

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 107 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=107>)

From: Bess of Hardwick (Tutbury, Burton upon Trent, Staffordshire);

To: Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester;

Date: 21 January 1568/9

Summary: Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) writes to Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, complaining about the delayed delivery of his latest letters concerning the imminent arrival of Mary Queen of Scots at Tutbury Castle.

Archive: Magdalene College Library, Pepys, MS 2503, pp. 203-06

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

Letter features: Seal intact - no. Ribbon/floss – no. Letter packet - slit and band

Hands: unknown scribe | archivist | Bess of Hardwick |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 107: 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 107: Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester

Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester (1532/3-88), courtier and magnate, was a childhood friend of Elizabeth I and her earliest favourite as queen. He was appointed to the privy council in 1562 and played a very significant role in English politics. Given his prominence in the period, it is not surprising he was a frequent correspondent of Bess and her fourth husband, earl and countess of Shrewsbury.

Other letters associated with Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester:

[1570s?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=167>)

27 June [1576?] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=110>)

18 May [1577?] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=109>)

2 August 1578 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=197>)

16 July [1580?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=118>)

12 July 1585 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=151>)

23 November 1586 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=214>)

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Other letters associated with Tutbury, Burton upon Trent, Staffordshire

[Dec 1568] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=65>)

13 Dec [1568] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=66>)

[23?] Jan 1569 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=164>)

[c.1570] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=9>)

6 Dec 1605 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=207>)

31 Dec 1605 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=11>)

Normalised view of Letter 107

xxj^o Ianuarij .1568 The countesse of Shrewsbury.

your lorddshypp latters dyrected vnto my lord my husband and to me yn hys absence bearyng dayte the xiiij of thys Instant montthe of Ianuarye was not delyuered vnto me before the xx daye of the same at vj of the clocke yn the euenynge/ surelye my Lord I was muche greued because ther was nomore haste with delyuerye of the sayd letters consydering the weyghtye and great causes dependyng thervpon / and my humble dewtye and seruyse to be shewed yn the dyspache of suche thynges as the quenes mayestye requyrethe to haue yn redynes wythyn tutbury Castell/ the house beyng vnredye yn manye respecctes for the receauyng of the Scottytyshe queyne cominge at sodayne. I haue caused workmen to make furwyth yn redynes all suche thynges as ys moust needfull to be downe before her cominge and god wyllynge I shall cause furthwythe thre or fowre lodgyngs to be furnyshed wyth hangyngs and other necesaryes and rather then I shuld not with trewe and ffaithfull hart answeere the trust reposed by the quenes mayestye I wyll lacke furnytüre of lodgyng for my selfe. thus with my continvall prayer to god for the preseruacyon of the queenes most excellent mayestye and my hartye commendacyons unto your good lordshyppe I cease to truble you any further at thys present ffrom tutbery the xxj of Ianuary

your Lordship's assuryed frend

EShrouesbury

Diplomatic view of Letter 107

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

Aabcdefghijklmnopqrstuwx

Aabcdefghijklmnopqrstuwx

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Aabcdefghijklmnopqrstuwx

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[Doodle, hand: unknown scribe]

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

xxj° Ianuarij .1568

The countesse of

Shrewsbury.

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

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

your lorddshypp latters dyrected vnto my lord my
husband and to me yn hys absence bearyng day
dayte the xiiij of thys Instant montthe of
Ianuarye was not delyuered vnto me before
the xx daye of the same at vj of the clocke
yn the euenynge/ surelye my .L. I was muche
greued because ther was nomore haste w^t
delyuerye of the sayd letters consydering the
weyghtye and great cawses dependyng thervpon
/ and my hummble dewtye and seruyse to be
shewed yn the dyspache of suche thynges
as the quenes mayestye requyrethe to haue
yn redynes wythyn tutbury Castell/ the
house beyng vnredye yn manye respecctes for
the receauyng of the Scottytyshe queyne cominge
at sodayne. I haue caused workmen to make

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furwyth yn redynes all suche thynges as ys
moust needfull to be downe before ~~herr~~ her
cominge at ~~tutbury~~ and god wyllynge I shall
cause furthwythe thre or fowre lodgyngs
to be furnyshed wyth hangyngs and other
necesaryes and rather then I shuld not w^t
trewe and ffaithfull hart answere the trust
reposed by the quenes mayestye I wyll lacke
furnytur of lodgyng for my selfe. thus w^t
my continvall prayer to god for the ~~preseruæ~~
~~preseruacyon~~ of the queenes most excellent
mayestye and my hartye commendacyons
unto your good lordshyppe I cease to truble
you any further at thys *present* ffrom tutbery
the xxj of *Ianuary*

your .L. assuryed frend

EShrouesbury

[Overleaf]

[Overleaf: Notes]

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

I shall by tweleue goo to ^{^diener^}

If not I will stay heare

but to pre ^{^ue^} nt it I will still

stay heare [Doodle, hand: unknown scribe]

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[Next Page: Notes]

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

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