

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 136 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=136>)

From: Sir Robert Cecil; Sir John Stanhope;

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: [January] 1602/3

Summary: Sir John Stanhope and Sir Robert Cecil write to Bess (dowager countess of Shrewsbury) by commandment of the queen, regarding Bess's granddaughter Arbella Stuart - namely to do with how 'some base companions (thinking it pleasing to her youth and sex) to be sought in marriage, were content to abuse her with a device that the earl of Hertford had a purpose to match his grandchild with her'. They assure her that Hertford had no such intention and request Bess to assign some members of her household to keep a close, however discreet, watch over Arbella. As for Bess's request to be 'freed of her', the queen can think of no other fit place for Arbella.

Archive: Hatfield House, Cecil Papers, 135/128, fols 167-8

Delivery status: to Bess, not sent (i.e. a draft or contemporary copy)

Letter features: Seal intact - no. Ribbon/floss – no.

Hands: unknown scribe | Sir Robert Cecil | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 136: Sir Robert Cecil

Robert Cecil, first earl of Salisbury (1563-1612), leading administrator, politician and courtier, was the only son of William Cecil, Lord Burghley. Like his father, he held a number of important positions, including secretary of state, lord high steward to Queen Anne of Denmark (King James I's wife), lord treasurer and master of the wards.

Other letters associated with Sir Robert Cecil:

20 May 1595 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=124>)

2 June 1600 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=125>)

6 October 1600 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=126>)

28 April 1601 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=127>)

18 January 1602/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=139>)

2 February 1602/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=130>)

6 February 1602/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=131>)

21 February 1602/3 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=133>)

21 February 1602/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=132>)

3 March 1602/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=134>)

13 April 1603 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=140>)

People Associated with Letter 136: Sir John Stanhope

John Stanhope, first Baron Stanhope (c.1540-1621), appears as a courtier at the Elizabethan court in the late 1570s. His first wife Mary (née Knolles) died in 1567 and her inheritance reverted to her sister, which may have put Stanhope in financial straits. In 1589 he married Margaret Mackwilliams (c.1565-1640), a relation of William Cecil, Lord Burghley. At the same time, he also became associated with the Cecils and was appointed master of the posts in 1590. Bess's son-in-law/stepson Gilbert Talbot, seventh earl of Shrewsbury, was thwarted by Stanhope's influence at court during his feud with the Stanhopes of Nottinghamshire. Stanhope continued to rise under Elizabeth I and was knighted and appointed treasurer of the chamber in 1596, and he became vice-chamberlain of the household and a privy councillor in 1601 (posts he remained in at the accession of James I).

Other letters associated with Sir John Stanhope:

2 February 1602/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=130>)

21 February 1602/3 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=133>)

3 March 1602/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=134>)

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People Associated with Letter 136: 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.

Normalised view of Letter 136

1602

Lady Shrewsbury Master Vicechamberlain and my lettre to ye Lady Shrewsbury

Madame. It hath pleased her Majesty; vppon the receipt of your lettres by Sir Henry Bronekard (with which and with all other perticulers he acquaynted her) to command vs two, to Lett you know, how much she remayneth satisfyed with your proceedinges ; nothings appearinge in them, but fullnes of care to prevent inconveniencs and desyre to accomplish (in all thinges) her Majestes pleasure, But (Least you by mistakinge her meaninge, or apprehendinge more then is needfull, should peradventure take some course, that is not covenient) we are commanded to Lett you know; first what her Majesty conceaues of the younge Ladyes action, and how (from hence forth) she would haue it ordered, to avoyd idle talkes and rumours, whereof there is aptnes in most men, to take libertye in this tyme. In the observation of the roote (from whence this motive spronge in the Lady) she doth perceave, that some base companions (thinkinge it pleasinge to her youth and sex) to be sought in marriage, weare content to abuse her, with a device; That the Erle of Hartford, had a purpose, to match his Gran=chylde with her A matter wherein they knew (in their owne consciences) how Leawdly they dealt, but that they hoped, soe to haue practised vppon the Nobleman, as to haue proffitt if they could once haue been admitted; only to haue entered into such communication with him: for of this your Ladyship may be assured, That if his owne precise carriage in the matter and cleare and inocent dealinge with the queen (as he hath done) weare not sufficient to cleare the Erle; yet the incongruitye of his Gran=chylde's yeares (beinge between 17 and 18) besydes the absurd Election of the Ministers, and course of proceedinges) is sufficient to satisfye all the world, that this matter had a corrupt beginninge, as it hath a fond end, and hereof is her Majesty pleased, that you should make the yonge Lady, partaker; to this intent; both that she may see her follye, and withall to receaue this admonition hereby; That howsoever her Majesty may be contented (in respect of her penitence for her fault) to pass ouer the presumption in her, to hearken to a match in that place, whereby it mought be collected, that she had some other idle conceipt, then the marriage, Yet that if she shall not take this for a warninge, and content her selfe to Liue in good sort, (with soe deare a parent and soe worthy a matrone) without dealinge in such thinges, or any matter of importance, wherevnto she shall not ether, first make you privy (if she be the first Authour) or immediately after she is acquaynted by any others, shall not resort to you and playnly and dutifully declare all circumstances even at the first instant, she shall be made knone, that therein she abuseth that libertye, which otherwise her Majesty is pleased, she should hould, as heretofore she hath done, for all correspondencies and exchanges of Courtesyes, and acquayntance with her freindes or yours, in matters that tend not to such like plottes or practises, wherein she must know,

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that beeing of that blood she is, her Majesty will looke for an extraordinary accompt of her proceedinges. Next Madame to concurr with this purpose, of her Majesty, in the manner of her traictment we are commanded to tell you, that she would haue you (by all meanes) avoyde any such manner of Guardinge; your howse, or excluding resort as may contynue the fond bruietes. that are raysed, and that you therein retourne to your accustomed manner, without any other overcuriositye. Your Ladyship may notwithstandinge sufficiently observe, how she carryes her selfe, And because your age and sicknes cannot permitt you to be allwayes in her company, you may impose some care vppon some discreet gentlewoman to be in her company and some honest gentleman to attend her amongst the rest, whoe without vsinge any extraordinarye restraynt, may haue eyes sufficiently vnto her, if she doe any thinge vnfitt for her ether in dutye to the queen, or in preiudice of her owne honour or welldoinge. To conclude Madame we must agayne reiterate vnto you her Majestes gracious acceptation of your dutifull care and affection to please her. Only you must receaue this answeare for your suite to be freed of her, That her Majesty cannot thinke of any other place, soe fitt for her as this is, and therefore desyreth you to remayne contented and to looke to your health, that God may giue you a comfortable life, which her Majesty wisheth you as much as any freind you haue. And soe for this tyme we &c.

Diplomatic view of Letter 136

[Address Leaf]

1602

La: Shrewsb:

M^r Vicechamb^r~~lain~~ and

owr^r ^{^my^} [^]lettre to y^e

Lady Shrewsbury

[Overleaf]

[Overleaf: Notes]

168 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

128 [Item number, hand: archivist]

167 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

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