

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 106 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=106>)**

From: Arbella Stuart ([Eames, Essex?]);

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: 8 February 1587/8

Summary: A twelve-year-old Arbella Stuart sends her grandmother, Bess (countess of Shrewsbury), strands of her hair and a pot of jelly, along with news of her health and that of another of Bess's grand-daughters, Mary (Talbot), who has had 'three little fits of an ague' but is now well.

Archive: Huntington Library, MS HM 803

Delivery status: to Bess, sent

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

Hands: Arbella Stuart | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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## People Associated with Letter 106: Arbella Stuart

Arbella Stuart (1575-1615) was the daughter of Charles Stuart, earl of Lennox (1555/6-1576), and his wife, Bess's daughter, Elizabeth (née Cavendish; 1554-1582). By birth Stuart was cousin to King James VI/I and a potential heir to both the Scottish and English thrones. However, by 1582 both of Stuart's parents were dead and her inheritance passed to Elizabeth I. It is at this point that she moved in with Bess, her grandmother, who petitioned on her behalf (especially to do with her allowance from the queen) and had her highly educated in multiple languages. As she became a young woman, on house arrest for most of her life, Arbella proved a resentful and troublesome resident at Hardwick Hall, from which she devised several bizarre plots of escape (including the fabrication of a fictional lover) - a situation which caused Bess much unwanted stress in her later years (early 1600s). After Bess's death (1608), Arbella married William Seymour in 1610, against King James I's wishes, and she was banished to Durham. She attempted escape, but ended up in the Tower of London, where she fell ill and died in September 1615.

Other letters associated with Arbella Stuart:

[29 January?] 1602/3 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=141>)

[29 January?] 1602/3 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=142>)

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## People Associated with Letter 106: 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.

## Normalised view of Letter 106

To the right honorable, my very good Lady, and Grandmother, the Countesse of Shrewsbury

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Good Lady Grandmother, I haue sent your Ladyship, the endes of my heare which were cutt the sixt day of the moone, on saterday laste; & with them, a pott of Gelly, which my seruante made; I pray God you finde it good. My Aunte Cauendishe was heere on Monday laste, she certified me, of your Ladyships good health, & dispositione, which I pray God longe to continue. I am in good health, my Cousin Mary hath had three little fittes of an agew, butt now she is well, and mery. Thus with my humble duty vnto your Ladyship & humble thanckes for the token you sent me laste, and craueinge your dayly blessinge, I humbly Ceasse. Frome Eims, the .viii. of February. 1587

Your Ladyships humble, and obbediente childe

Arbella Steward

## Diplomatic view of Letter 106

[Address Leaf]

### [Address Leaf: Notes]

1739

1587

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152 [Doodle, hand: archivist]

To the right honorable, my very  
good Lady, and Grandmother, the  
Countesse of Shrewsbury

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[Letter Text]

### [Letter Text: Notes]

this Lady was <sup>^grand^</sup> daughter of Margaret Steward Countess of Lenox (who was the daughter of Margaret Queen of Scotland daughter to King Henry the vij by her 2<sup>d</sup> Husband Charles Steward Earl of Lenox) who being Married to William Seymeur 2<sup>d</sup> Son to the Duke of Somerset without the consent of K James the 1<sup>st</sup> she was Imprison'd in the Tower of London where she died the 15 Septemb.<sup>r</sup> 1615 [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

Good Lady Grandmother, I haue sent yo:<sup>r</sup> La:<sup>p</sup>, the endes of my heare which were cutt the sixt day of the moone, on saterday laste; & with them, a pott of Gelly, which my seruante made; I pray God you finde it good. My Aunte Cauendishe was heere on Monday laste, she certified me, of yo:<sup>r</sup> La:<sup>ps</sup> good health, & dispositione, which I pray God longe to continue. I am in good health, my Cousin Mary hath had three little fittes of an agew, butt now she is well, and mery. Thus with my humble duty vnto yo:<sup>r</sup> La:<sup>p</sup> & humble thanckes for the token you sent me laste, and craueinge your dayly blessinge, I humbly Ceasse. Frome Eims, the .viii. of February. 1587

Yo:<sup>r</sup> La:<sup>ps</sup> humble, and obbediente  
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Arbella Steward

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