

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 234 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=234>)

From: Bess of Hardwick (Leicester House);

To: Sir Francis Walsingham;

Date: 8 June 1576

Summary: Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) writes to Sir Francis Walsingham with thanks for his 'friendly dealing towards me'. And while 'her majesty's pleasure is that the Scottish queen shall presently [go] to Buxton', she asks him to procure a warrant for the sake of her husband, George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, as 'I think my word will not satisfy his lordship'.

Archive: The National Archives, State Papers Scotland, Mary, Queen of Scots, 53/10, f 79 (item 79)

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

Letter features: Seal intact - no. Ribbon/floss – no. Letter packet - slit and band

Hands: unknown scribe | archivist | Bess of Hardwick |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 234: 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 234: Sir Francis Walsingham

Sir Francis Walsingham (c.1532-1590), was a principal secretary and an intelligencer to Elizabeth I. During the reign of Queen Mary, he lived in exile in Europe. Then, having returned to England following the accession of Elizabeth I, he married Ursula (née St Barbe; with whom he had two daughters); and backed by powerful figures at court (such as Cecil and Leicester) he was initially appointed as an ambassador to France in 1570. In 1573 he was appointed as principal secretary and a privy councillor. By the early 1580s he was one of the queen's key advisors and intimates - evidenced by her nickname for him, her 'Moor'. Walsingham is known to posterity mainly for his complex coordination of intelligence operations - most famously for the discovery of the Babington Plot in 1586, which ultimately led to the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, previously held in the custodial charge of Bess and her fourth husband, George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury.

Other letters associated with Sir Francis Walsingham:

29 December 1578 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=123>)

28 January 1581/2 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=144>)

6 May 1582 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=146>)

6 May 1582 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=145>)

7 February 1582/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=148>)

6 April 1584 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=149>)

2 December 1585 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=153>)

Normalised view of Letter 234

To my very frend Master Secretorie Walsingham

I am Sorye I coulde not speak with you by reason of my soden departure and to haue yelded moste hartie thankes for your so frendely dealinge towardes me which as I can not forgett so do I require you to take this lettre of thankes in good parte with assurance of my Lordes good will & myne as of any frendes you haue if in any thinge we maye stande you in Steed./

Where her Majesties pleasure ys that the Scottishe quene shall presently to Buxston I am to require you to procure a warrant for my Lord his dischardge in that behalfe, because I thincke my word will not satisfie his Lordship therin without a sufficient dischardge./ So with my right hartie Comendacions I bid you farewell At Leicestr howse this viijth of Iune 1576

your assuryed louynge frende

EShrouesbury

Diplomatic view of Letter 234

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

1576

From the Countesse
of Shrewsburie. dated
the 8-of- ~~Februar~~

June. [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

Sc. Q. to Buxton [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

8 June 1576 [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

8 June 1576

Queen of Scots [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To my very frend ~

M^r Secretorie Walsingham

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

79 [Item number, hand: archivist]

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

I am Sorye I coulde not speak wth yo^u by reason of
my soden departure and to haue yelded moste hartie
thankes for yo^r so frendely dealinge towards me w^{ch}
as I can not forgett so do I require yo^u to take this
lettre of thanckes in good parte wth assurance of my Lordes
good will & myne as of any frendes yo^u haue if in
any thinge we maye stande yo^u in Steed./

Where her Ma^{ties} pleasure ys that the Scottishe
quene shall p^r sently to Buxston I am to require
yo^u to *procure* a warrant for my .L. his dischardge
in that behalfe, because I thincke my word will
not satisfie his L. therin wth out a sufficient

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dischardge./ So wth my right hartie Comendacions
I bid yo^u farewell At Leicestr howse this
vijth of Iune 1576

your assuryed louynge
frende

EShrouesbury

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