

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 102 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=102>)

From: Bess of Hardwick (Chatsworth House, Derbyshire);

To: Sir Francis Willoughby (Wollaton, Nottinghamshire);

Date: 8 May 1594

Summary: Bess (dowager countess of Shrewsbury) writes to Sir Francis Willoughby regarding a land mortgage which she finds expensive in comparison with others he has offered to others. She agrees nonetheless, not because she wants his land, but because she desires the 'security of them that are to disburse this money'.

Archive: Nottingham University Library, Middleton MSS, Mi C23

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

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

Hands: unknown scribe | archivist | Bess of Hardwick |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 102: 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 102: Sir Francis Willoughby

Sir Francis Willoughby (1547-1596), coal owner and industrialist, had a troubled childhood marked by the loss of both of his parents and his family's involvement in the plot to thwart Queen Mary's accession and put Lady Jane Grey (a cousin to Francis) on the throne, which subsequently led to the imprisonment and execution of several of Francis' caretakers. Nonetheless, he was carefully schooled and succeeded to his family's inheritance, built up at Wollaton in Nottinghamshire, in 1559. In 1564 he married his first wife, Elizabeth (née Littleton). Their marriage would prove to be one of the most infamously dramatic matches of Elizabethan England and both were known to have turbulent dispositions towards each other as well as others. Willoughby's revenues for his coal pits during the 1560s and 1570s helped fund his iron forge at Middleton (1570), as well as the new hall he had built at Wollaton during the 1580s. Following the death of his first wife (to whom he was then reconciled) in 1595, Willoughby remarried, to the widow Dorothy Tamworth - although he died (intestate) a mere fifteen months later.

Other letters associated with Sir Francis Willoughby:

26 April 1589 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=95>)

26 September 1595 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=216>)

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Other letters associated with Wollaton, Nottinghamshire

26 Sep 1595 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=216>)

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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>)
- 14 Nov [1552] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=99>)
- 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>)

Normalised view of Letter 102

To the right worshipfull my very good Cosin and frend Sir ffrancis Willoughby. knight at Wollaton/

Good cosin, in respect of the good will I beare you I made offer to my cosin Henry Willoughby for the disbursment of three or fowrre thousand poundes in such sort as he hath signified to you. and thoughe of late I haue had very good offers made me of land to be sold yet in respect of my former promis I haue not gyven care therto./ The Land you offer in morgage vpon further lookinge into the matter I fynd to be threescore pound rackt rent, and threescore poundes of old rent, and of the old rent some in lease for lyves. and your mannor of willoughby the principall thing besydes yat some part of it is in lease for lyfe the whole is in ioynture to my lady Willoughby. So yat for so great a somme I think it not a convenient porcion I know where for less then half this money you assured for more land. yet haue I told my cosin this bearer yat there shalbe three thousand pound pres[en]tly disbursed vpon this land. and yf you be to vse any more vpon further assur[ance] there shalbe more redy for you: I hope you doe assure your self yat I look not for any thinge but for the security of them yat are to disburse this money. your Land I do not desyre. yf I could be assured of your lyff there should not nede any morgage at all to be made but the yongest and healthfullest are subiect to chaunge. My cosin Henry Willoughby will shoe you my mynd at more length./ And so praying god to send you longe lyffe and happy health. I ceass. from chatsworth this vijth of maie .1594.

Your lovinge cosin and assured frend

EShrouesbury ////

Diplomatic view of Letter 102

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

1594 [Later editorial note, hand: unknown scribe]
the Countesse of
Shrousburye for
lands morgaged/ [Later editorial note, hand: unknown scribe]
about her Security
36 Eliz [Later editorial note, hand: unknown scribe]
8 May
chatsworth. [Later editorial note, hand: unknown scribe]

To the right wo^p full my very
good Cosin and frend S^r ffrancs
Willoughby. knight at
Wollaton/

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

Mi C 23 [Item number, hand: archivist]

Good cosin, in respect of the good will I beare yo^u I made offer to my cosin ~
Henry Willoughby for the disbursm^t of three or fowrre thousand pounds in such sort as
he hath signified to yo^u . and thoughe of late I haue had very good offers made me
of land to be sold yet in respect of my former promis I haue not gyven care
therto./ The Land yo^u offer in morgage vppon further lookinge into the matter
I fynd to be threescore pound rackt rent, and threescore pounds of old rent, and of
the old rent some in lease for lyves. and yo^r mannor of willoughby the principall
thinge besydes y^t some pt of it is in lease for lyfe the whole is in ioynture to
my la Willoughby. So y^t for so great a some I think it not a convenient porcon
I know where for less then half this money yo^u assured for more land. yet
haue I told my cosin this bearer y^t there shalbe three thousand pound prs...tly
disbursed vppon this land. and yf yo^u be to vse any more vppon further assur...
there shalbe more redy for yo^u : I hope yo^u doe assure yo^r self y^t I look not for
any thinge but for the security of them y^t are to disburse this money. your

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Land I do not desyre. yf I could be assured of yo^r lyff there should not nede any morgage at all to be made but the yongest and healthfullest are subiect to chaunge. My cosin Henry Willoughby will shoe yo^u my mynd at more length./ And so praying god to send yo^u longe lyffe and happy health. I ceass. from chatsworth this viijth of maie .1594.

Your lovinge cosin and assured frend

EShrouesbury

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