

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 230 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=230>)**

From: Bess of Hardwick;

To: William Cecil, Lord Burghley;

Date: [13 June 1586]

Summary: Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) writes to William Cecil, Lord Burghley, referring to the 'miseries' and lack of true friends that have followed her estrangement from her husband, George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury; asking Burghley to 'give me leave by your favourable acceptance to put my whole trust and hope in your lordship for the restoring of the oppressed estate of me and mine'.

Archive: Arundel Castle, Autograph Letters 1585-1617, No 113

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

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

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 230: 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 230: 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>)
- 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>)

## Normalised view of Letter 230

To the ryght honorable my very good lord the Lord burgley Lord Tresorar of England///

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my most honorable good Lord; they that be in the pace of your Lordship must be trobled with the complaynts of such as be oppressed./ and the great regard I haue to your Lordship, makes me open my selfe vpon some speches both of latt and heartofore vsed by your Lordship vnto me which myght discorage me yf your Lordship's honorable disposetyon and goodnes weare not dayly tried and approued of all./ your Lordship supposed I had better frends then you, but truly in my accounte ther ys noe such thinge./ for by the effecttes yt appears not, my meserys being greater, now then the weare at first, nether any thinge done in my behaulfe more then of late her magestys order by your goodnes which your Lordship with your owne hande made more fauorable for vs./ in treuth I confes ther ys a noble man that hath made some good shewes vnto me, whom I haue found at the tyme of my nede much les then he profesed, and in stead of afrendly and Iust course reuyled my sonnes, became parcyall ageanst me, intruding hym selfe to be a Iudge in our cause, which I proteast was much ageanst our desyars, seking violently to make vs yelde to many hard condetyons to all our present ovarthrowes./ others ther be that I haue procured to be moued by my frends as I thenke any dystressed person would, ether to make them frends, or else to stay ther oppotition; yet what hath forlowed, nothyng but generall words, refering my comforte to hope, which hope ys desperate without your Lordship's goodnes and protectyon of me, whos athoretye, wysdom, and honorable dealing, hath of longe and doth satisfye the worlde, to which I vnfortunat woman doe as faythfully subcrybe as any others, acknowledging my bonde to be equall with the greatest./ Lett yt please your Lordship to know and beleue my professyon in all harty and reuerent affectyon towards you, and geue me Leaue by your fauorable acceptance to put my wholl trust and hope in your Lordship for the restoring of the opresed estate of me and myne, dyspayring through any body else to haue redres of my heauye meserys, and so (yf yt please you to regarde yt) bynde me and myne in bonds that we shall euar beare to doe your Lordship thankfull saruyce with yours, and yf yt please your Lordship to excepte here of and take vs into your fauorable conseratyon, we shall depend one you aboue all subiectes, as one most worthy and that hath most bound vs./ only thys maybe doubted of my parte, the world being so ell, whether ther be trewth and constancye in my professyon, that I refare to the wholl course of my Lyfe past, and dealing with all parsons that haue had to doe with me./. I beceache your Lordship to conceaue the best you shall neuar be deseued in me, and so humble intreating your comfortable answear I cease with my prayar for your Lordship's Longe and happy Lyffe, thys monday./

your Lordships assured and so most bounde

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## Diplomatic view of Letter 230

[Address Leaf]

To the ryght honorable my very good  
lord the Lo: burgley Lord Tresorar  
of England///

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[Letter Text]

### [Letter Text: Notes]

113 [Item number, hand: archivist]

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

my most honorable good Lord; they that be in the pace of your Lo: must be trobuled w<sup>th</sup> the  
complaynts of such as be oppressed./ and the great regard I haue to your Lo:., makes me open  
my selfe vpon some speches both of latt and heartofore vsed by your L. vnto me wch  
myght discourage me yf your Lo: honorable disposetyon and goodnes weare not dayly  
tried and approued of all./ your L. supposed I had better frends then you, but  
truly in my accounte ther ys noe such thinge./ for by the effecttes yt appears  
not, my meserys being greater, now then the weare at first, nether any thinge  
done in my behaulfe more then of late her mag:<sup>ty</sup>s order by your goodnes w<sup>ch</sup> your  
L. w<sup>th</sup> your owne hande made more fauorable for vs./ in treuth I confes ther  
ys a noble man that hath made some good showes vnto me, whom I haue  
found at the tyme of my nede much les then he profesed, and in stead  
of afrendly and iust course reuyled my sonnes, became parcyall ageanst  
me, intruding hym selfe to be a Iudge in our cause, w<sup>ch</sup> I proteast was  
much ageanst our desyars, seking violently to make vs yelde to many  
hard condetyons to all our present owarthrowes./ others ther be that I  
haue procured to be moued by my frends as I thenke any dystressed person  
would, ether to make them frends, or else to stay ther oppotition; yet  
what hath forlowed, nothyng but generall words, refering my comforte  
to hope, w<sup>ch</sup> hope ys desperate w<sup>th</sup> out your L. goodnes and protectyon of  
me, whos athoretye, wysdom, and honorable dealing, hath of longe and doth



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satysfye the worlde, to w<sup>ch</sup> I vnfortunat woman doe as faythfully subcrybe  
as any others, acknowledging my bonde to be equall w<sup>th</sup> the greatest./  
Lett yt please your L. to know and beleue my professyon in all harty and  
reuerent affectyon towards you, and geue me Leaue by your fauorable  
acceptance to put my wholl trust and hope in your L. for the restoring  
of the opresed estate of me and myne, dyspayring through any body else to w  
haue redres h of my heauye meserys, and so (yf yt please you to regarde yt)  
bynde me and myne in bonds that we shall euar beare to doe your L.

thankfull saruyce w<sup>th</sup> yours, and yf yt please your L. to excepte here of  
and take vs into your fauorable conseratyon, we shall depend vpon  
one you aboue all subiectes, as one most worthy and that hath most  
bound vs./ only thys maybe doubted of my parte, the world being so  
ell, whether ther be trewthe and constancye in my professyon, that I  
refare to[deletion] the wholl course of my Lyfe past, and dealing w<sup>th</sup> all parsons  
that haue had to doe w<sup>th</sup> me./. I beceache your L. to conceaue the best  
you shall neuar be deseued in me, and so humble intreating your  
comforttable answeare I cease w<sup>th</sup> my prayar for your L. Longe  
and happy Lyffe, thys monday./

your Lops: assured and so most  
bounde

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