

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 186 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=186>)

From: Bess of Hardwick (Chelsea, London, Greater London);

To: George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury;

Date: [April 1587]

Summary: Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) writes to her husband, George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, thanking him for a letter which has provided her with great comfort - she was afraid that having left so early in the morning as he did would have caused him pain in his hands and legs. She looks forward to their next meeting and (in a postscript) asks him to bear with her 'bleating' (i.e. prattling) as she has not written much of late under her own hand, and 'could not now forbear'. Although undated, this letter is almost certainly from the period in which Bess and Shrewsbury were at court in April 1587, being 'reconciled' by the queen. The queen's resulting commandments were favourable for Bess, but Shrewsbury remained bitter (which is perhaps why he left Chelsea without her).

Archive: Lambeth Palace Library, Talbot Papers, MS 3205, fol. 73

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

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

Hands: Bess of Hardwick | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

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Bess of Hardwick's Letters

People Associated with Letter 186: 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

Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

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 186: George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury

George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury (c.1522-90), was the eldest and only surviving son of Francis Talbot, fifth earl of Shrewsbury (1500-60), and his first wife, Mary (d.1538). In 1538, at the age of sixteen, he took up the title of Lord Talbot, until he succeeded to the earldom after his father's death twenty-two years later. In 1539 he married his first wife, Gertrude (née Manners; d.1566/7), with whom he had seven children: four daughters and three sons. Early on he acquired a number of honours stemming from his family's well-established prominence in the north: knight bachelor (1547), member of the council of the north (1549), knight of the Garter (1561), and lord lieutenant of Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire (1565). Following the death of his first wife, he married Bess, then the widow of William St Loe (c.1520-65?), in 1567. At this point Shrewsbury was one of the wealthiest men in England, derived from his estates and also business adventuring in farming, shipping, coal-mining, glassworks and lead extraction and production. Soon after his marriage to Bess, however, he was appointed keeper of Mary Queen of Scots, a custodianship he would hold from 1569-84. Shrewsbury prided himself on his loyalty to Elizabeth I, but he soon found her reluctant to provide sufficient diet money to keep Mary and her retinue. This, in addition to the monies needed for expensive building projects (at Worksop and Chatsworth), and his eldest son Gilbert's debts led to serious financial anxiety for Shrewsbury. Furthermore, he was forced to remain with Mary at all times and was therefore losing his place at court. As Shrewsbury's stresses grew and he became increasingly irascible, his marriage with Bess broke down spectacularly amid quarrelling to do with family finances and the allocation of estates. Scandal and mutual bad-mouthing soon became very public and the queen herself intervened, eventually dictating that Shrewsbury pay Bess a regular income (from 1587), while the two lived apart. Shrewsbury was an ill man for many years and suffered with a severe rheumatic condition, what he referred to as 'gout', which contributed to his terrible handwriting. He died in the company of his mistress, Elinor Bretton, at Sheffield Manor, on 18 November 1590, after being administered a mercury cure. His son Gilbert Talbot succeeded him as the seventh earl of Shrewsbury.

Other letters associated with George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury:

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

[December 1568] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=65>)

13 December [1568] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=66>)

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

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

[c. 1570] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=9>)

[1570] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=178>)

[1570s] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=203>)

[c. 1570] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=68>)

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

4 November 1570 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=226>)
4 November 1570 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=171>)
[c. 1571] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=70>)
[c. 1571] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=69>)
[1574?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=72>)
[1574?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=71>)
8 August 1574 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=73>)
[c. 1575?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=76>)
[c. 1575] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=75>)
[1575-7] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=245>)
7 June 1575 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=74>)
June 19 [c. 1575?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=77>)
20 February 1575/6 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=165>)
19 November [1576?] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=115>)
[1577] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=183>)
[1577] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=182>)
18 May [1577?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=109>)
4 June 1577 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=221>)
25 June 1577 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=172>)
14 May 1578 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=188>)
[30 June 1578?] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=83>)
2 August 1578 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=197>)
28 December 1578 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=193>)
13 February 1578/9 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=166>)
28 February 1578/9 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=174>)
22 June 1579 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=189>)
17 January 1579/80 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=190>)
13 May 1580 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=194>)
21 June 1580 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=78>)
11 September 1580 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=154>)
10 October 1580 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=79>)
8 February 1581/2 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=195>)
4 August 1584 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=119>)

Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

- 26 August [1584] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=116>)
14 October [1585] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=229>)
23 October 1585 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=117>)
9 June 1586 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=176>)
4 August 1586 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=202>)

Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

Other letters associated with Chelsea, London, Greater London

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

[1580] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=185>)

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

Normalised view of Letter 186

To my lorde my hosbande the yerle of Shrouesbury

my owne good Lorde I longed greatly to here frome you and thanke you moste hartely for your Latter whyche was a great coumfor[t] to me, nexte to your selfe, ther ys not any thyng coulde be more welcome I wos yn some feare that your yerly Iorne myght brynge you to some payne yn your handes or leges, I haue thought the tyme longe sence your goynge. you haue bene letyll out of my mynde I wolde you knewe my wholle thoughtes I was somethynge afearde thys mornynge that I shulde not haue sene you afore your Iorney, now I shall longe for monday and wyll yn the meanne tyme and euer wysshe to you as to my owne harte and prey to the lorde to sende you helthe withall the hapenes your selfe cane desyre Chelsey thys seterday

your louynge and most obedyante faythefull wyffe

EShrouesbury

bare swete harte with my bletynge, of late I haue yoused to wryte letyll. with my owne hande but coulde nott now for bayre

Diplomatic view of Letter 186

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

E Countess
to the E
before their
dissension [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To my lorde my
hosbande the yerle
of Shrouesbury

[Overleaf]

[Overleaf: Notes]

74 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

73 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

my owne good Lorde I longed greatly to here
frome you and thanke you ^{^moste^} hartely for
your Latter whyche was a great coumfor...
to me, nexte to your selfe, ~~no~~ ther ys not
any ~~thynng~~ thyng coulde be more welcome
I was yn some feare that your yerly Iorne
myght brynge you to some payne yn
your handes or leges, I haue thought
the tyme longe sence your goynge.
you haue bene letyll out of my mynde
I wolde you knewe my wholle thoughtes
I was somethynge afearde thys ~~morny~~
mornynge that I shulde not haue sene
you afore your Iorney, now I shall
longe for monday and wyll yn the
~~tyme~~ ^{^tyme^} meanne and euer wysshe to you as to my
owne harte and prey to the lorde to
sende you helthe w^t all the hapenes

Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

your selfe cane desyre Chelsey thys
seterday

your louynge and
most obedyante
faythefull wyffe

EShrouesbury

bare swete harte w^t
my bletynge, of
late I haue yoused
to wryte letyll. w^t
my owne hande
but coulde nott now
for bayre

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