

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 024 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=024>)

From: Robert Devereux, earl of Essex ([The Royal Court, London?]);

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: 23 March 1590/1

Summary: Robert Devereux, second earl of Essex, writes to Bess (dowager countess of Shrewsbury) to recommend the bearer, Christopher Hannam, who wishes to enter Bess's service as a gentleman usher. Despite the endorsements by Essex, Sir John Wingfield and Lady Kent, Hannam does not subsequently appear in the account books or wage lists for Bess's households.

Archive: Folger Shakespeare Library, Cavendish-Talbot MSS, X.d.428 (26)

Delivery status: to Bess, sent

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

Hands: unknown scribe | archivist | Robert Devereux, earl of Essex |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 024: Robert Devereux, earl of Essex

Robert Devereux, second earl of Essex (1565-1601), was a soldier and politician. In 1585 he accompanied his stepfather, Robert Dudley (earl of Leicester), commander of the English army going to the Netherlands, in aid of the Dutch against the Spanish. Following his return to England in 1586 as a war hero, Essex became the queen's new favourite and was appointed to the privy council in 1593. However, his fortune was not to last, and largely due to strong political opposition at court and his own proud behaviour, he eventually suffered a fall from favour. In 1601, in a desperate attempt to denounce his enemies and win back the queen, he led 300 armed men into the city of London. He was immediately imprisoned, charged with treason and condemned to death. He was beheaded at the Tower of London on 25 February 1601.

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People Associated with Letter 024: 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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Other letters associated with [The Royal Court, London?]

- 8 Mar [1560?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=100>)
- 13 Dec [1568] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=66>)
- 20 Feb 1576 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=165>)
- 19 Nov [1576?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=115>)
- 28 Feb 1579 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=174>)
- 10 Feb 1606 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=48>)
- 7 Mar 1606 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=49>)
- 13 Feb 1607 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=14>)
- 22 Jun 1607 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=34>)

Normalised view of Letter 024

To the Ryghte honorable the Covntes of Shrewesberey dowger this be delivered

Madam, This bearer Christopher Hannam hath a good while belonged vnto me. and now desireth to be entertayned in service by yow. That your Ladyship meaneth to receave one in the place of a gentleman vsher I vnderstand by my good frend Sir Ihon Wingfield, who hath made choyse of this man to be preferred to your service, and moved me for my consent therto. Wherin I am so farre from dissenting, that for manie respectes I have great lyking of it; first for his owne sake that he shall be placed with so honorable a Ladie, then for my selfe yat it is my happe to have a man worthie to be preferred to your Ladyship And I hope, when yow have made prooffe of his service, he will deserve my commendacion, and your Ladyship's good lyking. The iudgment of my Lady of Kent, and Sir Ihon Wingfield who have thowght him meete for your service might well suffice for his credite; yet I thowght it not enoughe to give him leave, vnlesse I added therto these lettres in his commendacion: which I do wishe may so farre stand him in steed, as that for my sake his service may be somewhat the more acceptable vnto your Ladyship So I committ your Ladyship to gods protection. from the Courte the .23. of Marche 1590.

Your Ladyships to do yow seruice.

R. Essex

The Countesse of Shrewsburie.

Diplomatic view of Letter 024

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

Rob.^t Devereux E. of Essex the
great Favourite of Q Eliz. E Marshall
of Engl.^d & Deputie of Ireland. He was
beheaded 23^d of March 1590 Feb: 5.th
1600. [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To the Ryghte honorable
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[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

X.d.428
(26) [Item number, hand: archivist]
93 [Old foliation/item number, hand: archivist]

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Y^r *Ladyships* to do y^w seruice.

R. Essex

The Countesse of Shrewsburie.

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