

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 134** (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=134>)

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

To: Sir Robert Cecil; Sir John Stanhope;

Date: 3 March 1602/3

Summary: Bess (dowager countess of Shrewsbury) writes to Sir John Stanhope and Sir Robert Cecil following the queen's agent, Sir Henry Brouncker's visit to interrogate Bess's granddaughter, Arbella Stuart. The latter now refuses to name her supposed lover and threatens to 'perform her vow' if she is not allowed to leave Hardwick. Bess supports her removal, hoping that 'the change of place will work some alteration in her'; also writing that a few more weeks of this 'will make an end of me'.

Archive: Hatfield House, Cecil Papers, 92/1 [unfoliated]

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 C | unknown scribe | archivist | Scribe B | Bess of Hardwick |

Version: 1.0

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## People Associated with Letter 134: 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 134: 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>)

2 February 1602/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=130>)

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>)

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

## People Associated with Letter 134: 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>)

2 February 1602/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=130>)

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

# 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>)  
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>)  
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>)

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

## Normalised view of Letter 134

To the Right honorable Sir Iohn Stanhope Knight ViceChamberlen and Sir Robert Cecill Knight  
Principall Secretarie to hir Majestie/

1602 March .3. Countess of Shrewsburye Dowager to Master Vicechamberlen and my Master

---

Maye it please you./ Sir Henry Brouncker will make relation of all that hath passed here./ which  
maye ease you of reading/ and keepe me from wryting of a long discourse, of that which to  
my infinite greif I finde./ yt is not vnknowne to you what earnest and importunat suite, my  
vnfortunate Arbell hath made for Sir Henry Brounckers comming downe./ I was in hope she  
woulde have discovered somewhat worth his travell./ but nowe she will neyther name the partie  
to whome she hath showed to be so affectionate, nor declare to Sir Henry Brouncker any matter  
of moment., spending the tyme in idle and impertinent discourses./ And though Sir Henry  
Brouncker hath left nothing vndone that might bring hir to conformytie, he coulde not in any  
sorte prevayle with hir, though she putt him in hope from tyme to tyme that she woulde name  
the partie./ yf it had lyen aswell in my power to have made all thinges playne as I had a desire to  
further Sir Henry Brounckers service., it would have ben less trouble to him and he shoulde not  
have departed with such vncertenties./ This is the fruit of them that have labored to withdrawe  
hir naturall affection from me, and to perswade hir to all theise vanyties./ they little respected  
hir vndoing, so they might overthrowe me with greif./ sone after Sir Henry Brounckers departure  
hence, I loke she will fale into some such extremytie of making of willfull vowes as she did  
lately./ she sayde before Sir Henry Brouncker that yf she had not ben suffred then to remove  
hence, she woulde have performed hir vowe./ and the like I daylie doubt she maye doe vpon  
any toye she will take discontentment at./ And therefore I most earnestly beseech you both to  
be a mean to hir gracious Majestie for hir speedie remove./ yt maye be the chaunge of place will  
worke some alteration in hir./ Sir Henry Brouncker can testefie howe carefull I am to keep hir  
quyet till I maye vnderstand further hir Majesties pleasure./ she most vaynely hath prefixed a  
daye to Sir Henry Brouncker for hir remove./ both he and my self advised hir not to stand on  
dayes and tymes./ she is so wilfully bent, and there is so little reason in moste of hir doinges that  
I can not tell what to make of yt./ a fewe more such weekes as I have suffred of late will make  
an end of me./ notwithstanding yf it might be for hir Majesties service, I coulde be content to  
spende my lyfe./ but I have had overgreat triall nowe that she is brought to this extremytie, that  
hir remayne here is like to breede overgreat inconvenience which will not lye in my power to  
prevent./ I beseech the Almightye forever to prosper hir Highnes: and to send you all honor and  
happynes: and my self quyetnes in my olde dayes./ ffrom Hardwick this third of Marche .1602./

your pore frend most assured



# Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

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## Diplomatic view of Letter 134

[Address Leaf]

To the Right honorable S.<sup>r</sup> Iohn  
Stanhope Knight ViceChamberlen  
and S.<sup>r</sup> Robert Cecill Knight  
Principall Secretarie to ~  
hir Ma.<sup>tie</sup> /

1602  
March .3.  
Countess of Shrewsburye  
Dowager to M.<sup>r</sup> Vicechambe <sup>^r^</sup> len  
and my M.<sup>r</sup>

[Letter Text]

### [Letter Text: Notes]

Vol. 92 [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

1 [Item number, hand: archivist]

Maye it please you./ S.<sup>r</sup> Henry Brouncker will make relation of all that hath passed ~  
here./ w<sup>ch</sup> maye ease you of reading/ and keepe me from wryting of a long discourse,  
of that w<sup>ch</sup> to my infinite greif I finde./ yt is not vnknowne to you what earnest  
and importunat suite, my vnfortunate Arbell hath made for S.<sup>r</sup> Henry Brounckers  
comming downe./ I was in hope she woulde have discovered somewhat worth his ~  
travell./ but nowe she will neyther name the partie to whome she hath showed to be  
so affectionate, nor declare to S.<sup>r</sup> Henry Brouncker any matter of moment., spending  
the tyme in idle and impertinent discourses./ And though S.<sup>r</sup> Henry Brouncker hath  
left nothing vndone that might bring hir to conformytie, he coulde not in any  
sorte p<sup>r</sup> vayne w<sup>th</sup> hir, though she putt him in hope from tyme to tyme that she woulde  
name the partie./ yf it had lyen aswell in my power to have made all thinges playne  
as I had a desire to further S.<sup>r</sup> Henry Brounckers service., it would have ben less ~  
trouble to him and he shoulde not have departed w<sup>th</sup> such vncertenties./ This is the fruit  
of them that have labored to w<sup>th</sup> drawe hir naturall affection from me, and to perswade

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hir to all theise vanyties./ they little respected hir vndoing, so they might overthrowe me w<sup>th</sup> greif./ sone after S.<sup>r</sup> Henry Brounkers departure hence, I loke she will fale into some such extremytie of making of willfull vowes as she did lately./ she sayde before S.<sup>r</sup> Henry Brounker that yf she had not ben suffred then to remove hence, she ~ woulde have performed hir vowe./ and the like I daylie doubt she maye doe vppon any toye she will take discontentment at./ And therefore I most earnestly beseech you both to be a mean to hir gracious Ma.<sup>tie</sup> for hir speedie remove./ yt maye be the chaunge of place will worke some alteration in hir./ S.<sup>r</sup> Henry Brounker can testefie howe carefull I am to keep hir quyet till I maye vnderstand further hir Ma.<sup>ties</sup> pleasure./ she most vaynely hath p<sup>r</sup> fixed a daye to S.<sup>r</sup> Henry Brounker for hir remove./ both he and my self advised hir not to stand on dayes and tymes./ she is so wilfully bent, and there is so little reason in moste of hir doinges that I can not tell what to make of yt./ a fewe more such weekes as I have suffred of late will make an end of me./ notw<sup>th</sup> standing yf it might be for hir Ma.<sup>ties</sup> service, I coulde be content to spende my lyfe./ but I have had overgreat triall nowe that she is brought to this extremytie, that hir remayne here is like to breede overgreat inconvenience w<sup>ch</sup> will not lye in my power to p<sup>r</sup> vent./ I beseech the Almightye forever to prosper hir Highnes: and to send you all honor and happynes: and my self quyetnes in my olde dayes./ ffrom Hardwick this third of Marche .1602./

your pore frend most assured

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