

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 239 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=239>)

From: Bess of Hardwick;

To: Sir John Manners;

Date: 2 April 1597

Summary: Bess (dowager countess of Shrewsbury) writes to John Manners to request he show good favour towards Edward Slater and his wife in their 'tedious and chargeable' suit with Lady Bowes.

Archive: Belvoir Castle, Rutland MSS, Letters & Papers XIII, folios 27-28

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

Letter features: papered seal, embossed with Bess's arms featuring the Hardwick cross (a saltire engrailed, in chief three eglantines, surmounted by a countess's coronet) Ribbon/floss – no. Letter packet - tuck and fold

Hands: Scribe C | archivist | Bess of Hardwick |

Version: 1.0

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Bess of Hardwick's Letters

People Associated with Letter 239: 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 239: Sir John Manners

Sir John Manners (of Haddon Hall, not to be confused with John, the fourth earl of Rutland who died in 1588), was the son of Thomas, first earl of Rutland (c.1497-1526). He was the brother-in-law of Bess's fourth husband, George (sixth earl of Shrewsbury), through the latter's first marriage to Manners' sister, Gertrude (d.1566) - which is presumably why Bess refers to him as her 'brother' in her letters. He was the uncle of Edward (the third earl of Rutland), whom also figures in Bess's correspondence.

Other letters associated with Sir John Manners:

9 August 1593 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=108>)

18 May 1601 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=240>)

20 December 1602 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=241>)

21 December 1602 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=44>)

18 June 1604 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=45>)

16 December 1605 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=242>)

Normalised view of Letter 239

To my very good Brother master Iohn Manners Esquire/

Good Brother, I vnderstand you intende shortly to goe to London, I wishe you a good and happie Iourney, I have ben earnestly entreated by Edward Slater and his wyfe to write to you in theyr behaulf, that you woulde shoue them what lawfull favor you maye in the tedious and Chardgable sute betwene ye Ladie Bowes and them, wherein as you knowe they have ben verie much wronged./ I praye you t[her]efore at my request to let them have your favor and furtheraunce in that matter so farre as the equitye of the cause requyreth./ and esppecially in a bonde of fyve hundreth poundes with the which he sayth he hath heretofore acquaynted you./ And so with my hartie Commendations to you and my blessing to my sonne & my Daughter I end this second of Aprill 1597./

your louynge syster and assuryed frende

EShrouesbury

Diplomatic view of Letter 239

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

Shrewsbury

1597 [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To my very good Brother
m.^r Iohn Manners Esquire/

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

27 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

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your louynge syster
and assured frende

EShrouesbury

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