

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 244 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=244>)

From: Bess of Hardwick;

To: Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots;

Date: [1574]

Summary: Bess, countess of Shrewsbury, writes a somewhat cryptic letter to Mary Queen of Scots, to do with 'your little poor creature' and other letters, which Bess has also sent. For the accompanying letter to Mary's servant, Gilbert Curle, see ID 243.

Archive: The National Archives, State Papers Scotland, Mary, Queen of Scots, 53/9, f 195r-195v

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

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

Hands: Scribe A | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 244: 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 244: Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots

Mary (Stuart) Queen of Scots (1542-87), was the only surviving child of James V, king of Scots (1512-42), and his wife, Mary of Guise (1515-60). She was born in Linlithgow Palace (Scotland); however, she was betrothed to the French dauphin, subsequently Francois II, in 1548 and spent thirteen years in France. After Francois II's death in 1560, she returned (as queen) to Scotland, in 1561. She married twice more - to Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley (1545/6-67) in 1565 and then, following Darley's murder, to James Hepburn, fourth earl of Bothwell in 1567. Following her downfall in Scotland, she fled to England and was held in captivity there from 1568 until her execution in 1587. Much of her captivity (from 1569-84) was spent in the custody of Bess's fourth husband, George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury. Bess and the Scots Queen spent many hours embroidering together; however, during the marriage breakdown between Bess and Shrewsbury in the 1580s, the women's relationship deteriorated. By 1583 rumours were in circulation throughout London of an affair between the Scots Queen and her keeper Shrewsbury, and that she had born him at least one child. It was a ludicrous story, not least because of the poor state of health of both Shrewsbury and the Scots Queen. It was also dangerous and slanderous. Perhaps not surprisingly, a hurt and enraged Shrewsbury accused his wife Bess of starting the rumour, although there is no reason to think she had anything to do with the story. In fact, not only would it seem out of character for Bess, but it would have been directly contrary to her ongoing petitions to Queen Elizabeth and Walsingham to be reunited with her husband.

Other letters associated with Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots:

[June 1569] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=220>)

July 1582 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=147>)

Normalised view of Letter 244

madam I most humble thanke you, that yt pleased you to make me partakar of so welcom aletter non wysbeth hym better then I, your lettell pore creatuar showed more gladnes then was to be louked for in one doble her years, she and the rest most humble thanks your majesty that yt wyll pleas you to remembar them I haue sent iiij letters which I desyar may be showed yf yt seme good to your majesty to wryte as ys requeared I beseche you send yt by thys bearar I dare assuar ther shall come no harne of yt, I besech you wryt earnestly, and so being not well I humble take my leaue thys monday lat at nyght

yf yt please you I thenk yt as good or better to wryt to my sonne to be showed and the letter shalbe retourned

Diplomatic view of Letter 244

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

195 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

114 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

38 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

431 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

madam I most humble thanke you, that yt pleased you
to make me partakar of so welcom aletter non wysbeth
hym better then I, your lettell pore creatuar showed
more gladnes then was to be louked for in one doble
her years, she and the rest most humble thanks
your ma:^{ty} that yt wyll pleas you to remembar them
I haue sent iiij letters w^{ch} I desyar may be
showed yf yt seme good to your ma:^{ty} to wryte as
ys requeared I beseche you send yt by thys bearar
I dare assuar ther shall come no harme of yt, I
besech you wryt earnestly, and so being not well I
humble take my leaue thys monday lat at nyght

yf yt please you I think yt as good ^{^or better^} to wryt to my sonne to be showed
and the letter shalbe retourned

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