

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 123 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=123>)**

From: Bess of Hardwick (Sheffield, Yorkshire);

To: Sir Francis Walsingham;

Date: 29 December 1578

Summary: Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) writes to Sir Francis Walsingham, assuring him of her loyalty towards him and the queen. She reports that her husband, George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, has pronounced articles sent to Mary Queen of Scots, who has grown 'lean and sickly'. Mary will write her own answer to the accusations, but Bess cautions that whatever Mary says 'in excuse of her self I hope there will be advised considerations in believing her'.

Archive: Hatfield House, Cecil Papers, 10/77, fols 137-8

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

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

Hands: Bess of Hardwick | unknown scribe | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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## People Associated with Letter 123: 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 123: Sir Francis Walsingham

Sir Francis Walsingham (c.1532-1590), was a principal secretary and an intelligencer to Elizabeth I. During the reign of Queen Mary, he lived in exile in Europe. Then, having returned to England following the accession of Elizabeth I, he married Ursula (née St Barbe; with whom he had two daughters); and backed by powerful figures at court (such as Cecil and Leicester) he was initially appointed as an ambassador to France in 1570. In 1573 he was appointed as principal secretary and a privy councillor. By the early 1580s he was one of the queen's key advisors and intimates - evidenced by her nickname for him, her 'Moor'. Walsingham is known to posterity mainly for his complex coordination of intelligence operations - most famously for the discovery of the Babington Plot in 1586, which ultimately led to the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, previously held in the custodial charge of Bess and her fourth husband, George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury.

Other letters associated with Sir Francis Walsingham:

8 June 1576 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=234>)

28 January 1581/2 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=144>)

6 May 1582 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=146>)

6 May 1582 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=145>)

7 February 1582/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=148>)

6 April 1584 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=149>)

2 December 1585 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=153>)

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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>)
- 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>)
- 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 123

To my honorable good frende Syre francys walsyngham knyght har magystyes prencypall secretary

29. December .1578 From the Countesse of Shrewsburie Scottish queen will answeare &c

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Good mayster secretary my approuyd good frend to whome I do yn mynd acknoledge my selfe greatly beouldynge the openyone you haue of my fydeyte and lyall sarues to har magystye and frendly affeccyone you bare me for that cause shall I dowte not so unnyte owre myndes to gether as therby shall conteneu assuryed frenshep betweste vs. for yf ther be fown[d] any subgett more faythfoull to har magystye or more carefoull to dyscharge my bonden dewty to my so nobyll soferyne then I. lett me neuer inioye your frenchepe nor thynke me worthey to leue. my lorde prononced the contentes of thartycles you sente to thys queen who semed not so meche to myslyke of the same as that he charged har with them. and not therfor well plesed with hym. sayd she wold not put har ansore to hys reporte for dowte of hys adecyone but wryte har selfe at hur perell as she hath done and that stayed my Lord so longe because she kepe har bede saiynge crestolme day euer yn affecte synce my comynge she ys growed lene and seckely and saythe wante of exarcyse brynge har yn to that weeke statte I se no danger yn har of lyffe. and what so euer she wrytes yn excuse of hur selfe I hope ther wylbe aduysed consederacyons yn beleuyng har. and so wyssynge to you as to my deare fren[d] I comende me hartely to your selfe and you to the almyghty shefelde the xxix of desember

your faythefoull assuryed frend

EShrouesbury

[I] came hether of crestolmes euen and lefte my letyll arbell at Chattysworth I thanke god she yndewred uary well with trauell and yat I was forsed to take longe Iornes to be here with my lorde afore this day

## Diplomatic view of Letter 123

[Address Leaf]

**[Address Leaf: Notes]**

XV. 36.

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

A. E. 19

21

Whitthall

1574. [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To my honorable good  
frende Syre francys  
walsyngham knyght  
har magystyes  
prencypall secretary

~ 29. December .1578

From the Countesse

of Shrewsburie

Sc: q. will answeare

&c

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[Overleaf]

**[Overleaf: Notes]**

138 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

[Letter Text]

**[Letter Text: Notes]**

77 [Item number, hand: archivist]

137 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

Good mayster secretary my approuyd good frend to whome  
I do yn mynd acknoledge my selfe greatly beouldynge  
the openyone you haue of my fydelyte and lyall  
sarues to har magystye and frendly affeccyone you  
bare me for that cause shall I dowte not so unnyte  
owre myndes to gether as therby shall contenew  
assuryed frenshap betweste vs. for yf ther be fown...

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any subgett more faythfoull to har magystye or  
more carefoull to dyscharge my bonden dewty to  
my so nobyll soferyne then I. lett me neuer inioye  
your frenchepe nor thynke me worthey to leue.  
my lorde prononed the contentes of thartycles  
you sente to thys q. who semed <sup>^not^</sup> so meche to myslyke  
of the same as that he charged har w<sup>t</sup> them.  
and not therfor well plesed w<sup>t</sup> hym. sayd she  
wold not put har ansore to hys reporte for dowte  
of hys adecyone but wryte har selfe at hur *perell*  
as she hath done and that stayed my Lord  
so longe because she kepe har bede saiynge crestolme  
day euer yn affecte synce my comynge she ys  
growed lene and seckely and saythe wante of  
exarcyse ys brynge har yn to that w<sup>t</sup> weke  
statte I se no danger yn har of lyffe. and what  
so euer she wrytes yn es excuse of hur selfe I  
hope ther wylbe aduysed consederacyons yn beleuyng  
har. and so wyssynge <sup>^to^</sup> you as to my deare fren...  
I comende me hartely to your selfe and you to  
the almyghty shefelde the xxjx of desember

your faythefoull  
assuryed frend

EShrouesbury

... came hether of crestolmes euen  
and lefte my letyll arbell at  
Chattysworth I thanke god she  
yndewred uary well w<sup>t</sup> trauell  
and y<sup>t</sup> I was forsed to take longe  
Iornes to be here w<sup>t</sup> my lorde afore  
this day

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