

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 110 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=110>)**

From: Bess of Hardwick (Sheffield, Yorkshire);

To: Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester;

Date: 27 June [1576?]

Summary: Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) writes to Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, to thank him for favours shown to her and ask him to present a friend of hers to the queen. In the postscript she writes on behalf of her son Henry Cavendish, requesting that Dudley send 'earnest letters' to the Prince of Orange in Henry's favour.

Archive: Longleat House, Dudley Papers, DU/II/313

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

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

Hands: Bess of Hardwick | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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## People Associated with Letter 110: 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 110: 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>)

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 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>)
- 18 May [1577?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=109>)
- 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 110

To the Ryght honorabell my vary good lord and cossen the therle of Leicester

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My honorabell Lord/ albeyt one of my greatest comforte[s] ys to here frome your Lordship/ and nothyng can be more acseptabelle vnto me then to here of your wel[l] lykenge the bache, and helthe recouered therby I haue yet not withstandyng forborne wrytyng for that I wolde geue your Lordship no ocasyon hereyng yt was wysshede by lerned aduysse you shulde not youse yt/ other wysse I shulde altogeder for gett my selfe/ whych shall neuer apeare towards so nobell a frende/ as I fynde by good proffe your Lordship ys bothe to me and myne but wyll reste euer moust faythefoull as many your moust honorabell fauores may Iustely chalenge. yn the meane tyme/ my Lord and I acontе all we canе do or procure nothyngе ansorabell to owre good wylles, yf yn dede theys barainne partes gaue any thyngе worthey your Lordship my lorde thynke[s] my sone gelborte for want of experyence hathe/ ofered hys conterey cokes to be ouermache[d] and no defalte nether yn the conterey nor cokes. I beseche your Lordship desyre my vary fren[d] mayster Iulyo to presente vnto har magystye in moust humbell dewty for whose prosperyte I wyll euer pray as one moust bonde. that we may longe leue vnder har gracyous and happy gouernment/ and so my good lorde preyn[ge] to god to sende you helthe and your hartes desyre I ende Shefelde the xxvij of Iune

Your Lordship's louyngе cossen and moust faythefoull frende

EShrouesbur[y]

hary cauendysshe hathe desyred me by hys latters to moue your Lordship for your erneste laters to the prence of oryngе yn hys fauore. and that yt wyll plese you to show you acontе of hym. thys am I euar bolde to trobell your Lordship

## Diplomatic view of Letter 110

[Address Leaf]

To the Ryght  
honorabell my vary  
good lord and cossen  
the therle of Leicester

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[Letter Text]

### [Letter Text: Notes]

Shrewsbury [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

313 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

My honorabell L/ albeyt one of my greatest comferte...  
ys to here frome your .L./ and nothyngcane be  
more acseptabelle vnto me then to here of your wel...  
lykengc the bache, and helthe recouered therby

I haue bene <sup>^</sup>yet not w<sup>t</sup> standyngc<sup>^</sup> forborne wrytyngc for that I wolde  
geue your .L. no ocasyon hereyngc yt was wysshede  
by lerned aduysse you shulde not youse yt/ other  
wysse I shulde altogeder for gett my selfe/ whych  
shall neuer apere towards so nobell a frende/  
as I fynde by good proffe your .L. ys bothe to  
me and myne but wyll reste euer moust  
faythefoull as many your moust honorabell  
fauores may iustely chalenge. yn the meane  
tyme/ my Lo. and I acontc all we canc do or  
procure nothyngc ansorabell to owre good wylles,  
y f yn dede theys barainne partes gaue any  
thyngc worthy your .L. my lorde thynke...  
my sone gelborte for læ want of experyence  
hathe/ ofered hys contere y cokes <sup>^</sup>to be<sup>^</sup> ouermache...  
and no defalte nether yn the contere y nor  
cokes. I beseche your .L. desyre my vary fren...  
mayster Iulyo to presente vnto har magystye in  
moust humbell dewty for whose prosperyte I

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wyll euer pray as one moust bonde. that  
we may longe leue vnder har gracyous and  
happy gouerment/ and so my good lorde preyn... <sup>^to god^</sup> to sende you helthe and your hartes  
desyre  
I ende Shefelde the xxvij of Iune

Your .L. louynge cossen  
and moust faythefoull  
frende

EShrouesbur...

hary cauendysse hathe  
desyred me by hys latters  
to moue your .L. for your  
erneste latters to the prence  
of orynge yn hys fauore. and that  
yt wyll plese you to show you  
aconte of hym. thys am I euar bolde to trobell your .L.

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