

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 231 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=231>)**

From: Bess of Hardwick (Sheffield, Yorkshire);

To: William Cecil, Lord Burghley;

Date: 19 December 1590

Summary: Bess (dowager countess of Shrewsbury) writes to William Cecil, Lord Burghley, following the death of her husband, George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury. She hopes that all quarrel in her family has died with George, and thanks Burghley for the favour he has shown her.

Archive: Arundel Castle, Autograph Letters 1585-1617, No 123

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

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

Hands: Scribe A | archivist | Bess of Hardwick |

Version: 1.0

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## People Associated with Letter 231: 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 231: William Cecil, Lord Burghley

William Cecil (1521-98), Lord Burghley, was a chief minister to Queen Elizabeth I for most of her reign. Most importantly, he served as secretary of state (1558-71) and lord high treasurer (from 1571) and he was elected chancellor of Cambridge University. He was an especially constant friend to Bess's fourth husband, George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury; therefore, upon becoming the countess of Shrewsbury, Bess's own friendship with Cecil was also strengthened.

Other letters associated with William Cecil, Lord Burghley:

13 October 1571 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=225>)

14 May 1578 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=188>)

23 September 1578 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=121>)

24 October 1578 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=122>)

22 June 1579 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=189>)

28 January 1581/2 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=162>)

2 August 1584 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=150>)

6 October 1585 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=152>)

[13 June 1586] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=230>)

6 October 1587 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=156>)

11 April 1591 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=159>)

21 September 1592 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=163>)

9 August 1593 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=108>)

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## Other letters associated with Sheffield, Yorkshire

- 27 Aug 1567 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=114>)
- 3 May 1571 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=29>)
- 8 Aug 1574 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=73>)
- 7 Jun 1575 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=74>)
- 19 Jun [c.1575?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=77>)
- [Oct 1575?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=218>)
- 13 Oct 1575 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=217>)
- 29 Mar 1576 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=103>)
- 27 Jun [1576?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=110>)
- 18 May [1577?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=109>)
- 1 Aug 1577 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=85>)
- 17 Mar 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=120>)
- 14 May 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=188>)
- 29 Dec 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=123>)
- 17 Jan 1580 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=190>)
- 13 May 1580 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=194>)
- 21 Jun 1580 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=78>)
- 31 Jan 1581 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=228>)
- 31 Jan 1581 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=227>)
- 28 Nov 1581 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=104>)
- 28 Jan 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=144>)
- 28 Jan 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=162>)
- 8 Feb 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=195>)
- 6 May 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=146>)
- 6 May 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=145>)
- 10 Jun 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=105>)

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24 Nov [1582?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=204>)

7 Feb 1583 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=148>)

4 Aug 1584 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=119>)

23 Oct 1585 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=117>)

14 Apr [1600?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=2>)

## Normalised view of Letter 231

To the Right honorable my espetyall good Lord the Lord Brughley Lord Tresurar of England ////

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my espetiall good Lord; I weare aboue measure vnthankfull; yf I shoulde not acknowledge that noe man hath bound me Lyke vnto your Lordshipe for since I was furste knowne vnto you I haue tasted of your fauor; and in my Laste and greatest misfortune, was in the end only by your compassionne and goodnes, brought to that quiett I possessed./. your Lordship's kynd letter ys an excedynge comfote to me and your Iudgment therin of my latt husbands disposition moste trew as some cercomstances before his death declared, with the generall spoyll mad of his goods by thos bad Instruments which conteneded the seperatione begun by amyghteer hand./ but I hope my good Lord that all disagrement (in this famely) died with him; quiett ys my princippall desire; and I shall rather suffer then enter into controuersy; yf Iniuries be not vntolerable, which perswation of peace by your Lordship ys exceedinge graue, very honorable, and moste frendly./ my moste honored Lord, I beceach your Lordship know that I greatly reuerence your Lordship and though my frendshipe ys not worthie enough, yet as yt ys, and to the very highte your Lordship shall eyer commande yt, for I am mightyly bounde thertoo, so wishing your Lordship many prosperus and happye days I take my Leau of your good Lordship, at sheffeld this sixth of desembar

your Lordshipes and so bounde./

EShrouesbury

## Diplomatic view of Letter 231

[Address Leaf]

### [Address Leaf: Notes]

29 Dec. 1590

Countes of Shrowesbury y<sup>e</sup>

Elder. [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To the Right honorable my espet a yall  
good Lord the Lord Brughley  
Lord Tresurar of England  
////

[Letter Text]

### [Letter Text: Notes]

113 [Item number, hand: archivist]

115 [Old foliation/item number, hand: archivist]

my espetiall good Lord; I weare aboue measure vnthankfull; yf I shoulde not acknowledge that noe man hath bound me Lyke vnto your Lordshipe for since I was furste knowne vnto you I haue tasted of your fauor; and in my Laste and greatest misfortune, was in the end only by your compassion and goodnes, brought to that quiett I possessed./. your Lo:<sup>p</sup> kynd letter ys an excedynge comfote to me and your Iudgment therin of my latt husbands disposition moste trew as some cercomstances before his death declared, w<sup>th</sup> the generall spoyll mad of his goods by thos bad Instruments w<sup>ch</sup> conteneded the seperatione begun by amyghteer hand./ but I hope my good Lord that all disagrement (in this famely) died w<sup>th</sup> him; quiett ys my precipall desire; and I shall rather suffer then enter into controuersy; yf Iniuries be not vntolerable, w<sup>ch</sup> perswation of peace by your Lo:<sup>p</sup> ys exceedinge graue, very honorable, and moste frendly./ my moste honored Lord, I beceach your Lo:<sup>p</sup> know that I greatly reuerence your Lo:<sup>p</sup> and though my frendshipe ys not worthie enough, yet as yt ys, and to the very highte your Lo:<sup>p</sup> shall eyer commande yt, for I am mightyly bounde thertoo,

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so wishing your Lo:<sup>p</sup> many prosperus and happye days I take my  
Leaue of your good Lo:<sup>p</sup> , at sheffeld this xix<sup>th</sup> of desembar

your Lordshipes and so  
bounde./

EShrouesbury

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