

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 238** (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=238>)

From: Bess of Hardwick (Coldharbour, London, Greater London);

To: Matthew Parker;

Date: 6 May 1568

Summary: Bess, countess of Shrewsbury, writes to Matthew Parker, archbishop of Canterbury, in support of 'preferring one Martin Nelson to the vicarage of Catterick in Richmondshire'. She is informed he has 'good zeal to religion and towardness in learning'.

Archive: Corpus Christi College Cambridge, Parker Library, MS 114A, p.153

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

Letter features:

Hands: unknown scribe | archivist | Bess of Hardwick |

Version: 1.0

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# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

## People Associated with Letter 238: 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 238: Matthew Parker**

Matthew Parker (1504-1575) was archbishop of Canterbury and a significant patron of sixteenth-century scholarship. Parker saw advancement under Henry VIII and Edward VI. After the death of both Queen Mary and Reginald Pole (then archbishop of Canterbury) in 1558, Parker was summoned to take up the latter's post under Elizabeth I. He took up this post reluctantly under pressure from Nicholas Bacon (Lord Keeper) and Sir William Cecil (Elizabeth I's principal secretary), for perhaps he knew the hardship it would cost him.

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## **Other letters associated with Coldharbour, London, Greater London**

17 Jan 1580 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=190>)

6 Nov [c.1585] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=10>)

18 Jun [c.1600?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=6>)

## Normalised view of Letter 238

It may please your grace/ I am instantlie desired to be an earnest suter for your graces goodnes in preferring one Martyne Nelson to the vicariage of Catricke in Richemondshire Who (being brother to one of my Lordes gentlemen) is as I am enformed of suche good zeale to Religion and towardnes in Larning as I am bold in those respectes to beseche your grace, that in case ye shal perceve him apt for that place/ Ye woll please to graunte him your favour in advauncing him therunto/ Wherin/ Althoughe I must confesse my self vnable to acquit your goodnes alrede shewed yet shal I think myself gretlie beholding vnto your grace in this behalf And so for this tyme I take my leave ffrom Coldherbar this vjth of May 1568/

your gracys moust bowden

EShrouesbury

## Diplomatic view of Letter 238

[Letter Text]

### [Letter Text: Notes]

49. [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

153 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

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favour in advauncing him therunto/ Wherin/ Althoughe  
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alredy shewed yet shal I think myself gretlie beholding  
vnto your grace in this behalf And so for this tyme I take  
my leave ffrom Coldherbar this vjth of May 1568/

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