hir Highnes, and to crave *pardon*. but I coulde not prevayle, neyther learne more, then I formerly advertized vntill the receipt of yo.<sup>r</sup> letter, w<sup>ch</sup> according to hir Highnes pleasure I shoed hir to make hir looke into hir great follies, and to se that hir Ma:<sup>ties</sup> pleasure was she shoulde *impart* to me any matter of practize what soever./ Your letter together w<sup>th</sup> my earnest *perswasions* prevayled so farr, as that she hath sett downe w<sup>th</sup> hir owne hand this declaration fraught w<sup>th</sup> vanytie./ ~ such as it is I have sent <sup>^it^</sup> hereinclosed, but I coulde not by any possible meanes p<sup>f</sup> vayne w<sup>th</sup> hir to sett downe the matter playnly, as I desired she woulde in fewe lynes./ Theise

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your euer assured louing frend

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