

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 099 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=099>)

From: Bess of Hardwick (London, Greater London);

To: Francis Whitfield (Chatsworth House, Derbyshire);

Date: 14 November [1552]

Summary: Bess (Lady Cavendish) writes to her servant Francis Whitfield concerning the management of Chatsworth, and asks him to look after everything until her aunt (Marcella Linacre) arrives. Among her instructions to Whitfield are that he is to take only wooden 'cleats or boards' not needed for the ongoing building works at Chatsworth; to brew beer, specifically for her and her husband William Cavendish; to repair her bedroom; and to pay her midwife. She also reprimands him for not supplying her sister Jane (née Hardwick) with 'things needful for her'.

Archive: Folger Shakespeare Library, Cavendish-Talbot MSS, X.d.428 (82)

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

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

Hands: Bess of Hardwick | Sir William Cavendish? | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 099: 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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People Associated with Letter 099: Francis Whitfield

Francis Whitfield was one of Bess's servants from the time of her marriage to Sir William Cavendish (1508-1557), and following.

Other letters associated with Francis Whitfield:

20 October [c. 1560] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=101>)

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Other letters associated with Chatsworth House, Derbyshire

- 15 Mar [1550s?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=200>)
- 31 Mar [1550s?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=198>)
- 13 Apr [c.1550] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=13>)
- 13 Jan [c.1560] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=47>)
- 4 Sep [1560?] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=59>)
- 12 Oct [c.1560] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=60>)
- 24 Oct [c.1560] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=61>)
- 18 May 1562 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=55>)
- 20 Nov [1565?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=17>)
- 8 Dec [c.1565] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=28>)
- 26 Feb [1566?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=18>)
- Jun [1568?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=157>)
- 28 Jun [1568?] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=64>)
- [1570s?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=210>)
- [1570] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=178>)
- 28 Jul 1570 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=25>)
- 31 Aug 1570 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=170>)
- 21 Sep 1571 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=26>)
- [1577] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=182>)
- 2 Aug 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=197>)
- 23 Sep 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=121>)
- 22 Jun 1579 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=189>)
- 15 Jul 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=175>)
- 8 Apr 1594 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=236>)
- 8 May 1594 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=102>)

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Other letters associated with London, Greater London

- 25 Feb 1558 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=112>)
- 24 Oct [c.1560] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=61>)
- 4 Nov 1561 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=54>)
- 14 Dec [1564] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=50>)
- [23?] Jan 1569 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=164>)
- 28 Jul 1570 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=25>)
- 31 Aug 1570 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=170>)
- 21 Sep 1571 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=26>)
- 13 Oct 1571 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=225>)
- 3 Feb 1574 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=27>)
- 9 Jul 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=191>)
- 21 May 1591 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=215>)
- [c.1600] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=22>)
- 12 Nov 1600 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=20>)
- 4 Jul 1604 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=21>)
- 23 Apr 1605 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=23>)

Normalised view of Letter 099

To my sa[rvant] francys wytfelde [delive]r thys at chattysw[orth]e

for the myller for taking shepe for taking Coll woodes for Capons to be fatt for swyne/ for the hard Cornefeldes for a pynder

francys I haue spoken with your mayste[r] for the clyltes or bordes that you wrete to me of and he ys contente that you shall take some for your nesecyte in the aponntemente of neusante. so that you take seche as wyll do hyme no saruese aboute hys byldynge at chattysworthe. I pray you loke well to all thynges at chattysworthe tyll my aunes comynge whome whyche I hope shalbe shortely and yn the meane tyme cause bronshawe to loke to the smethes and all other thynges at penteryge lete the brewar make bere for me fourthewith for my owne drynkyng and your mayster and se that I haue good store of yet for yf I lacke ether good bere, or charcole or wode I wyll blame nobody so meche as I wyll do you. cause the flore yn my bede chamber to be made euen ether with plaster claye or lyme and al the wyndoyes were the glase ys broken to be mended and al the chambers to be made as close and warme as you cane. I here that my syster Iane cane not haue thynges that ys nedefoulle for hare to haue amowngste you yf yet be trewe you lacke agreat of honyste as well as dyscrecyon to deny hare any thyng that she hathe amynde to beyng yn case as she hathe bene. I wolde be lothe to haue any stranger so yoused yn my howse and then assure your selfe I cane not lyke yet to haue my syster so yousede. lyke as I wolde not haue any superfleuete or waste of any thyng. so lyke wysse wolde I haue hare to haue that whyche ys nedefoulle and nesary. at my comynge whome I shal knowe more. and then I wyll thynke as I shall haue cause. I wolde haue you to geue to my mydwyffe frome me and frome my boye wylle. and to my syster norse frome me and my boye as hereafter folowyet fyrste to the mydwyfe frome me tene shyllynges. and frome wylle fyue shyllynges. to the norse frome me fyue shyllynges. and frome my boye iij fore pence. so that yn the wolle you mouste geue to them twenty thre shyllynges and fore pence make my syster Iane preuye of yet and then paye yet to them fow[rth] with yf you haue noother money take so meche of the rente at penteryge tyll my syster Iane that I wyll geue my dowter somethynge at my comyng whome and prayinge you not to fayle to se all thynges done accordyngely I bede you fare well frome london the xiiij of nouember

your mystrys

Elyzabethe Cauendyss

tyll Iames crompe that I haue resauyed the fyue ponde and ixs that he sente me by heue alsope

Diplomatic view of Letter 099

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

Elizabeth Wife of S.^r W.^m Cavendish of
Chatsworth, afterwards Countess of
Shrewsbury. [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To my sa... francys
wytfelde ...r thys at
chattysw...e

for the myller
for taking shepe
for taking Coll woodes
for Capons to be fatt
for swyne/
for the hard Cornefeldes
for a pyndr

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

X.d.428
(82) [Item number, hand: archivist]
42 [Old foliation/item number, hand: archivist]
29 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

francys I haue spoken w^t your mayste...
for the clyltes or bordes that you
wrete to me of and he ys contente
that you shall take some for
your nesecyte in the aponntemente
of neusante. so that you take
seche as y wyll do hyme no
saruese aboute hys byldynge at
chattysworthe. I pray you loke
well to all thynges at chattysworthe

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tyll my aunte comynge whome
whyche I hope shalbe shortely
and yn the meane tyme cause
bronsawe to loke to the smethes
and all other thynges at penteryge
lete the brewar make bere for me
fourthew^t for e my owne drynkyng
and your mayster and se that I
haue good store of yet for yf I lacke
ether good bere, or charcole or wode
I wyll blame nobody so meche
as I wyll do you. cause the
flore yn my bede chambe to be

[page break]

made euen ether w^t plaster claye or lyme
and al the wyndoyes were the glase
ys broken to be mended and al the
chambers to be made as close and war
warne as you cane. I here that
my syster Iane cane not haue thynne
thynges that ys nedefoulle for hare
to haue amowngste you yf yet be trewe
you lacke agreat of honyste as well as
dyscrescyon to deny hare any thyng
that she hathe amynde to beyng
yn case as she hathe bene. I wolde
be lothe to haue any stranger so yoused
yn my howse and then assure your
selfe I cane not lyke yet to haue my
syster so yousede. lyke as I wolde not haue
haue any superfleuete or waste of any
thyng. so lyke wysse wolde I haue hare
to haue that whyche ys nedefoulle for
and nesary. at my comynge whome I
shal knowe more. and then I wyll thynke
as I shall haue cause. I wolde haue
you to geue to to my mydwyffe frome
me and frome my boye wylle. and to

[page break]

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^my^ syster norse frome me and my boye
as hereafter folowyet fyrste to the mydwyfe
frome me tene shylynges. and frome
wylle fyue shylynges. to the norse
frome me fyue shylynges. and frome
my boye iij fore pence. f so that yn
the wolle you mouste geue to them
twenty thre shylynges and fore pence
make my syster Iane preuye of yet
and then paye yet to them fow...

w^t yf you haue noother money take
so meche of the rente at penteryge
tyll my syster Iane that I wyll geue
my dowter somethynge at my comyng
whome and prayinge you not to
fayle to se all thynges done accordyngely
I bede you fare well frome london
the xiiij of nouember

your mystrys

Elyzabethe Cauendysshe

tyll Iames crompe
that I haue resauyed
the fyue ponde and ix^s
that he sente me by heue alsope

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