

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 154** (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=154>)

From: George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury;

To: Bess of Hardwick; Gilbert Talbot;

Date: 11 September 1580

Summary: George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, writes to his wife, Bess (countess of Shrewsbury), touching her recent illness, advising her that 'sweating is the surest remedy'; and thanking her for asking after his hand, which is now much better. He also describes 'foolish letters' he has intercepted from one Bagshaw, and relates details of a spy network acting within their household(s), advising Bess to take further action.

Archive: Folger Shakespeare Library, Cavendish-Talbot MSS, X.d.428 (103)

Delivery status: to Bess, sent

Letter features: seal, red wax, embossed with a Talbot dog passant (for the earls of Shrewsbury, a play on the family name Talbot) surrounded by the motto of the Order of the Garter 'Honi soit qui mal y pense' ('Shame be to him who thinks evil of this') Ribbon/floss – no. Letter packet - irregular

Hands: George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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## People Associated with Letter 154: 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>)

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

# Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

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

23 October 1585 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=117>)

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>)

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## People Associated with Letter 154: 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 154: Gilbert Talbot

Gilbert Talbot (1552-1616) was the son of George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, and his first wife Gertrude (née Manners; d.1566). Gilbert was the second son but as his older brother Frances died in 1582, Gilbert succeeded to the earldom and became seventh earl of Shrewsbury after his father died on 18 November 1590. After his father's marriage to Bess (and to serve their interests), on 9 February 1568 Gilbert was married to Bess's daughter from her second marriage, Mary (née Cavendish). That is to say, Gilbert was married to his step-sister, at which point Bess became both his step-mother and mother-in-law. (At the same time, his sister Grace was married to Bess's eldest son Henry.) Gilbert and Mary were known for living large and eventually relations between Gilbert and his father Shrewsbury deteriorated over what Shrewsbury saw as his son and daughter-in-law's careless spending and the resultant debt. Gilbert also became notorious for his quarrelsome disposition. His relationship with his father suffered further damage when he accused him of siding with his wife Bess during their marriage breakdown. After his father's death he became engaged in litigation with Bess over the will (a legal battle which Bess won). Then, in 1594, he challenged his brother, Edward Talbot, to a duel amidst allegations of poisoning. These and other feuds were often long-lasting and expensive and left Gilbert with many enemies and debts. Gilbert had five children with Mary. His two sons, George and John, died in infancy and therefore his three daughters became joint heirs to their father's titles and great estate: Mary Herbert, countess of Pembroke (d. 1650), Elizabeth Grey, countess of Kent (1582-1651) and Aletheia Howard, countess of Arundel (b. After 1582, d. 1654).

Other letters associated with Gilbert Talbot:

- 4 November 1570 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=171>)
- 28 June 1574 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=80>)
- 14 May 1575 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=81>)
- [October 1575?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=218>)
- 13 October 1575 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=217>)
- 20 February 1575/6 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=165>)
- 28 May 1576 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=82>)
- [July 1577?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=84>)
- 1 August 1577 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=85>)
- [30 June 1578?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=83>)
- 13 February 1578/9 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=166>)
- 28 February 1578/9 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=174>)
- 31 January 1580/1 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=228>)
- 31 January 1580/1 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=227>)

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[19 September 1583?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=86>)

[February 1589] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=87>)

1 July 1589 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=88>)

28 February [1597/8?] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=187>)

[November 1604] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=177>)

15 January [1606] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=180>)

## Normalised view of Letter 154

To my sune gylbard talbott to be delyverd to my wyfe the countes of Shrewsbury

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wyf I Am sory to here you Arre nott well Recovered as yett of this deseas butt swetyng ho so is Abell to Abyde it is the sureste Remedy I thanke you for causenge gylbard to wryt to know how my hande dothe it is mych bettar I thanke god & your good wyll for wyschenge it soo/ now this last nyght I Intarcepted bagshaw found folysch lettares where in you may see his delynge & what trost he hathe putt in your daughtare./ it were good you loked to that yonge fellow goodere he is Atruste fellow lyttell to hur honor & smawle deskresyon Remenes in him/ I love nott to dele in thynges I shall have smawle thank forre butt wysch well wych is All I can doo/ besy hedds wylbe okupyed nedeles so I end that mattar it were good you loked to sutton ho is made Aspye to gyve bagshaw Intellygens/ & for bentles lettat cend for him to you & delyvar him his lettat your celfe openyd & Intarcepted by me & so show him that he may perseve you vndarsta[nd] bagshaw his Inderete delynge I have no more to say butt that I made my selfe sport At his lettares to see how onest Avergen he wold make hur so wyschenge to you as to my celfe this xj of september 1580/

Your fethfull husband

G Shrewsbury

because the Redyng may perhapp trobell you lett gylbard Rede them to you & they wyll make you the meryar to laghe At his folly

gylbard your boy cam butt this mornyg & weted At hennsfeld All nyght

## Diplomatic view of Letter 154

[Address Leaf]

To my sune gylbard  
talbott to be delyverd  
to my wyfe the  
countes of Shrewsbury

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[Letter Text]

### [Letter Text: Notes]

X.d.428

(103) [Item number, hand: archivist]

72 [Old foliation/item number, hand: archivist]

141 [Old foliation/item number, hand: archivist]

wyf I Am sory to here you Arre nott well Recovered as  
yett of *[deletion]* this desees butt swetyng *[deletion]* ho so is Abell to Abyde  
it is the sureste Remedy I thanke you for causenge gylbard  
to wryt to know how my hande dothe it is mych bettar  
I thanke god & yo<sup>r</sup> good wyll for wyschenge it soo/ now this  
last nyght I Intarcepted bagshaw found folysch lettares  
where in you may see his delynge & how what trost he  
hathe putt in yo<sup>r</sup> daughtare./ it were good you loked  
to that yonge fellow goodere he is Atruste fellow lyttell to  
hur honor & smawle deskresyon Remenes in him/ I love  
nott to dele in thynges I shall have smawle thank forre  
butt wysch well wych is All I can doo/ besy hedds wylbe  
okupyed nedeles so I end that mattar it were good  
you loked to sutton ho is made Aspye to gyve bagshaw  
Intellygens/ & for bentles lettar cend for him <sup>^to you^</sup> &  
delyvar him his lettar yo<sup>r</sup> celfe openyd & Intarcepted  
by me & so show him that he may perseve you vndarsta...  
<sup>^bagshaw^</sup> his Inderete delynge I have no more to say butt  
that I made my selfe sport At his lettares to see how  
onest Avergen he wold make hur so wyschenge  
to you as to my celfe this xj of september 1580/

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Yo<sup>r</sup> fethfull husband

G Shrewsbury

§

because the Redynge may *perhapp*  
trobell you lett gylbard Rede  
them to you & they wyll make you the  
meryar to laghe At his folly

gylbard *es* <sup>^yo<sup>r</sup></sup> ^ boy boy cam  
butt this mornyng & weted  
At *hennsfeld* All  
nyght

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