

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 163** (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=163>)

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

To: William Cecil, Lord Burghley;

Date: 21 September 1592

Summary: Bess (dowager countess of Shrewsbury) writes to William Cecil, Lord Burghley, in reply to his letter about rumoured plans to abduct Bess and her grand-daughter, Arbella Stuart. Bess assures him that she will protect Arbella to the best of her ability. She also tells him about one of Arbella's attendants, Morley, who she has dismissed due to his suspicious behaviour. The letter was penned by her son, William Cavendish, because her head hurts; however, no one else knows of the matter.

Archive: British Library, Lansdowne, MS 71, ff. 3r-4v

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

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

Hands: William Cavendish | unknown scribe | archivist | Bess of Hardwick |

Version: 1.0

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# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

## People Associated with Letter 163: 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 163: 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>)
- 2 August 1584 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=150>)
- 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>)
- 9 August 1593 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=108>)

# 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>)  
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>)

# 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>)



# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

## Normalised view of Letter 163

To the right honorable my very good Lord the Lord Burghley Lord Tresorer of Englande

21 September 1592 Countess of Shrowsberry to my Lord

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My honorable good Lord; I reseuyd your Lordships lettre on wedensday towards night bein[g] the xxth of this September, by a seruaut of master Iohn Talbotts of Irelande./ My good Lord I w[as] at the first much trobled to think yat so wicked and mischeuous practises shold be deuysed to intrap my pore Arbell & me; but I put my trust in thalmighty & wyll vse such diliagent care, as I dobt not but to preuent whatsoeuer shalbe attempted by any wycked persons against ye pore chyld./ I am most bounde to hyr majesty yat it pleased hyr to apoynte your Lordship to giue me knowledge of this wycked practyse, and I humbly thanke your Lordship for aduertisinge yt, yf any such lyke hereafter be discouered I besech your Lordship I may be forewarned./ I wyll not haue any vnknownen or suspected person to come to my howse, vppon ye least suspicion that may happen here, any wey, I shall giue aduertisement to your Lordship/ I haue litle resort to me, my howse is furnished with sufficient company, Arbell walks not late, at such tyme as she shall take ye ayre, yt shalbe nere the howse, & well attended on, She goeth not to any bodyes howse atall, I se hyr almost euery howre in the day, she lyeth in my bed chambre, yf I can be more presise then I haue bene I wylbe./ I am bound in nature to be carefull for Arbell; I find hir louing & dutyfull to me, yet hire owne good & safety is not derer to me, nor more by me regarded then to accomplysh hyr majesties pleasure, & yat which I think may be for hyr seruice./ I wold rayther wyshe many deaths then to se this or any such like wycked attempt to preuayle./ About a yere since there was on harrison a seminary yat lay at his brothers howse about a myle from hardwyck whome I thought then to haue caused to bene apprehended & to haue sent hym vp; but found he had licence for a tyme; notwithstandinge the seminary sone after went from his brothers finding how much I was discontented with his lyinge so nere me. Since my comming now into the cuntrey I had some intelligence that the same seminary was come ageyn to hys brothers howse, my sonn william Cavendysshe went thither of a sudden to make serch for hym, but cold not find hym./ I wryte thus much to your Lordship yat yf any such trayterus and naughty persons (thoroug hir majesty's clemency) be suffred to go abroad, yat they may not harbor nere my howses, wyngfeld, hardwik, nor Chattesworthe, in derbyshyre; they are the likest instruments to put a bad matter in execution./ On Morley who hath attended on Arbell & red to hyr for the space of thre yere & a half shoed to be much discontented since my retorn into ye cuntry, in saying he had lyued in hope, to haue som annuitie graunted him by Arbell out of hyr land during hys lyfe, or some lease of grounds to ye value of forty pound a yere, alledging yat he was so much damnified by leuing of ye vniuersitie; & now saw yat if she were wyllinge yet not of abylyte to make him any such assurance. I vnderstanding by dyuers

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yat Morley was so much discontented, & withall of late hauing some cause to be dobtfull of his forwardnes in religion (though I can not charge him with papistry) toke occasion to parte with him/ after he was gone from my howse and all hys stuff caried from hence, the next day he retorned ageyn, very importunate to serue, without standinge vppon any recompence, which made me more suspicious & ye wyllinger to parte with hym./ I haue an other in my howse who wyll supply Morleys place very well for ye tyme; I wyll haue those yat shalbe sufficient in lerninge, honest, & well disposed, so nere as I can./ I am inforced to vse the hand of my sonn william Cavendysshe, not beinge able to wryte so much my self for feare of bringing great payne to my hed, he only is pryuy to your Lordships letter, & neyther Arbell nor any other lyuinge, nor shalbe./ I besech your Lordship yat I may be directed from you as occasion shall fall out, to the vttermost of my vnderstanding, I haue & wylbe carefull./ I besech thalmighty to send your Lordship a longe & happy lyfe, & so I will. committ your Lordship to his protection./ from my howse at hardwyck this xxj.th of September 1592

your Lordships as I am bound

EShrouesbury



## Diplomatic view of Letter 163

[Address Leaf]

### [Address Leaf: Notes]

1592 [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To the right honorable my very  
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Lord Tresorer of Englande

21 Sept 1592

Countess of Shrowsberry to my L.

[Overleaf]

### [Overleaf: Notes]

4 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

[Letter Text]

### [Letter Text: Notes]

N 2. [Item number, hand: archivist]

3 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

2 [Item number, hand: archivist]

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

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

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the xx<sup>th</sup> of this *September*, by a seruant of m<sup>r</sup> Iohn Talbotts of Irelande./ My good Lord I w...  
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diliagent care, as I dobt not but to preuent whatsoeuer shalbe attempted by any wycked persons  
against y<sup>e</sup> pore chyld./ I am most bounde to hyr ma.<sup>ty</sup> y<sup>t</sup> it pleased hyr to apoynte your .L.<sup>p</sup>  
to giue me knowledge of this wycked practyse, and I humbly thanke your Lo.<sup>p</sup> for adu<sup>r</sup> tising  
adu<sup>r</sup> tisinge yt, yf any such lyke hereafter be discouered I besech your Lo.<sup>p</sup> I may be  
forewar==ned./ I wyll not haue any vnknownen or suspected person to come to my howse, vppon  
y<sup>e</sup> least  
suspicion that may happen here, any wey, I shall giue adu<sup>r</sup> tistem<sup>t</sup> to yo<sup>r</sup> Lo.<sup>p</sup> / I haue litle resort  
to me, my howse is furnished w<sup>t</sup> sufficient company, Arbell walks not late, at such tyme as she  
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forwardnes in religion (though I can not charge him w<sup>th</sup> papistry) toke occasion to parte w<sup>th</sup> him/ after he was gone from my howse and all hys stuff caried from hence, the next day he retorned ~ ageyn, very importunate to serue, w<sup>th</sup> out standinge vppon any recompence, w<sup>ch</sup> made me more suspicious

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