

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 150** (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=150>)

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

To: William Cecil, Lord Burghley;

Date: 2 August 1584

Summary: Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) writes to William Cecil, Lord Burghley, asking him to write to her husband George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, in the hopes that he may persuade 'my lord for my better usage', as George now threatens to take Chatsworth and claim rent on lands given to her sons over a decade ago. She writes that 'I would I had not lived to this day to have my husband at these hard terms with me'.

Archive: The National Archives, State Papers Domestic, Elizabeth I, 12/172, ff 64r-65v (item 50)

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

Letter features: Seal intact - no. Ribbon/floss – no. Letter packet - tuck and fold

Hands: Scribe A | William Cecil, Lord Burghley | archivist | Bess of Hardwick |

Version: 1.0

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# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

## People Associated with Letter 150: 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 150: William Cecil, Lord Burghley

William Cecil (1521-98), Lord Burghley, was a chief minister to Queen Elizabeth I for most of her reign. Most importantly, he served as secretary of state (1558-71) and lord high treasurer (from 1571) and he was elected chancellor of Cambridge University. He was an especially constant friend to Bess's fourth husband, George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury; therefore, upon becoming the countess of Shrewsbury, Bess's own friendship with Cecil was also strengthened.

Other letters associated with William Cecil, Lord Burghley:

- 13 October 1571 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=225>)
- 14 May 1578 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=188>)
- 23 September 1578 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=121>)
- 24 October 1578 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=122>)
- 22 June 1579 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=189>)
- 28 January 1581/2 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=162>)
- 6 October 1585 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=152>)
- [13 June 1586] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=230>)
- 6 October 1587 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=156>)
- 19 December 1590 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=231>)
- 11 April 1591 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=159>)
- 21 September 1592 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=163>)
- 9 August 1593 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=108>)

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## 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>)
- 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>)
- 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>)



# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

## Normalised view of Letter 150

To the ryght honorable my senglular good Lord and frend the Lord Burgley Lord Tresurar of England./ /

2. August 1584 ye Countess of Salopp. hir hard vsage by my Lord hir husband

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my honorable good Lord and deare frend./ your Lordship hath always bound me to you by your many good fauors./ I was neuer more dystressed then now and therfore assuredly hope your Lordship of your accustomed goodnes wyll releue me, my case ys most Lamentable many ways./ I beseche your Lordship be ameane to her majesty for me. and that yt wyll please you to wryte your owne Letters of aduyse and parswagyon to my Lord for my better vsage. quyatnes ys the thyng I most desyre in thes my Lattar days, and in reason I would thenke my Lord should not myslyke yt./ your Lordship's Letters wyll doe more with hym now then any subiects els Leueing./ and therfore yf he be parswaded to vse me well, I must yelde the wholl thanks next to her majesty) to your Lordship; and rest for euer most bound to you./ my Lord now within thys few days sekis to take away chatsworth and thos pore goods and Leueing which were myne, which hym selfe assured to my ij yonger sonnes vnder hys hand and sealle about xj yeares synce in consederatyon to pay my dettes, to dyscharge such somes as my Land was charged with to my chyldryn, and to others; and for ther aduancement and mentynance; which euer synce they haue quyatly inioyed tyll within thes few days./ I would not haue my sonnes (without they be inforced) to stand in sute ageanst my Lord; yt wyll not be honorable for hym, to doe contrary to hys owne hand and sealle, and to deale so hardly with me and them, I haue not any thyng of hym at thys day to mentayne my selfe, nor haue not had thys xij monthe and more; for then he withdrew that pencyon he allowed me before for my mentynance so that I am dreuen to Leue one my chyldryn; and now he sekis to take from them that which before he assured, and comands the tenants to pay them no rente./ my Lord knows the Lawe ys with my sonnes but sayth he wyll make them consume in sute that Lettell they haue, he knowes my debte and thers are greate, and therfore the rathar he sekis to trobell them./ yf gods pleasure had ben I would I had not Leued to thys day to haue my husband at thes hard tearmes with me./ I beseche your Lordship Lycence thys bearar to declare more partecularly vnto your Lordship my most Lamentable state; and thus haueing an assured hope to reseue comfort by your Lordship's good meanes I cease from further trobeling your Lordship with my prayar for your Longe and happy Lyffe;/ from hardwecke the second of august.//

your Lordship's faythfull most dystressed sorrowfull frend

EShrouesbury

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my good Lord synce the wryting heareof I heare that my Lord meaneth to send agreat numbar to ashford (parsyll of the Land conuayd to my yongar sonnes) ther to gether the rent and certeyn Lead ore which belongeth to them./ after a xj yeares quiat poscession yt ys hard to be thrust out in thys sorte I beseche your Lordship conseder honorably and frendly of me and myne hearein./ I can not stay my chyldryn but they wyll rathar Lose ther Lyffe ther, then be so spoyled and I Leue not without feare of my Lyffe ./ my Lord ys not contente only to vse me so hardly hym selfe but hath wone my sonne hary cauendysh to deale most vnnaturally with me, for whome your Lordship knoweth my care./ who had ben Lettell worthe yf I had not obtayned apardon at her majestys hande for the which your Lordship was a specyall meane, good my Lord be an earnest meane to kepe me and myne from spoyle



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## Diplomatic view of Letter 150

[Address Leaf]

### [Address Leaf: Notes]

Domestic

2 Augt 1584 [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To the ryght honorable my  
sengiular good Lord and frend  
the L. Burgley Lord Tresurar  
of England./ /

2. August 1584

y<sup>e</sup> Countess of Salopp.

hir hard vsage

by my L. hir husband

[Overleaf]

### [Overleaf: Notes]

113 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

65 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

88 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

[Letter Text]

### [Letter Text: Notes]

50 [Item number, hand: archivist]

383 [Old item number, hand: archivist]

64 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

111 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

87 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

(50.) [Item number, hand: archivist]

112 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

my honorable good Lord and deare frend./ your L. hath always  
bound me to you by your many good fauors./ I was neuer more  
dystressed then now and therfore assuredly hope your L. of your  
accustomed goodnes wyll releue me, my case ys most Lamentable  
many ways./ I beseche your L. be ameane to her ma:<sup>ty</sup> for me.

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

and that yt wyll please you to wryte your owne Letters of aduyse  
and parswagyon to my Lord for my better vsage. quyatnes ys  
the thyng I most desyre in thes my Lattar days, and in  
reason I would thenke my L. should not myslyke yt./  
your L. Letters wyll doe more w<sup>th</sup> hym now then any subiects  
els Leueing./ and therfore yf he be parswaded to vse me  
well, I must yelde the wholl thanks next to her ma:<sup>ty</sup> ) to  
your L.; and rest for euer most bound to you./ my Lord  
now w<sup>th</sup> in thys few days sekcs to take away chatsworth  
and thos pore goods and Leueing w<sup>ch</sup> were myne, w<sup>ch</sup>  
hym selfe assured to my ij yongar sonnes vnder hys hand  
and sealle about xj yeares synce in consederatyon to pay my  
dettes, to dyscharge such somes as my Land was charged w<sup>th</sup>  
to my chyldryn, and to others; and for ther aduancement and  
mentynance; w<sup>ch</sup> euer synce they haue quyatly inioyed tyll w<sup>th</sup> in thes  
few days./ I would not haue my sonnes (w<sup>th</sup> out they be  
inforced) to stand in sute ageanst my Lord; yt wyll not be honorable  
for hym, to doe contrary to hys owne hand and sealle, and to  
deale so hardly w<sup>th</sup> me and them, I haue not any thyng of  
hym at thys day to mentayne my selfe, nor haue not had  
thys xij monthe and more; for then he w<sup>th</sup> drew that pencyon  
he allowed me before for my mentynance so that I am dreuen  
to Leue one my chyldryn; and now he sekcs to take from them  
that w<sup>ch</sup> before he assured, and comands the tenants to pay  
them no rente./ my Lord knows the Lawe ys w<sup>th</sup> my sonnes  
but sayth he wyll make them consume in sute that Lettell  
they haue, he knowes my debte and thers *[deletion]* are greate,  
and therfore the rathar he sekcs to trobell them./ yf gods  
pleasure had ben I would I had not Leued to thys day  
to haue my husband at thes hard tearmes w<sup>th</sup> me./  
I beseche your L. Lycence thys bearar to declare more

[page break]

partecularly vnto your L. my most Lamentable state; and thus  
haueing an assured hope to reseue comfort by your L. good meanes  
I cease from further trobeling your L. w<sup>th</sup> my prayar for  
your Longe and happy Lyffe;/ from hardwecke the second  
of august.//

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

your L. faythfull most dystressed  
sorrowfull frend

EShrouesbury

my good L. synce the wryting heareof I heare that my L. meaneth  
[deletion] to send agreat numbar to ashford (parsyll of the  
Land conuayd to my yongar sonnes) ther to gether the rent  
and certeyn Lead ore wch belongeth to them./ after a xj  
yeares quiat poscession yt ys hard to be [deletion] thrust out in  
thys sorte I besече your L. conseder honorably and  
frendly of me and myne hearein n ./ I can not stay ther my  
chyldryn but they wyll rathar Lose ther Lyffe ther, then be  
so spoyled and I Leue not w<sup>th</sup> out feare of my Lyffe  
[deletion]./ my Lord ys not contente only to vse me  
so hardly hym selfe but hath wone my sonne hary  
cauendysh to deale most vnnaturally w<sup>th</sup> me, for  
whome your L. knoweth my care./ who had ben Lettell  
worthe yf I had not obtayned apardon at her ma:<sup>tys</sup>  
hande for the w<sup>ch</sup> your L. was a specyall meane, good  
my Lord be an earnest meane to kepe me and myne from  
spoylle

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