

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 109** (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=109>)

From: Bess of Hardwick (Sheffield, Yorkshire); George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury (Sheffield, Yorkshire);

To: Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester;

Date: 18 May [1577?]

Summary: Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) writes to Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, to thank him for his efforts in finding a match for her widowed daughter Elizabeth, dowager countess of Lennox, and for his goodwill towards her son, Charles Cavendish. Bess's husband, George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, adds a postscript, reiterating her thanks.

Archive: Longleat House, Dudley Papers, DU/II/173

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

Letter features: seal, red wax, 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: Bess of Hardwick | archivist | George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury | Canon Jackson |

Version: 1.0

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# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

## People Associated with Letter 109: 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 109: George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury

George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury (c.1522-90), was the eldest and only surviving son of Francis Talbot, fifth earl of Shrewsbury (1500-60), and his first wife, Mary (d.1538). In 1538, at the age of sixteen, he took up the title of Lord Talbot, until he succeeded to the earldom after his father's death twenty-two years later. In 1539 he married his first wife, Gertrude (née Manners; d.1566/7), with whom he had seven children: four daughters and three sons. Early on he acquired a number of honours stemming from his family's well-established prominence in the north: knight bachelor (1547), member of the council of the north (1549), knight of the Garter (1561), and lord lieutenant of Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire (1565). Following the death of his first wife, he married Bess, then the widow of William St Loe (c.1520-65?), in 1567. At this point Shrewsbury was one of the wealthiest men in England, derived from his estates and also business adventuring in farming, shipping, coal-mining, glassworks and lead extraction and production. Soon after his marriage to Bess, however, he was appointed keeper of Mary Queen of Scots, a custodianship he would hold from 1569-84. Shrewsbury prided himself on his loyalty to Elizabeth I, but he soon found her reluctant to provide sufficient diet money to keep Mary and her retinue. This, in addition to the monies needed for expensive building projects (at Worksop and Chatsworth), and his eldest son Gilbert's debts led to serious financial anxiety for Shrewsbury. Furthermore, he was forced to remain with Mary at all times and was therefore losing his place at court. As Shrewsbury's stresses grew and he became increasingly irascible, his marriage with Bess broke down spectacularly amid quarrelling to do with family finances and the allocation of estates. Scandal and mutual bad-mouthing soon became very public and the queen herself intervened, eventually dictating that Shrewsbury pay Bess a regular income (from 1587), while the two lived apart. Shrewsbury was an ill man for many years and suffered with a severe rheumatic condition, what he referred to as 'gout', which contributed to his terrible handwriting. He died in the company of his mistress, Elinor Bretton, at Sheffield Manor, on 18 November 1590, after being administered a mercury cure. His son Gilbert Talbot succeeded him as the seventh earl of Shrewsbury.

Other letters associated with George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury:

28 June [1568?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=64>)

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

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

[1569?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=67>)

[1570s?] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=184>)

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

[1570] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=178>)

[1570s] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=203>)

[c. 1570] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=68>)

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4 November 1570 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=226>)  
4 November 1570 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=171>)  
[c. 1571] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=70>)  
[c. 1571] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=69>)  
[1574?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=72>)  
[1574?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=71>)  
8 August 1574 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=73>)  
[c. 1575?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=76>)  
[c. 1575] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=75>)  
[1575-7] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=245>)  
7 June 1575 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=74>)  
June 19 [c. 1575?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=77>)  
20 February 1575/6 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=165>)  
19 November [1576?] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=115>)  
[1577] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=183>)  
[1577] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=182>)  
4 June 1577 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=221>)  
25 June 1577 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=172>)  
14 May 1578 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=188>)  
[30 June 1578?] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=83>)  
2 August 1578 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=197>)  
28 December 1578 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=193>)  
13 February 1578/9 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=166>)  
28 February 1578/9 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=174>)  
22 June 1579 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=189>)  
17 January 1579/80 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=190>)  
13 May 1580 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=194>)  
21 June 1580 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=78>)  
11 September 1580 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=154>)  
10 October 1580 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=79>)  
8 February 1581/2 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=195>)  
4 August 1584 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=119>)  
26 August [1584] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=116>)

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14 October [1585] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=229>)

23 October 1585 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=117>)

9 June 1586 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=176>)

4 August 1586 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=202>)

[April 1587] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=186>)



## People Associated with Letter 109: 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:

21 January 1568/9 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=107>)

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

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

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 Sheffield, Yorkshire

- 27 Aug 1567 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=114>)
- 3 May 1571 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=29>)
- 8 Aug 1574 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=73>)
- 7 Jun 1575 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=74>)
- 19 Jun [c.1575?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=77>)
- [Oct 1575?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=218>)
- 13 Oct 1575 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=217>)
- 29 Mar 1576 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=103>)
- 27 Jun [1576?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=110>)
- 1 Aug 1577 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=85>)
- 17 Mar 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=120>)
- 14 May 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=188>)
- 29 Dec 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=123>)
- 17 Jan 1580 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=190>)
- 13 May 1580 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=194>)
- 21 Jun 1580 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=78>)
- 31 Jan 1581 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=228>)
- 31 Jan 1581 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=227>)
- 28 Nov 1581 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=104>)
- 28 Jan 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=144>)
- 28 Jan 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=162>)
- 8 Feb 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=195>)
- 6 May 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=146>)
- 6 May 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=145>)
- 10 Jun 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=105>)
- 24 Nov [1582?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=204>)



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7 Feb 1583 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=148>)

4 Aug 1584 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=119>)

23 Oct 1585 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=117>)

19 Dec 1590 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=231>)

14 Apr [1600?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=2>)

## Normalised view of Letter 109

To the Ryght honorabell my [synge]uler good lorde an[d b]rother the erle of lecester

---

My good lord and brother yt ys wrete to me at lenth by my sone gelberte talbott how honorable your Lordship contenes your wonted care to do good styll to me and myne, and theryn ys expressed your Lordship's honorabe[ll] prouydence now entended for my dowter lennox yn maryage, I shall euer acknolege besydes ane enfenytted number your goodnesse to me and myne, the latte good speede and prefarment my sonne charles hade, brought to passe by your Lordship's only wysdome. but as your Lordship's nobell mynde ys euer workenge nobell effectes and of the same frewtes by good fourtune I and all [my]ne amongst otheres to owre great confortes do ... [ely ta]ste, I beyng of no poure nor abelyte any ...[wes] to make apeare the dewty of thanks/ ... your Lordship the greater by me and myne ough[t] ...onde your Lordship's worthey famme whyche ys all the [re]compence I cane make and the beste sarues all myne are abell to do vnto your Lordship all the dayes of ther lyues. and for my dowter lennox of whome your Lordship plecythe to haue that esspecyall care, and we most bonde to your Lordship for yt, yeldynge humbyll thanks to your Lordship she dothe styll fynde har selfe so many wayes bonde to you, as wylbe aduysed by your Lordship more then any man and I hartely desyre your Lordship to contenne that honorabell mynde towards har ether for the Lord Sandes or any other that shalbe thought metyste, and yf yt plesse your Lordship to comende eny to Chattysworth as a place for sondery cauncus I desyre fourst to enter ther aquentance, he or whome elce your Lordship comendes shalbe as frendly welcome as I am behouldyng to geue one sent by your Lordship, wereyn as yn althynges elles I do refare her happy mache, her well bestoyng ys my greatys care, some of my frendes haue heretofore wyched sondery good machus for her, yf I coude haue founde yn her the lysty lykenge more to one then a nother I wolde haue trobeled your Lordship herwith without whouse specyall help I knowe yt colde take no good affecte she sayth euer to me she cane nott determyne har selfe to lyke of any for a hosbande whome she neuer saye nor knyowethe not hys lykenge of har. I defare all to your Lordship's honorabell good conseracyon of whome as of vary nobelyte hym selfe I take my leue with my prayer for all hapynes to you and yours shefelde the xvij of maye

your Lordship's faythefull Syster

EShrouesbury

I cannott contente my celfe my wyfes lettares shall passe. withoute Rememberenge & commendynge my celfe vnto your Lordship my derest frende with my moste hartyste thanks

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for the honorabell care of vs & oures whereby if it comlebe you ... more & more bynde me to  
be youres/ Your Lordship's moste fethe[full]

G S[hrewsbury]

## Diplomatic view of Letter 109

[Address Leaf]

### [Address Leaf: Notes]

1577 May 18.

Thynne Vol I [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To the Ryght honorabell  
my ...uler good lorde  
an...rother the erle of  
lecester

[Letter Text]

### [Letter Text: Notes]

173 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

1577? [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

42 [Old item number, hand: archivist]

Shrewsbury (Eliz Countess

of) [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

B [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

My good lord and brother yt ys wrete to me at lenth  
by my sone gelberte talbott how honorabley your .L.  
contenewes your wontyed care to do good stylly to me an  
and myne, and theryn ys expressed your .L. honorabe...  
prouydence now entended for my dowter lennox yn  
maryage, I shall euer acknolege besydes ane enfenytt  
nomber your goodneses to me and myne, the latte  
good spede and prefarment my sonne charles hade,  
brought to passe by your .L. only wysdome. but as  
your .L. nobell mynde ys euer workenge nobell effectes  
and of the same frewtes by good fourtune I and all  
...ne amongst otheres to owre great confortes do  
.....ste, I beyng of no poure nor abelyte any  
..... to make apeare the dewty of thanks/  
... your .L. the greater by me and myne ough...  
...onde your .L. worthey famme whyche ys all the  
...compence I cane make and the beste sarues all

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myne are *[deletion]* abell to do vnto your .L. all the dayes of  
ther lyues. and for my dowter lennox of whome  
your <sup>^L.^</sup> plecythe to haue that essecyall care, and we most  
bonde to your .L. for yt, yeldyng humbyll thanks to  
your .L. she dothe styll fynde har selfe so many wayes  
bonde to you, as wylbe aduysed by your .L. more then  
any man~~[deletion]~~ and I hartely desyre your .L. <sup>^to^</sup> contennew that  
honorabell mynde towards har ether for the Lord  
Sandes or any other that shalbe thought metyste, and  
yf yt plesse your .L. to comende eny to Chattysworth  
as a place for sondery cauncus I desyre fourst to enter  
ther aquentance, he or whome elce your .L. comendes  
shalbe as frendly welcome as I am behouldyng to geue one  
sent by your .L., wereyn as yn althynges elles I do  
refare h a er happy mache, h a er well bestoyng yz my  
greatys care, some of my frendes haue heretofore  
wyched sondery good machus for her, yf I coulde haue  
founde yn her the lysty lykenge more to one then a  
nother I wolde haue trobeled your .L. herw<sup>t</sup> w<sup>t</sup> out whouse  
specyall help I knowe yt colde take no good affecte

[page break]

she sayth euer to me she cane nott determyne har selfe  
to lyke of any for a hosbande whome she neuer saye nor  
knoywe the *[deletion]* not hys lykenge of har. I defare all to  
your .L. honorabell good consederacyon of whome  
as of vary nobelyte hym selfe I take my leue w<sup>t</sup> my  
prayer for all hapynes to you and yours shefelde  
the xvij of maye

your .L. faythefull  
Syster

EShrouesbury

I cannott contente my celfe my wyfes lettares shall passe. w<sup>t</sup> oute  
Rememberenge & commendynge my celfe  
vnto yo<sup>r</sup> L my derest frende  
w<sup>t</sup> my moste hartyste thanks for the

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honorabell care of vs & oures whereby if it comlebe you ... more  
& more bynde me to be yo<sup>res</sup> / G Yo<sup>r</sup> L moste fethe...

G S...

§

[Next Page]

[Next Page: Notes]

174 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

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Eliz<sup>th</sup> (Hardwick <sup>^Bess^</sup>) Countess of Shrews bury  
to R dudley E of Leycester

Written between AD 1577 & 1582: as it refers  
to Leice... endeavours to find a husband

for Bess's daughter. Elizabeth Cavendish then

widow of Charles Stuart E of Lennox. Lennox

died 1577 & Eliz his widow (who was mother

of Lady Arabella Stuart) died 21 Jan 15 82 . [Later editorial note, hand: Canon Jackson]

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