

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 159 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=159>)

From: Bess of Hardwick (Wingfield);

To: William Cecil, Lord Burghley;

Date: 11 April 1591

Summary: Bess (dowager countess of Shrewsbury) writes to William Cecil, Lord Burghley, regarding troubled negotiations with her stepson and son-in-law, Gilbert, seventh earl of Shrewsbury, 'in respect of my widow's part'.

Archive: The National Archives, State Papers Domestic, Elizabeth I, 12/238, ff 173r-174v (item 116)

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

Letter features: seal, red wax, embossed Ribbon/floss – no. Letter packet - tuck and fold

Hands: Scribe A | William Cecil, Lord Burghley | archivist | Bess of Hardwick |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 159: 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 159: William Cecil, Lord Burghley

William Cecil (1521-98), Lord Burghley, was a chief minister to Queen Elizabeth I for most of her reign. Most importantly, he served as secretary of state (1558-71) and lord high treasurer (from 1571) and he was elected chancellor of Cambridge University. He was an especially constant friend to Bess's fourth husband, George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury; therefore, upon becoming the countess of Shrewsbury, Bess's own friendship with Cecil was also strengthened.

Other letters associated with William Cecil, Lord Burghley:

13 October 1571 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=225>)

14 May 1578 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=188>)

23 September 1578 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=121>)

24 October 1578 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=122>)

22 June 1579 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=189>)

28 January 1581/2 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=162>)

2 August 1584 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=150>)

6 October 1585 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=152>)

[13 June 1586] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=230>)

6 October 1587 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=156>)

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

21 September 1592 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=163>)

9 August 1593 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=108>)

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Other letters associated with Wingfield

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

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

28 May 1576 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=82>)

6 Oct 1585 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=152>)

6 Oct 1587 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=156>)

5 Nov 1588 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=37>)

22 Apr 1589 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=38>)

Normalised view of Letter 159

To the Righte honorable my very good Lord the Lorde Burgley Lord Tresurar of Englande

xj. Aprill. 1591 Countess of Shrewsbury by Sergeant bradshaw

My moste honorable good Lord; your Lordships ould saruante my good frend master Bradshaw coming by me in his retorne toward the cowrte, I mighte not suffare him to pas without my Letters of moste hartye thanks to your Lordship for all your honorable fauors towards me, and withall to segnefye partly to your Lordship how matters now reste betwene the earle of shrousbury and me, which I should haue thoughte fully concluded yf be fore I had not had tryall of his strange and vnkynde dealing; the xjth of marche Laste master markham being sente hether to me from the earle of shrousbury and my daughter for to make offars in respecte of my wedows parte, I tould him yt was in veane for me to enter into taulke with him for that the earle hertofore had refused such articles as he had set downe; whervnto master markham replied that he had full commetione from the earle to conclude all matters and whatsoever he should now set downe he would be bounde the earle should parforme them, so that the xijth of marche Laste ther weare artocles set downe by master markham betwen the earle of shrousbury and me and master markham bounde in syxe thousad ponde that the earle should parform them, before the Laste of marche; the effecte wherof I segnefied to my solesytor whaley emediatly vpon the conclusyone, and commandid him forthewyth to wayte of your Lordship at your Leasure and to declare the wholl vnto your Lordship which was Longe for slowed by the neclegence of the carryar that stayed my Letters as Whaley hath wrete to me; since master markhams going hence which was the xijth of marche vntyll the viijth of aprell I harde not the Leaste worde from the earle though I contnewally expected before the Laste of marche to haue all mattars parfeted and to reseue both Leade and cattyll according to the agremente; and assurance for the mony to be payde at days sott downe in the articles// the tyme prefexed being paste at the Laste I harde that some strange and nedles quarryls weare intended by the earle to breake of the agremente tho he nether myslyked the same nor days of paymente the some being so smalle in respecte of my dewe that in reason he ys to conclude without any new inventyons, but he hath founde me so forwarde styll in relenting my righte and dew, that this thurd agremente thoughe a tryffell wyll not please him, but that by pretending some other matter he wyll styll seke to brenge me in the ende to nothings, but yf this goe not forwarde I wylbe Loth to taulke the forte tyme/ what he wyll doe yet resteth vncertine, but as things further shall faule out I wyll presume to segnefye them to your Lordship and I humble beseche your Lordship to beare with this my contnewall bouldnes to troble you, the almighty grante your Lordship all confortes and a moste happye Longe Lyffe at winfeld this xjth of apryll//

your Lordships and so many ways bounde//

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EShrouesbury

Diplomatic view of Letter 159

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

1591 April 11

Dom [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To the Righte honorable my
very good Lord the Lorde
Burgley Lo: Tresurar of
Englande

xj. Aprill. 1591

Countess of Shrewsbury

by *Sergeant* bradshaw

[Overleaf]

[Overleaf: Notes]

174 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

227 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

173 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

90 [Old item number, hand: archivist]

116 [Item number, hand: archivist]

226 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

My moste honorable good Lord; your Lo:^{ps} ould saruante my
good frend m.^r Bradshaw coming by me in his retorne
toward the cowrte, I mighte not suffare him to pas
wth out my Letters of moste hartye thanks to your Lo:^p
for all your honorable fauors towards me, and
wth all to segnefyne partly to your Lo:^p how matters
now reste betwene the earle of shrousbury and
me, w^{ch} I should haue thoughte fully concluded
yf be fore I had not had tryall of his strange
and vnkynde dealing; the xjth of marche Laste
m.^r markham being sente hether to me from the

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earle of shrousbury and my daughter for to make
offars in respecte of my wedows parte, I tould
him yt was in veane for me to enter into
taulke wth him for that the earle hertofore
had refused such articles as he had set downe;
whervnto m^r markham replyed that he had full
commetione from the earle to conclude all matters
and whatsoeuer he should now set downe he would
be bounde the earle should parforme them, so
that the xijth of marche Laste ther weare artocles
set downe by m^r markham betwen the earle of
shrousbury and me and m^r markham bounde in
syxe thousad pounde that the earle should parform
them, before the Laste of marche; the effecte
wherof I segnefyed to my solesytor whaley
emediatly vpon the conclusyone, and commandid
him forthewyth to wayte of your Lo:^p at your
Leasure and to declare the wholl vnto your Lo:^p w^{ch}
was Longe for slowed by the neclegence of the
carryar that stayed my Letters as Whaley hath
wrete to me; since m^r markhams going hence
w^{ch} was the xijth of marche vntyll the viijth
of aprell I harde not the Leaste worde from
the earle though I contenewally expected
before the Laste of marche to haue all mattars
parfeted and to reseue both Leade and cattyll
according to the agremente; and assurance for
the mony to be payde at days sott downe in
the articles//

[page break]

the tyme prefexed being paste at the Laste I harde
that some strange and nedles quarryls weare intended by
the earle to breake of the agremente tho he nether
myslyked the same nor days of paymente the some being
so smalle in respecte of my dewe that in reason he ys
to conclude wth out any new inventoryons, but he hath
founde me so forwarde styll in relenting my righte
and dew, that this thurd agremente thoughe a tryffell

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wyll not please him, but that by pretending some
other matter he wyll styll seke to brenge me in the
ende to nothinge, but yf this goe not forwarde
I wylbe Loth to taulke the forte tyme/ what
he wyll doe yet resteth vncertine, but as things
further shall faule out I wyll presume to
segnefyte them to your Lo:^p and I humble beseche
your Lo:^p to beare wth this my contenewall
bouldnes to troble you, the almighty grante your
Lo:^p all comfortes and a moste happye Longe Lyffe
at winfeld this xjth of apryll//

your Lo:^{ps} and so many
ways bounde//

EShrouesbury

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