

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 009 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=009>)

From: Bess of Hardwick (Tutbury, Burton upon Trent, Staffordshire); Henry Cavendish (Tutbury, Burton upon Trent, Staffordshire);

To: Bess of Hardwick; George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury;

Date: [c. 1570]

Summary: Henry Cavendish writes to his mother, Bess (countess of Shrewsbury), regrettably reporting a squabble between some of his servants which has resulted in a sword duel and the death of one of them. Bess forwards the letter to her husband, George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, expressing her own sentiments in a postscript to him (and asking that he 'return this').

Archive: Folger Shakespeare Library, Cavendish-Talbot MSS, X.d.428 (9)

Delivery status: to Bess, sent and then forwarded by her

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

Hands: Henry Cavendish | Bess of Hardwick | unknown scribe | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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Bess of Hardwick's Letters

People Associated with Letter 009: 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 009: Henry Cavendish

Henry Cavendish (1550-1616) was Bess's eldest son and heir from her marriage with Sir William Cavendish (d.1557). Following his mother Bess's marriage to George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury (and to serve their interests), on 9 February 1568 Henry was married to the earl's daughter from his previous marriage, Grace (née Talbot). That is to say, Henry was married to his step-sister, at which point the earl became both his step-father and father-in-law. (At the same time, his sister Mary was married to the earl's second son Gilbert.) At the time of the marriage, Grace was only eight years old, and eighteen-year-old Henry was immediately sent on a tour of Europe, from which he did not return until 1572. The marriage was not a success on any level: the couple never produced a child and Henry was notorious for his adulterous affairs, numerous illegitimate children, financial debts and, in April 1605, for openly calling his wife a 'harlot'. A glimpse of these ongoing difficulties can be found in the letter from Edward Talbot to Bess in 1604 (ID 063). Henry undertook a number of expeditions and journeys during his life, and his trip to Constantinople in 1589 is recorded in the memoir of his servant Fox and mentioned in ID 008. Henry regularly served as MP and sheriff for Derbyshire, yet he was troublesome as a son and subject of England. He was poor with money, failed in his military ventures and, to Bess's shame, was involved in a plot to liberate his niece, Arbella Stuart, from Bess's care at Hardwick Hall in December 1602. Bess eventually disinherited him in her will.

Other letters associated with Henry Cavendish:

4 November 1570 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=226>)

6 November [c. 1585] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=10>)

6 December 1605 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=207>)

31 December 1605 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=11>)

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

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Bess of Hardwick's Letters

People Associated with Letter 009: George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury

George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury (c.1522-90), was the eldest and only surviving son of Francis Talbot, fifth earl of Shrewsbury (1500-60), and his first wife, Mary (d.1538). In 1538, at the age of sixteen, he took up the title of Lord Talbot, until he succeeded to the earldom after his father's death twenty-two years later. In 1539 he married his first wife, Gertrude (née Manners; d.1566/7), with whom he had seven children: four daughters and three sons. Early on he acquired a number of honours stemming from his family's well-established prominence in the north: knight bachelor (1547), member of the council of the north (1549), knight of the Garter (1561), and lord lieutenant of Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire (1565). Following the death of his first wife, he married Bess, then the widow of William St Loe (c.1520-65?), in 1567. At this point Shrewsbury was one of the wealthiest men in England, derived from his estates and also business adventuring in farming, shipping, coal-mining, glassworks and lead extraction and production. Soon after his marriage to Bess, however, he was appointed keeper of Mary Queen of Scots, a custodianship he would hold from 1569-84. Shrewsbury prided himself on his loyalty to Elizabeth I, but he soon found her reluctant to provide sufficient diet money to keep Mary and her retinue. This, in addition to the monies needed for expensive building projects (at Worksop and Chatsworth), and his eldest son Gilbert's debts led to serious financial anxiety for Shrewsbury. Furthermore, he was forced to remain with Mary at all times and was therefore losing his place at court. As Shrewsbury's stresses grew and he became increasingly irascible, his marriage with Bess broke down spectacularly amid quarrelling to do with family finances and the allocation of estates. Scandal and mutual bad-mouthing soon became very public and the queen herself intervened, eventually dictating that Shrewsbury pay Bess a regular income (from 1587), while the two lived apart. Shrewsbury was an ill man for many years and suffered with a severe rheumatic condition, what he referred to as 'gout', which contributed to his terrible handwriting. He died in the company of his mistress, Elinor Bretton, at Sheffield Manor, on 18 November 1590, after being administered a mercury cure. His son Gilbert Talbot succeeded him as the seventh earl of Shrewsbury.

Other letters associated with George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury:

- 28 June [1568?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=64>)
- [December 1568] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=65>)
- 13 December [1568] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=66>)
- [1569?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=67>)
- [1570s?] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=184>)
- [1570] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=178>)
- [1570s] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=203>)
- [c. 1570] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=68>)
- 4 November 1570 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=226>)

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

4 November 1570 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=171>)
[c. 1571] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=70>)
[c. 1571] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=69>)
[1574?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=72>)
[1574?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=71>)
8 August 1574 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=73>)
[c. 1575?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=76>)
[c. 1575] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=75>)
[1575-7] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=245>)
7 June 1575 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=74>)
June 19 [c. 1575?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=77>)
20 February 1575/6 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=165>)
19 November [1576?] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=115>)
[1577] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=183>)
[1577] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=182>)
18 May [1577?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=109>)
4 June 1577 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=221>)
25 June 1577 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=172>)
14 May 1578 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=188>)
[30 June 1578?] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=83>)
2 August 1578 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=197>)
28 December 1578 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=193>)
13 February 1578/9 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=166>)
28 February 1578/9 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=174>)
22 June 1579 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=189>)
17 January 1579/80 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=190>)
13 May 1580 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=194>)
21 June 1580 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=78>)
11 September 1580 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=154>)
10 October 1580 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=79>)
8 February 1581/2 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=195>)
4 August 1584 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=119>)
26 August [1584] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=116>)

Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

14 October [1585] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=229>)

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

9 June 1586 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=176>)

4 August 1586 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=202>)

[April 1587] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=186>)

Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

Other letters associated with Tutbury, Burton upon Trent, Staffordshire

[Dec 1568] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=65>)

13 Dec [1568] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=66>)

21 Jan 1569 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=107>)

[23?] Jan 1569 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=164>)

6 Dec 1605 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=207>)

31 Dec 1605 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=11>)

Normalised view of Letter 009

To my Lady.

To my lorde of some affecte

to my Lady

Maye yt please your Honor, I thought yt good to let your Ladyship vnderstande of a mysfortune that happened in my howse. On thursday at nyght last at supper ij of my men fell owt abowte some tryflynge woordes and to all theyr felloes iudgementes that harde theyr iangelynge, wear made good ffrendes agayne, and went and Laye together that nyghte, for they had byn bedfelloes of longe before, and loved one thother very well as every boddye tooke yt in the howse. On ffryday mornynge very early, by breake of daye they wente forthe, by name Swenerton, and Langeford with ij swordes a peece, as the sequele after showed, and in the fyeldes foughte together, and in fyghte, Swenerton shlewe Langeford, to my great greyfe booth for the sodeyne deathe of the one, and for the vtter dystructyon of the tother whom I loved very well. Good Madam let yt not trowble you in any thyng, we are mortall, and borne to many and strange adventures, and thearfore must temper owr myndes to bear shuche burthens as shall be by God layd on owr shoulders. My greatest greyffe, and so I iudge yt wyll be some trowble to your Ladyship that yt shoulde happen in my howse alas madam what coulde I dooe with yt, altogether not once suspectynge any thyng betwyxte them. I haue byn ryghte sorofull full for yt, and yt hath trowbled and vexed me, more then in reason yt should haue donne a wyese man. I would to God I could forget that theyr never had byn any shuch matter. Vpon the facte donne I sent for Master Adderley, and vsed hys counsell in all thynges. Swenerton ffledde presently, and ys pursued but not yet harde of. Thus humbly cravyng your Ladyship's dayly blessinge I end, more then sadde to trowble your Ladyship thus longe with thys sorrofull matter. Tutbury thys present Saturday.

Your Ladyship's most bounden humble and obedyent sonne:

Henry Cavendyshe.

retarne thys

my Iuwell thys saterday at nyght I resauyed thys later meche to my greffe for the myshape yett was euer lyke that swenertone shulde comete some great fayte he was a vane lewe felow. fare well my deare harth your faythefoull wyffe

Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

EShrouesbury

Diplomatic view of Letter 009

[Address Leaf]

To my Lady.

To my lorde
of some affecte

to my La.

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

X.d.428

(9) [Item number, hand: archivist]

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

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

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of daye they wente forthe, by name Swenerton, and Langeford
w^t ij swordes a peece, as the sequele after showed, and thear
in the fyeldes foughte together, and in fyghte, Swenerton sl^t
shlewe Langeford, to my great greyfe booth for the sodeyne
deathe of the one, and ^{for} the vtter dystructyon of the tother
whom I loved very well. Good Madam let yt not trowble
you in any thyng, we are mortall, and borne to many and
and strange adventures, and thearfore must temper owr myndes
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fare well my deare harth
your faythefoull wyffe

EShrouesbury

Version: 1.0