

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 236 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=236>)

From: Bess of Hardwick (Chatsworth House, Derbyshire);

To: Lady Elizabeth Kitson;

Date: 8 April 1594

Summary: Bess (dowager countess of Shrewsbury) writes to Lady Kitson regarding covenants drawn up to do with 'assurances of land' upon the marriage (in 1582) of her son, Charles Cavendish, and his now deceased wife, Margaret (Lady Kitson's daughter). Bess requests Lady Kitson 'to look up the said obligation and articles and to deliver them to this bearer' as there is now need of them.

Archive: Cambridge University Library, Hengrave MSS, 88/2/81

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

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

Hands: Scribe C | Lady Kitson | archivist | Scribe B | Bess of Hardwick |

Version: 1.0

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Bess of Hardwick's Letters

People Associated with Letter 236: 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

Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

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.

Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

People Associated with Letter 236: Lady Elizabeth Kitson

Elizabeth Kitson (née Cornwallis), Lady Kitson (1546/7-1628), was the eldest daughter of Sir Thomas Cornwallis. In 1560 she married Sir Thomas Kitson (1540-1603), whose family were significant patrons of music in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In 1582 their daughter, Margaret, married Sir Charles Cavendish, Bess's son from her second marriage to Sir William Cavendish; however, Margaret died in childbirth that same year.

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Other letters associated with Chatsworth House, Derbyshire

- 15 Mar [1550s?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=200>)
- 31 Mar [1550s?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=198>)
- 13 Apr [c.1550] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=13>)
- 14 Nov [1552] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=99>)
- 13 Jan [c.1560] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=47>)
- 4 Sep [1560?] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=59>)
- 12 Oct [c.1560] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=60>)
- 24 Oct [c.1560] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=61>)
- 18 May 1562 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=55>)
- 20 Nov [1565?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=17>)
- 8 Dec [c.1565] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=28>)
- 26 Feb [1566?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=18>)
- Jun [1568?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=157>)
- 28 Jun [1568?] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=64>)
- [1570s?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=210>)
- [1570] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=178>)
- 28 Jul 1570 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=25>)
- 31 Aug 1570 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=170>)
- 21 Sep 1571 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=26>)
- [1577] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=182>)
- 2 Aug 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=197>)
- 23 Sep 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=121>)
- 22 Jun 1579 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=189>)
- 15 Jul 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=175>)
- 8 May 1594 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=102>)

Normalised view of Letter 236

To my assured good Sister. the Lady Kitson at Hengrave/

Henry traunce to send presently. for the writes; to send to my father.

the old countes of Shrewsberys Letter: to Answer

Good Sister, whereas my sonne william Cavendishe and others entred into certen articles and Covenantes to my good brother Sir Thomas Kitson and my dere frend Sir Thomas Cornwallys which Co[v]enantes beare date the forth daye of februarie in the three and twentieth yere of the Quene, and were for assuraunces of land to be made to my sonne Charles & my daughter Margaret, and bonde likewise at the same time was given by my sonne william and others for performauce of the saide Covenantes./ sone after which ...e mariage being had, all Covenantes were performed, and assuraunce past by lawe accordingly to all our Contentmentes./ notwithstanding the saide wrytinges remayned still in your hand though they were requyred by my sonn william and promised by you and I knowe ment & intended to be delyvered but one occasion or other still diff[e]red it./ therefore good Madam I hartely praye you procure my good brothe[r] to loke vp the saide obligacion and articles of Covenantes and to delyver th[em] to this bearrer./ yf you shoulde not finde them redely (as I think you will) then in the meane time I desire that my good brother Kitson and my good frend Sir Thomas Cornwallis will seale this release which I have sent by this bearrer and delyver it as theyr deed, and whensoever the other wrytinges shalbe founde this release maye be del[yv]e[red] you agayne./ this release neyther is nor can be any ...ayes preiudiciall to Charles. he wilbe at London foure da[yes] before Saint Georges daye, & yf you be the least doubtful ... praye you sende vp on of yours with this bearrer to ... and shewe him the release and you shall knowe his minde ...ly and yf you can finde the ...d ... articles then the release needes not but to send them to ... yf you rest not satisfied vpon this my letter./ I praye [you] remember my very hartly Commendacions to my honorable good ... noble ... And so with my kyndest salutacions to your sel and my good brother to whome I wishe all happynes and Contentment I Cease./ from Chatesworth this viijth of aprill 1594

Your louing sistar and asured frend

EShrouesbury

Diplomatic view of Letter 236

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

8 April 1594

[Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To my assured good Sister.
the Lady Kitson at
Hengrave/

Henry ~~trauys~~ ^{^trauyce^}
to send presently. for the
writes; to send to my
father.

the old countes
of Shrewsberys
Letter: to
Answer

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

Hengrave 88/2/81 [Item number, hand: archivist]

Good Sister, whereas my sonne william Cavendishe and others entred into certen articles and Covenantes to my good brother S^r Thomas Kitson and my dere frend S^r Thomas Cornwalllys w^{ch} Co...enantes beare date the forth daye of februarie in the three and twentieth yere of the Quene, and were for assuraunces of land to be made to my sonne Charles & my daught^r Margaret, and bonde likewise at the same time was given by my sonne william and others for performaunce of the saide Covenantes./ sone after w^{ch} ...e mariage being had, all Covenantes were performed, and assuraunce past by lawe accordingly to all our Contentmentes./ notwth standing the saide wrytinges remayned still in yo^r hand though they were requyred by my sonn william and promised by you and I knowe ment & intended to be delyvered but one occasion or other still diff...red it./ therefore good Madam

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

I hartely praye you procure my good brothe... to loke vp the saide obligation and articles of Covenantes and to delyver th... to this bearrer./ yf you shoulde not finde them redely (as I think you will) then in the meane time I desire that my good brother Kitson and my good ~ frend S^r Thomas Cornwallis will seale this release w^{ch} I have sent by this bearrer and delyver it as theyr deed, and whensoever the other wrytinges shalbe founde this release maye be del...e... you agayne./ this release neyther is nor can be any ...ayes p^r iudiciall to Charles. he wilbe at London foure da... before S^t Georges daye, & yf you be the least doubtful ... praye you sende vp on of yo^{rs} wth this bearrer to ... and shewe him the release and you shall knowe his minde ...ly and yf you can finde the ...d ... articles then the release needes not but to send them to ... yf you rest not satisfyed vppon this my letter./ I praye ... remember my very hartly Commendacions to my honorable good ... noble ... And so wth my kyndest salutacions to yo^r sel and my good brother to whome I wishe all happynes and ~ Contentment I Cease./ from Chatesworth this viijth of aprill 1594

Your louing sistar and
asured frend

EShrouesbury

[Overleaf]

[Overleaf: Notes]

Letter from Elizabeth Countess of Shrewsbury to Lady Kytson.

The Countess of Shrewsbury, was mother to Sir Charles Cavendish of Welbeck. who married 'Margaret', the eldest daughter of Sir Thomas Kytson. whcih Lady died in childbed & ... no ...

This Countess of Shrewsbury was the celebrated 'Bess of Hardwick'.

[Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

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