

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 216 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=216>)

From: Sir Francis Willoughby (Wollaton, Nottinghamshire);

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: 26 September 1595

Summary: Sir Francis Willoughby writes to Bess (dowager countess of Shrewsbury) regarding the value of lands, claiming she has received erroneous reports from the surveyors. He hopes that she will still grant a mortgage.

Archive: Nottingham University Library, Middleton MSS, Mi 6/171/48

Delivery status: to Bess, sent

Letter features: Seal intact - no. Ribbon/floss – no.

Hands: unknown scribe | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 216: Sir Francis Willoughby

Sir Francis Willoughby (1547-1596), coal owner and industrialist, had a troubled childhood marked by the loss of both of his parents and his family's involvement in the plot to thwart Queen Mary's accession and put Lady Jane Grey (a cousin to Francis) on the throne, which subsequently led to the imprisonment and execution of several of Francis' caretakers. Nonetheless, he was carefully schooled and succeeded to his family's inheritance, built up at Wollaton in Nottinghamshire, in 1559. In 1564 he married his first wife, Elizabeth (née Littleton). Their marriage would prove to be one of the most infamously dramatic matches of Elizabethan England and both were known to have turbulent dispositions towards each other as well as others. Willoughby's revenues for his coal pits during the 1560s and 1570s helped fund his iron forge at Middleton (1570), as well as the new hall he had built at Wollaton during the 1580s. Following the death of his first wife (to whom he was then reconciled) in 1595, Willoughby remarried, to the widow Dorothy Tamworth - although he died (intestate) a mere fifteen months later.

Other letters associated with Sir Francis Willoughby:

26 April 1589 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=95>)

8 May 1594 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=102>)

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People Associated with Letter 216: 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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Other letters associated with Wollaton, Nottinghamshire

8 May 1594 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=102>)

Normalised view of Letter 216

To the contesses his letter of the 25th of September 1595.

Right honorable/ I doe not knowe howe your Ladyshipp hathe bene enformed by your officers, of the valew of those Lordshipp which they have taken surwaye of. and of the abylytie of the man to whom I especiallie committed yat service in truste: or of. my owne inclynation bothe for the sale of them, and in yeeldinge vnto your honour the refusall of them before all others/ But what reporte soever. or estimat they have delivered vnto yow, this farre of my poore credit I will assure yow. yat they doe either make a verie vnequall rate of. these landes, or els they are meerly ignourant of the worth of dunsby, for neyther in contynent of land, meade, pasture, ore woodes yat dothe come neere yt, by 3000 acres at the least, nor is of equall valew, by 6000li I dare warrant yow. ffor my man yf he made any offence, yt ys vnexcusable, for I knowe him able & well armed for yat purpos, & to yat ende I did only appointe him. ffor my self and my owne resolution I best knowe, & therefore yf they have made any other report of me, then yowr Ladyshipp ys privie vnto by my self, they have done me great wronge, for I remaine the same man and of the same mynd still irremovable, yf yt will please your honour to accepte of yt. Although there have bene & be verie great persons and men of good accoumpt and abylyte yat are verie importenat suters for the preferment of them & I have refused verie great offers of divers & I am sorie to saie yat which I may Iustly protest, that there is not the like quantity of land of the like commoditie and goodnes, by any on man in Nottes Sheere to be sould at this daie which yf yt would please your honour to accept in morgage beinge at the least the treble valewe of the money, I should take my self mucche bound: for by yat meanes, I should be well able to paie my debtes and performe my wief a Ionyter in Convenient tyme. which by meanes of that Covenant which Percivall hathe Conyngly tyed me vnto in Master Sutton. & in my Lady Arbella there assurannces, I shalbe driven to great extreamyties to effect. I doe not thinke there can be a more honorable parte then to delyver me my dewe which in equity and conscience I may require, and to ryght him yat is vnnaturallie wronged by those of whom he hathe best deserved as your Ladyshipp is not ignorant of. Good madam yeeld me soe mucche favour at the least as to grant me a coppie of the assurance, or a note of suche covenanntes as doe imparte me. yat my reposed. trust in them (which made me secure) be not the cause of my overthrow, ffor the which your Ladyshipp I hope will not be made the instrumennt, Especiallie beinge your poore kinsman yat hathe ever honored yow. & on yat will endeavour iustlie & kindly to repay all your dewes and desertes which I have receaved from yow in as readie and full measure as I shalbe any waie able to discharge it And thus relyinge my self of your honour's refuge & patronage as vpon the suer ancor & harbor of my hoped good, wishinge to your honour the prorogation of many happie yeare, and a fortunat accesse of deserved honor I humbly take my leave Wollaton this xxvjth of September/ 1595.

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To the Right honourable my verie good Lady the countesse of Shreusburie these be delivered

Diplomatic view of Letter 216

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

F W to
morgage Dunsby &c
& to redeeme
Arabellas lands.

37 Eliz
complaining of P W
... and desiring a copie
of y^e Morgage. [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]
26 Sept
1595 [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]
6/171/48 [Old item number, hand: archivist]

To the contesses his *letter* of
the 25th of Septemb 1595.

[Letter Text]

Right honorable/ I doe not knowe howe y^r La^{pp} : hathe bene
enformed by y^r offic^{rs} , of the vlew of those Lo^{pps} w^{ch}
they have taken surwaye of. and of the abylytie of the man
to whom I especiallie committed y^t service in truste: or of.
my owne inclynation bothe for the sale of them, and ⁱⁿ yeeldinge vnto
^{ho}: the refusall of them before all others/ But what reporte soever.
or estimat they have delivered vnto y^w , this farre of my poore ~
credit I will assure y^w . y^t they doe either make a verie vnequall
rate of. these landes, or els they are meerly ignourant of the worth
of dunsby, for neyther in contynent of land, meade, pasture, ore
woodes y^t dothe come neere yt, by 4000 ³⁰⁰⁰ acres at the least, nor is
of equall vlew, by 6000^{li} I dare warrant y^w . ffor my man yf
he made any offence, yt ys vnexcusable, for I knowe him able &

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well armed for y^t purpos, & to y^t ende I did only appointe him.
ffor my self and my owne resolution I best knowe, & therefore yf they
have made any other report of me, then y^{wr} La^{pp} ys privie
vnto by my self, they have done me great wronnge, for I remaine
the same man and of the same mynd still irremovable, yf yt
will please y^r ho: to accepte of yt. Although there have ^{^bene^}
& be ^{^[deletion]^} verie great persons and men of good accoumpt and abylitye
y^t are verie importenat suters for the p^r ferment of them &
I have refused verie great offers of div^{ts} & I am sorie to
saie y^t w^{ch} I may Iustly protest, that there is ^{^not^} the like quantity of land of the like commoditie
and goodnes, by any on man
subiect in England ^{^in Nottes Sheere^} to be sould at this daie w^{ch} yf yt would
please ^{^y^r^} ho: to accept in morgage beinge at the least the treble
valewe of the money, I should take my self muche bound:
for by y^t meanes, I should be well able to paie my debtes
and performe my wief a Ionyter in Convenient tyme.
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[page break]

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To the Right ho: my verie good
La: the countesse of Shreusburie
these be *delivered*
§

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