Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 185 (URL: http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=185)

From: Bess of Hardwick (Chelsea, London, Greater London);
To: Mary Talbot;
Date: [1580]
Summary: Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) writes to her daughter, Mary Talbot (née Cavendish), with news that 'my sister Snow is dispatched from the court and gone into the country'; and that her own bodily pains (which she thinks are made worse by 'moist weather') are somewhat better now.
Archive: Lambeth Palace Library, Talbot Papers, MS 3205, fol. 72
Delivery status: from Bess, sent
Letter features: Seal intact - no. Ribbon/floss – no. Letter packet - irregular
Hands: Scribe A | archivist | Bess of Hardwick |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 185: 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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People Associated with Letter 185: Mary Talbot

Mary Talbot (née Cavendish; b. 1556, d. 1632) was one of Bess's daughters from her marriage with Sir William Cavendish, who died in 1557 when she was only a year old. Following her mother's marriage to George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury (and to serve their interests), on 9 February 1568, when Mary was around twelve-years old, she was married to the earl's son from his previous marriage, Gilbert Talbot. That is to say, Mary was married to her step-brother, at which point the earl became both her step-father and father-in-law. (At the same time, her brother Henry was married to the earl's daughter Grace.) Mary's husband Gilbert was the second son but as his older brother Frances died in 1582, Gilbert succeeded to the earldom, and he and Mary became seventh earl and countess of Shrewsbury, after his father died on 18 November 1590. Mary and Gilbert's two sons, George and John, died in infancy and therefore their three daughters became joint heirs to their father's titles and great estate: Mary Herbert, countess of Pembroke (d. 1650), Elizabeth Grey, countess of Kent (1582-1651) and Aletheia Howard, countess of Arundel (b. after 1582, d. 1654). Mary was better educated than her mother Bess and is known for her strong-mindedness, intelligence and opinions, as well as for her conversion to Roman Catholicism as an adult. She was involved in the elopement and escape plans of her niece Arbella Stuart in 1610 and subsequently, when she refused to testify, was imprisoned in the Tower for several years. She spoke up for her mother, Bess, to queen Elizabeth, in 1587, during her estrangement from Shrewsbury. Despite some of their differences, Mary is said to have been genuinely distressed when her mother died in 1608 and was remembered by Bess in her will.

Other letters associated with Mary Talbot:

1 August 1577 (Author)(URL: http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=85)

13 February 1578/9 (Author)(URL: http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=166)

[1580s] (Recipient)(URL: http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=181)

[19 September 1583?] (Author)(URL: http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=86)

[February 1589] (Author)(URL: http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=87)

1 July 1589 (Author)(URL: http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=88)

18 February [1590/1?] (Recipient)(URL: http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=233)

28 February [1597/8?] (Recipient)(URL: http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=187)

15 January [1606] (Recipient)(URL: http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=180)

8 July [1607] (Author)(URL: http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=89)

30 November 1607 (Recipient)(URL: http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=179)

30 December [1607?] (Author)(URL: http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=90)

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Other letters associated with Chelsea, London, Greater London

[1570s?] (origin) (URL: http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=184)

[1580s] (origin) (URL: http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=181)

[Apr 1587] (origin) (URL: http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=186)

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Normalised view of Letter 185

To my Loueng daughter the Lady Talbott / / /

Swete harte, I harde this day from my sonne parponnte as you may parseue by his Letter;, my systar snowe ys dysspached from the courte and gon into the contrie no doubte ther was some deuise vsed to her to doe as she hath done, I am glad she ys dysspached; but I can say no more then nan baynton tels me, that she was at London and ys gon into the contrie; I thanke god that your Lord you and all our Lettylons are well, I haue ben contenewally greately paynd in my heade, necke, shouldars, and armes, and thenke yt much worse in the moyste wether./ this day I thanke god I am somewhat better and ventared to goe into the gardyn wher I was not this v. or vj weekes before, I harde not from the courte since monday, nor know nothing worthy the aduertising and so I ende praying, god to blesse you my good sonne and all ours/ at Chelsey this friday/

your Louing mother/ / /

EShrouesbury

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Diplomatic view of Letter 185

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

E Countess to her d[r]
the Lady Talbot [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To my Loueng daughter the
Lady Talbott / / /

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

72 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

Swete harte, I harde this day from my sonne parponnte
as you may parseue by his Letter;, my systar snowe ys
dysspached from the courte and gon into the contrie
no doubte ther was some deuise vsed to her to doe as
she hath done, I am glad she ys dysspached; but I
can say no more then nan baynton tels me, that she
was at London and ys gon into the contrie; I
thanke god that your L you and all our Lettylons
are well, I haue ben contenewally greately paynd
in my heade, necke, shouldars, and armes, and thenke
yt much worse in the moyste wether./ this day
I thanke god I am somewhat better and ventared
to goe into the gardyn wher I was not this v. or
vj weekes before, I harde not from the courte
since monday, nor know nothing worthy the aduertising
and so I ende praying, god to blesse you my good
sonne and all ours/ at Chelsey this friday/

your Louing mother/ / /

EShrouesbury

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