

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 013 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=013>)**

From: Sir William Cavendish (Chatsworth House, Derbyshire);

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: 13 April [c. 1550]

Summary: Sir William Cavendish writes to his wife, Bess (Lady Cavendish), asking her to pay a London man for oats they bought from him.

Archive: Folger Shakespeare Library, Cavendish-Talbot MSS, X.d.428 (13)

Delivery status: to Bess, sent

Letter features: papered seal, embossed with the Cavendish arms featuring three bucks heads cabossed Ribbon/floss – no. Letter packet - tuck and fold

Hands: Sir William Cavendish | archivist | unknown scribe |

Version: 1.0

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## **People Associated with Letter 013: Sir William Cavendish**

Sir William Cavendish (1508-57) made his fortune in his capacity as an agent of crown finance. By the 1530s he was one of Thomas Cromwell's principal clerks and acted as one of his main agents in the dissolution of the monasteries. He was appointed treasurer of the king's chamber and knighted in 1546. He married Bess (she being the widow of Robert Barlow and Cavendish's third wife) on 20 August 1547 at Bradgate, Leicestershire. The marriage took place at 2am in the Greys' manor house: the unusual time suggests the ceremony was in secret, although the marriage was supported by both the Greys and the Brandons. He was the father of all her six surviving children and their marriage is especially significant in terms of their shared social aspirations. It was a union that brought Bess into courtly circles, gave her her first taste of real wealth and, ultimately, became the foundation for the dynasty which she would further throughout the rest of her life.

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## People Associated with Letter 013: 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.

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## Other letters associated with Chatsworth House, Derbyshire

- 15 Mar [1550s?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=200>)
- 31 Mar [1550s?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=198>)
- 14 Nov [1552] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=99>)
- 13 Jan [c.1560] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=47>)
- 4 Sep [1560?] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=59>)
- 12 Oct [c.1560] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=60>)
- 24 Oct [c.1560] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=61>)
- 18 May 1562 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=55>)
- 20 Nov [1565?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=17>)
- 8 Dec [c.1565] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=28>)
- 26 Feb [1566?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=18>)
- Jun [1568?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=157>)
- 28 Jun [1568?] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=64>)
- [1570s?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=210>)
- [1570] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=178>)
- 28 Jul 1570 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=25>)
- 31 Aug 1570 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=170>)
- 21 Sep 1571 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=26>)
- [1577] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=182>)
- 2 Aug 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=197>)
- 23 Sep 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=121>)
- 22 Jun 1579 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=189>)
- 15 Jul 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=175>)
- 8 Apr 1594 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=236>)
- 8 May 1594 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=102>)

## Normalised view of Letter 013

To Besse Cavendysshe my wyff

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Good Besse haueinge forgotten to wryght in my letters that yow shuld pay otewell alayne. eight poundes for certayne otys that we haue bought of hym. our and aboue xls that I haue paid to hym in hand hertely pray yow for that he is desyrus to receyve the rest at london// to pay hym vppon the sight hereof yow knowe my Store and therefore I haue appoyntyd hym to haue it at your handes. And thus, faer yow well ffrom Chattesworth the xiiijth of Aprell

All yours as most worthy/

W C

## Diplomatic view of Letter 013

[Address Leaf]

### [Address Leaf: Notes]

S<sup>r</sup> W<sup>m</sup> Cavendish of Chatsworth  
(ancestor to ye Dukes of Devonshire)  
to his Wife Eliz. D.<sup>r</sup> to I.<sup>o</sup> n Hardwick  
of Hardwick Esq<sup>r</sup> & Widow of Robt  
Barley of Barley in Comitatus Derb.  
Esq<sup>r</sup> afterwards Countess of  
Shrewsbury. Privy Councillor  
*[deletion]* Treasurer of ye Chamber  
to Hen. 8. Edw 6 & Q Mary [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To Besse Cavendyssh  
my wyff  
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[Letter Text]

### [Letter Text: Notes]

X.d.428  
(13) [Item number, hand: archivist]  
UU [hand: unknown scribe]  
W<sup>m</sup> Cavendish of Chatsworth Esq.<sup>r</sup> (afterwards Knighted) the Founder of y<sup>e</sup> Devonshire  
Family, he mar.<sup>d</sup> Eliz. Daughter of Iohn Hardwick of Hardwick in Comitatus Derby Esq.<sup>r</sup> &  
Widow of Rob.<sup>t</sup> Barley in Comitatus predicto Esq.<sup>r</sup> [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]  
35 [Old foliation/item number, hand: archivist]

Good Besse haueinge forgotten to wryght in my letters  
for that yow shuld pay otewell alayne. eight poundes for certayne  
otys that we haue bought of hym. our and aboute xls that I haue  
paid to hym in hand hertely pray yow for that he is desyrus  
to receyve the rest at london// to pay hym vppon the sight hereof  
yow knowe my Store and therefore I haue appoyntyd hym to  
haue it at yo<sup>r</sup> handes. And thus, faer yow well ffrom  
Chattsworth the xiiij<sup>th</sup> of Aprell

All yo<sup>r</sup> s. as most worthy/

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W C  
§

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