

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 198 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=198>)**

From: Bess of Hardwick (Chatsworth House, Derbyshire);

To: Sir John Thynne, Senior;

Date: 31 March [1550s]

Summary: Bess (Lady Cavendish) writes to Sir John Thynne with news of 'disordered things' recently put 'into some good order', including relations with her tenants. She hopes Thynne can visit Chatsworth on his next trip to London or when visiting his estates in Yorkshire.

Archive: Longleat House, Thynne Papers, MS 4, fols 243-44v

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

Letter features: Seal intact - no. Ribbon/floss – no. Letter packet - tuck and fold

Hands: Bess of Hardwick | unknown scribe | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

## People Associated with Letter 198: 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 198: Sir John Thynne, Senior

Sir John Thynne (1512/13-1580), was the eldest son of Thomas Thynne and his wife, Margaret (née Eynns). He entered the service of Edward Seymour, Viscount Beauchamp, in 1536 and served as his steward until 1552. Thynne also became a member of the Mercers' Company in London and allied himself with the most powerful mercer family by his marriage to Christian, daughter of Sir Richard Gresham. He married for a second time in 1566 or 1567 - to Dorothy Wroughton - and had a number of children with both wives. Thynne's connections brought him wealth, which enabled him to commence what he is perhaps best known for - his building projects, namely Longleat House in Wiltshire (one of the most important examples of Tudor architecture). Bess was directly influenced by Thynne in her own building projects, evidenced by her correspondence with him.

Other letters associated with Sir John Thynne, Senior:

15 March [1550s?] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=200>)

[February 1558] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=111>)

25 February 1558 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=112>)

25 April 1560 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=113>)

27 August 1567 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=114>)

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## Other letters associated with Chatsworth House, Derbyshire

- 15 Mar [1550s?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=200>)
- 13 Apr [c.1550] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=13>)
- 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 198

Too the Ryght worchoupfull my vary frende Syr Iohen thynne knyghte

my Lady Cav[english] vltimo marcij

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Syr I shall pray you to acsepe theys fewe. lynes for that I haue no tyme to wryte at lenghte mayster hyde cane declare unto you of all oure prosedynges here. I thanke hym he hathe taken meche payne to brynge my dysordered thynges yn to some good order I shall by hys meanes be habyll so to youse my tanantes. as I trouste. they. shall not meche desaeue me. I wolde I coulde parswade you that your neryste waye to london. were to come by Chattysworth or elles. that you wolde chouse thys tyme to go se your lande yn yourke shyre. yf any ocasyon myght brengre you hether so that yt were not yll to you. I wolde be uary glade of yet. and so wyssynge unto you yn all thynges as to my selfe I wyll sease troblynge you with my crebelynge frome my poore howse at Chattysworthe the laste of marche

yours as I am many wayes bowden

E Cauendyssh

## Diplomatic view of Letter 198

[Address Leaf]

Too the Ryght  
worchoupfull my vary  
frende mayster  
Syr Iohen thynne  
knyghte

my Lady Cav...  
vltimo marcij

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[Letter Text]

### [Letter Text: Notes]

243 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

Cavendish [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

Syr I shall pray you to acsepe theys fewe. <sup>^lynes^</sup> for  
that I haue no tyme to wryte at lenghte  
mayster hyde cane declare unto you of  
all oure prosedynges here. I thanke hym  
he hathe taken meche <sup>^payne^</sup> to brynge my  
dysordered thynges yn to some good order  
I shall by hys meanes be habyll so to  
youse my tanantes. as I trouste. they. shall  
not meche desaeue me. I wolde I coulde  
parswade you that your neryste waye  
to london. were to come by Chattysworth  
or elles. that you wolde chouse thys  
tyme to go se your lande yn yourke  
shyre. yf any ocasyon myght brenge you  
hether so that yt were not yll to  
you. I wolde be uary glade of yet. and  
so I wyssynge unto <sup>^you^</sup> yn all thynges as  
to *[deletion]* my selfe I wyll sease troblynge you  
w<sup>t</sup> my crebelynge frome my poore

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howse at Chattysworthe the x  
laste of marche

yours as I am many wayes bowden

E Cauendyssh

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244 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

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