

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 094 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=094>)

From: Richard Topcliffe (Rycote, Oxfordshire);

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: 9 July 1577

Summary: Richard Topcliffe writes to Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) about various lords and ladies, chiefly Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, who was just at Buxton and is now a little troubled with a boil on his leg. Also mentions an 'old dead suit' regarding Bess's son Charles Cavendish, which Dudley will bring 'unto a new life'.

Archive: Folger Shakespeare Library, Cavendish-Talbot MSS, X.d.428 (125)

Delivery status: to Bess, sent

Letter features: Seal intact - no. Ribbon/floss – no. Letter packet - tuck and fold

Hands: Richard Topcliffe | archivist |

Version: 1.0

Copyright Information

All material is made available free of charge for individual, non-commercial use only. The copyright and other intellectual property rights in the transcribed letter text, metadata about the letters and the design of the letter display are owned by the University of Glasgow.

You are permitted to access, print and download letters from this site on the following conditions:

- use of all material on this site is for information and for non-commercial or your own personal use only; any copies of these pages saved to disk or to any other storage medium may only be used for subsequent viewing purposes or to print extracts for non-commercial or your own personal use.
- the content must not be modified in any way.
- any use of the material for a permitted purpose must be accompanied by a full source citation.

No part of this site may be reproduced or stored in any other web site or included in any public or private electronic retrieval system or service without the University of Glasgow's prior written permission. Commercial exploitation of the transcribed letters, including use by radio or television programme makers and examination boards, is prohibited without licence from the University of Glasgow.

Further information on copyright and citation can be found at:- (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/background.jsp?id=171>)

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

People Associated with Letter 094: Richard Topcliffe

Richard Topcliffe (1531-1604) was an Elizabethan interrogator and torturer. He married Jane Willoughby of Wollaton (sometime before the accession of Elizabeth I), and was introduced to the then Princess Elizabeth through his wife's family's connections. Following the northern rising in the 1570s, Topcliffe became a member of parliament and Bess's fourth husband, George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, secured work for him to lead investigations of the rebels. It was in this line of work that he became notorious - seeking out, interrogating and oftentimes torturing perceived enemies of the Elizabethan state, especially Catholics. Despite his infamy for using cruel measures even in his own time, he was authorized by the Elizabethan state and remained a security adviser to the queen throughout her life.

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

People Associated with Letter 094: 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

Normalised view of Letter 094

To the right honorable my singuler good Lady the Countesse of Shrewsbury.

Wee did yester night come to Ricote my Lord Norices Where Lait did arrive the countesses of Bedforde and Cumberland and therle of Cumberland the Lord Wharton and his wife the fatte Erle cummethe this day my Lord of Leicester beinge departed toward the coort to Sir Thomas Greshams xxxiiijty myles hence (wherby you may perceave of his healthe) onely a Lyttell trubled (with a Byele drawene to a heade in the calfe of the Legge which maketh hym vse his Lytter/ The countesse kept hym over longe waykinge askinge hym if Buxstone sent sownde men haltinge home Butt I never dyd heare hym comende the place nor the intertegment halfe somuche. And did sware that he wished he had tarried iii wiekes longer with his chardge of vCli but saiethe he it hathe and would haue coste my frindes deeply. His Lordship wished her majesty would progresse to Grafton and Killingworthe vpon whiche condicyone he would see Buxstone this somer ageyne. But the next yeare is thretenyd that iorney I can send your Ladyship no more vnpleasant newes Butt that his Lordship hathe said with meny vowes that he wilbe as tender over your Lorde and your selfe, and bothe youres as over his owne healthe. And my Lord is very cayfull over his too yoinge cossens master Edward and master henry to have them placed in Oxforde wishinge that he may fynde of his kinderid to woorke his good will vppon, as he hathe done hetherto of meny vnthankfull persons, good madame further you my good Lord your husband's dispocycyon that way for your sone Charles my Lord will bringe his owld deade sewt vnto a newe Lyffe. And therwith I end in very humble sorte. the ixth of Iuly 1577/

Your Ladyship's ever at comandement

Ryc: Topclyffe:

The phizicions and all other rewele it over for the best woorke of the well that my Lord is trubled with a Byele and so hyme self thinkethe.

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Diplomatic view of Letter 094

[Address Leaf]

To the ^{^right^} honorable
my singuler good
La: the Countesse
of Shrewsbury.
§

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

X.d.428

(125) [Item number, hand: archivist]

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

Wee did yester night cume to Ricote my Lo: Norices
Where Lait did arryve the countesses of Bedforde and
Cumberl: and therle of Cumberl: the L. Wharton
and his wife the fatte Erle cum^methe this
day my L. of Lec^r beinge departed towarde the
coort to S^r Tho: Greshams xxxiiij^{ty} myles hence
(wherby yo^u may perceave of his healthe)
onely a Lyttell trubled (wth a Byelee drawene to
a heade in the calfe of the Legge w^{ch} maketh
hym vse his Lytter/ The countesse kept
hym over longe waykinge askinge hym if
Buxstone sent sownde men haltinge home
Butt I never dyd heare hym comende the
place nor the interteigm^t halfe somuche.
And did sware that he wished he had tarried
iii wiekes longer wth his chardge of v^{cli} but
saiethe he it hathe and would haue coste my
frindes deeply. His L. wished her ma^{ty} would
progresse to Grafton and Killingworthe vpon
whiche condicyone he would see Buxstone this

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

somer ageyne. But the next yeare is thretenyd
§ that iorney §

[page break]

I can send yo^r La: no more vnpleasant newes
Butt that his Lo: hathe said wth meny vowes
that he wilbe as tender over yo^r Lorde
and yo^r selfe, and bothe yo^{res} as over his
owne healthe. And my Lo: is very cayrfull
over his too yoinge cossens m^r Ed: and m^r hen:
to have them placed in Oxforde wishinge
that he ^{may} fynde of his kinderid to woorke
his good will vpon, as he hathe done
hethertoo of meny vnthankfull persons,
good mad: funder yo^u my good Lo: yo^r husb:
dispocycyon that way for yo^r sone Char:
my Lo: will bringe his owld deade sewt vnto
a newe Lyffe. And therw^t I end in very
humble sorte. the ixth of Iuly 1577/

Yo^r La: ever at com^a ndem^t

Ryc: Topclyffe:§

The phizicions and all
other rewele it over for the
best woorke of the well that
my Lo is trubled wth a
Byele and so hyme self
thinkethe. §

Version: 1.0