

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 118 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=118>)

From: Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester (Kenilworth, Warwickshire);

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: 16 July [1580?]

Summary: Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, writes to Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) to express his being 'deeply indebted for your many bounties'.

Archive: National Library of Scotland, MS 3657, fols 15r-16v

Delivery status: to Bess, sent

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

Hands: Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 118: Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester

Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester (1532/3-88), courtier and magnate, was a childhood friend of Elizabeth I and her earliest favourite as queen. He was appointed to the privy council in 1562 and played a very significant role in English politics. Given his prominence in the period, it is not surprising he was a frequent correspondent of Bess and her fourth husband, earl and countess of Shrewsbury.

Other letters associated with Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester:

21 January 1568/9 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=107>)

[1570s?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=167>)

27 June [1576?] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=110>)

18 May [1577?] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=109>)

2 August 1578 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=197>)

12 July 1585 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=151>)

23 November 1586 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=214>)

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

People Associated with Letter 118: 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.

Normalised view of Letter 118

To ye right honorable the Countes of Shrewsbury.

My noble lady I must supplye a great burden with a light recompence, being so depelye Indebted for your many bountyes, only bare thankes have I to requyte them with, Albeyt a very redye & most wylling mynde shall ye alwey finde to make better requytalle with any servyce or pleasure yat may lye in my smale pouer. And so wyll with my best & hartyst prayers to god for your well doing comytt my good lady to his safe protectyon. from Kenelworth this xvj of July.

Your ladyship's most assuredly bounde

R. Leycester

Diplomatic view of Letter 118

[Address Leaf]

To y^e right honorable
the Countes of Shrewsbury.

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

234 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

15 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

Dudly Earl of Leucester ... 1564 extinct 1588 Robert Dudley

younger son of John Dudle of Northumberland being much favoured by Queen Elizabeth was
maked Baron of

denbigh and Earl of Leicester in the 6th of his reign = he

died Sep. 4 1588 – see Bead Collins's Peerage Page 452 Vol 9 . [Later editorial note, hand:
archivist]

My noble la. I must supplye a great burden

w^t a light recompence, being so depelye

Indebted for yo^r sø many bountyes, *[deletion]*

only bare thankes have I to requyte them wt,

Albeyt a very redye & most wylling mynde

shall ye alwey finde to make better requytalle

w^t any *servyce* or *pleasure* y^t may lye in my

smale pouer. And so wyll w^t my best

& hartiest prayers to god for yo^r well doing

comytt my good la. to his safe protectyon.

from Kenelworth this xvj of July.

Yo^r la most

assuredly bounde

R. Leycester

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