

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 202 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=202>)

From: Bess of Hardwick ([Richmond Palace, London?]);

To: George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury;

Date: 4 August 1586

Summary: Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) writes to her husband, George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, regarding offences he has accused her of having 'committed since her Majesty reconciled us'.

Archive: Chatsworth House, Devonshire MSS

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

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

Hands: Scribe A | archivist | Bess of Hardwick |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 202: 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 202: 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>)
11 September 1580 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=154>)
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>)

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26 August [1584] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=116>)
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>)
[April 1587] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=186>)

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Other letters associated with [Richmond Palace, London?]

24 Oct 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=122>)

Normalised view of Letter 202

To my Lord my husband the Earle of Shrouesbury.//

My Lord I hould my selfe most infortunatt that vpon soe lyght occation yt pleaseth you to wryte in that forme to me, for what new offence ys comitted since her magesty reconciled vs. yf the denyall of the plate be the only cause why then my Lord the trew affermation therof in my letter ys more then my wordes nether such atryfell I hoped could haue wrought so vnkynd effectes and weare my state able I would not stande vpon such toyes as then you spake of./ touching my sonnes leueing that ys no new cause for yt was longe agoe moued by you and could neuar be consented too by vs in respecte of the reasons in my last letter alleged and tho som myght seme not to dysalowe your motyons yett yt was not her majestys order nether they had cometyon to add to that order anythyng without our consentes but synce her magesty hath sett downe her order which my sonnes wyll and must precyslye obsarue./ my Lord I know not how Iustly you can tearme me vnsaciable in my desyre of geayning for my loses hath ben so greate with my charge that makes me desyre honystly to dyscharge my debte with my chylidrens lands which you haue no nede of and wyll not in my tyme dyscharge them tho we all should leue of nothyng, and I am gredye of nobodys lands else nether louke for the seuen hondryth pounds you haue of ther lands but would kepe the rest which by all lawe order and consyance they ought to posces nether my case and fortune hath ben to mentayne my meserys with vntrewthes for reseueing dayly manyfest dyscurtecys nede not blushe to speake truly./ I assure you my Lord my meaning ys not to molest or greue you with demanding nether I trust yt can be thought gredynes to demande nothyng for I desyar no more then her magestys order genetli and wyshe your happy days to be many and good./ wheras yt pleaseth you to caule her magestys wretten order but alate order the defferance only ys that the furst order ys latly wretten and then for her magestye to axe your consente to that you before consented to had ben amotyon superfluus./ I am exceding sory yt pleaseth you to wryte that I Impudently charge you with the saueing of athousand pounds you allowed me yearly baldwen spake yt before sir watter myldmay and amongst other thyngs set yt downe in wryting, and I maruyll you caule not to memory thys when so small thyngs be resyved./ as fyue hondryth pounds allowed in mony yearly your hydes and fells which you payd me ahondryth pounds ayeare fore score pound for saruants wages and made vp the thousand pound with better in benes muttons corne and other prouigyons, and you know thys to be very trewe./ touching the poscrypte my desyre hath ben so greate to be with you and sawe your longe delays that made me an humble suter to her magesty to be earnest with you but not as you wryte. for the other that I labour your stay I assure you my lord I dyd not but yet would be very glad that all wear parfeted heare and then to goe downe with you and hoped also eare thys we should haue be on our ways into the contrye./ so beseaching the almyghty to make you better conseaue of me, I end wyshing my selfe without offence with you./ Rychmond thys thursday /

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your obedyante faytheful wyffe

EShrouesbury

Diplomatic view of Letter 202

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

4 Augusti / 1585 [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

... 1576

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

To my Lord my husband the Earle of Shrouesbury.//

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

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

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

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

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

O [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

* [Marginalia (line beginning 'motyons yett yt was not'), hand: archivist]

My Lord I hould my selfe most infortunatt that vpon soe lyght occation yt pleaseth you to wryte in that forme to me, for what new offence ys comitted since her mag:^{ty} reconciled vs. yf the denyall of the plate be the only cause why then my L. the trew affermation therof in my letter ys more then my wordes nether such atryfell I hoped could haue wrought so vnkynd effectes and weare my state able I would not stande vpon such toyes as then you spake of./ touching my sonnes leueing that ys no new cause for yt was longe agoe moued by you and could neuar be consented too by vs in respecte of the reasons in my last letter alleged and tho som myght seme not to dysalowe your motyons yett yt was not her ma:^{ty}s order nether they had cometyon to add to that order anythyng wth out our consentes but synce her mag:^{ty} hath sett downe her ~~dr~~ her order w^{ch} my sonnes wyll and must precyslye obsarue./ my Lord I know not how Iustly you can tearme me vnsaciable in my desyre of geayning for my loses hath ben ^{^SO^} greate wth my charge s that makes me desyre honystly to dyscharge my debte ~~that~~ wth my chyldrens lands w^{ch} you haue no nede of and wyll not in my tyme dyscharge them tho we all should leue of nothyng, and I am gredye of nobodys lands else nether louke for the

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seuen hondryth pounds you haue of ther lands but would
kepe the rest w^{ch} by all lawe order and consyance they
ought to posces nether my case and fortune hath ben to
mentayne my meserys wth vntrewthes for reseueing dayly
manifest dyscurtecys nede not blushe to speake truly./
I assure you my L. my meaning ys not to molest or greue you
wth demanding nether I trust yt can be thought gredynes
to demande nothyng for I desyar no more then her mag:^{tyes}
order genetli and wyshe your happy days to be many and
good./ wheras yt pleaseth you to caule her mag:^{tyes} wretten
order but alate order the defferance only ys that the furst
order ys latly wretten and then for her magestye to axe
your consente to that you before consented to had ben
amotyon superflu s us./ I am exceding sory yt pleaseth
you to wryte that I Impudently charge you wth the
saueing of athousand pounds you allowed me yearly
baldwen spake yt before s:^r watter myldmay and
amongst other thyngs set yt downe in wryting, and I
maruyll you caule not to memory thys when so small
thyngs be resyved./ as the fyue hondryth pounds allowed
in mony

[page break]

yearly your hydes and fells w^{ch} you payd me ahondryth pounds
ayeare fore score pound for saruants wages and made vp the thousand
pound wth better in benes muttons corne and other prouigyons, and
you know thys to be very trewe./ touching the poscrypte my desyre
hath ben so greate to be wth you and sawe hyd your longe delays
that made me an humble suter to her magesty to be earnest wth you
but not as you wryte. for the other that I labour your stay I assure
you my lord I dyd not but yet would be very glad that all wear
parfeted heare and then to goe downe wth you and hoped also
eare thys we should haue be on our ways into the contrye./
so beseaching the almyghty to make you better conseaue of me,
I end wyshing my selfe wth out offence wth you./ Rychmond
thys thursday /

your obedyante faytheful wyffe

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EShrouesbury

[Overleaf]

[Overleaf: Notes]

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

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

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

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

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