

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 200 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=200>)

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

To: Sir John Thynne, Senior;

Date: 15 March [1550s?]

Summary: Bess (Lady Cavendish) writes to Sir John Thynne after completing a long and troublesome journey home, with an account of her travel difficulties and the disordered state in which she found her 'poor house' (i.e. Chatsworth) upon arrival.

Archive: Longleat House, Thynne Papers, MS 4, fols 246-47v

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

Letter features: the seal is now gone but the copy of this letter by Canon Jackson includes a drawing of the original seal (which he labels '3 shallets') 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 200: 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 200: 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:

31 March [1550s] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=198>)

[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>)

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Other letters associated with Chatsworth House, Derbyshire

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

Too the Ryghte worchoupfull my uarye frende Syr Iohen thyne Knyghte

from the lady Cavendysshe

Syr all thoughte I haue no mater of ymportance werewithall now to trbyll you. yet wyll I not suffer eny knowen messenger to pase without my latters of sonday I made ane ende of my longe foulle Iourney/ by the way I wos many tymes yn mynde to haue restode. for my horcus wos not well habyll to passe thoro the touffe myre waye with the leter/ I haue escapyed one of my fettys synes my comynge whome and dowte not yn shorte tyme to recouer my helthe. yf amounste you I haue no wronge offerede me yn my absence/ yf any seche matter happon I trouste you wyll so for se for me that yet shall not be hurtefoull to me nor myne/ to declare vnto you how I founde my poore howse yn all thynges dysorderede were to meche to trobyll you withall. but for the good order and clyndelynes of yet I dare compare yet with any en withyn thys reyme. I trousse mayster hyde wyll kepe hys aponntode day with me. and by hym I trouste to here frome you. my lady and my frende maystrys eynes. unto whome I pray you that I may be comaundode and so with my mouste hartly thanks for the frenchepe that I haue resauyed at your handes. wyll sease trobelynge you frome Chattysworth the xv of march

your as I am maney wayes bowden/

Elyzabeth Cauendysshe

Diplomatic view of Letter 200

[Address Leaf]

Too the Ryghte
worchoupfull my
uarye frende
Syr Iohen thyne
Knyghte

from the lady
Cavendysshe

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

246 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

(Bess Hardwick) Cavendish [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

Syr all thoughte I haue no mater of ymportance
werew^t all now to trbyll you. yet wyll I not suffer
eny knowen messenger to pase w^t out my latters
of sonday I made ane ende of my longe foulle
Iourney/ by the way I wos many tymes yn
mynde to haue restode. for my horcus wos
not well habyll to passe thoro the touffe myre
waye w^t the leter/ I haue escapyed one
of my fettys synes my comynge whome
and dowte not yn shorte tyme to recouer
my helthe. yf amounste you I haue no wronge
offerede me yn my absence/ yf any seche
matter happon I trouste you wyll so for se for
me that yet shall not be hurtefoull to me
nor myne/ to declare vnto you how I founde
my poore howse yn all thynges dysorderede
were to meche to trobyll you w^t all. but
for the good order and clyndelynes of yet
I dare compare yet w^t any en[deletion] w^t yn thys

Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

reyme. I trousse mayster hyde wyll kepe
hys apontode day w^t me. and by hym I
trouste to here frome you. my lady and
my frende maystrys eynes. I unto whome
I pray you that I may be comaundode
and so w^t my mouste harty thankes
for the frenchepe that I haue resauyed
as at your handes. wyll sease trobelynge
you frome Chattysworth the xv of march

your as I am maney
wayes bowden/

Elyzabeth Cauendyss

[Next Page]

[Next Page: Notes]

247 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

Version: 1.0