

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 120 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=120>)

From: Bess of Hardwick (Sheffield, Yorkshire);

To: Elizabeth I;

Date: 17 March 1577/8

Summary: Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) writes to Queen Elizabeth I, thanking her for the 'most especial and gracious goodness to grant unto my poor daughter [Elizabeth] Lennox the custody of her child [Arbella Stuart]'.
Archive: Hatfield House, Cecil Papers, 9/62, fols 101-2
Delivery status: from Bess, sent
Letter features: Seal intact - no. Ribbon/floss – no.
Hands: Bess of Hardwick | unknown scribe | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 120: 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 120: Elizabeth I

Elizabeth I (1533-1603), queen of England and Ireland, was the only child of King Henry VIII (1491-1547) and his second wife, Anne Boleyn (c.1500-1536). Her reign is one of the most famous in British, and indeed all of European history and, as she was in her own time, she remains an icon for that age. She succeeded to the throne after the death of her half-sister, Queen Mary, in 1558. With regard to Bess's life, the latter had recently married William St. Loe when Elizabeth became queen. In 1559, St. Loe was named captain of the guard to the queen, and in the same year Bess was appointed as a gentlewoman of the privy chamber. Bess was, however, dismissed due to the queen's anger over her alleged involvement in a clandestine marriage between Katherine Grey and Edward Seymour, earl of Hertford. Nonetheless, the two women continued to have an amiable and significant relationship throughout Elizabeth's reign - evidenced by the correspondence between them. Notably, Elizabeth served as mediator between Bess and her fourth husband, George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, during their marriage breakdown in the 1580s and even intervened on Bess's behalf.

Other letters associated with Elizabeth I:

4 June 1577 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=221>)

25 June 1577 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=172>)

9 January 1602/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=128>)

29 January 1602/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=129>)

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Other letters associated with Sheffield, Yorkshire

- 27 Aug 1567 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=114>)
- 3 May 1571 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=29>)
- 8 Aug 1574 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=73>)
- 7 Jun 1575 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=74>)
- 19 Jun [c.1575?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=77>)
- [Oct 1575?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=218>)
- 13 Oct 1575 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=217>)
- 29 Mar 1576 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=103>)
- 27 Jun [1576?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=110>)
- 18 May [1577?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=109>)
- 1 Aug 1577 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=85>)
- 14 May 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=188>)
- 29 Dec 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=123>)
- 17 Jan 1580 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=190>)
- 13 May 1580 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=194>)
- 21 Jun 1580 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=78>)
- 31 Jan 1581 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=228>)
- 31 Jan 1581 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=227>)
- 28 Nov 1581 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=104>)
- 28 Jan 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=144>)
- 28 Jan 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=162>)
- 8 Feb 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=195>)
- 6 May 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=146>)
- 6 May 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=145>)
- 10 Jun 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=105>)
- 24 Nov [1582?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=204>)

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7 Feb 1583 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=148>)

4 Aug 1584 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=119>)

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

19 Dec 1590 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=231>)

14 Apr [1600?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=2>)

Normalised view of Letter 120

To the quenes moust excelente magystye

16. March 1577 The Countes of Shrewsbury to the Quenes majestie

may yt plesse your moust exelente magystye I am outterly onhabyll to expresse the monyfolde causus I hau[e] to yelde your magystye my moust humbyll thankes and presently yn that I vnderstand by my vary good lorde of lescester that yt hat[h] plesed your magystye of your moust especyall and gracyous goodnes to grante vnto my poure dowter lenex the costody of har chylde nott withstandyng that ther were dyuers meanes yoused to your heghnes for the conterary someche the more am I bounden to rest your faythefoull and thanfoull saruante for the same/ and I do beseche your magystye that I may commette wolly vnto your moust Gracyous Consederacyon my sayde poure dowteres case of whoyes only goodnes I repouse my wolle troust/ besechinge your magystye also to haue yn remembrance the forder sutte of my lord and me one theyes two owre chylde behalfe, and so as we are moust bowden we wyll neuer seasse to prey to the almyghte god longe to prosper your magystye yn all joy perfytt healthe and selycyte with longe and happy reyne ouer vs at shefelde the xvij of marche

your magystyes moust bouden subgett and saruant

EShrouesbury

Diplomatic view of Letter 120

[Address Leaf]

To the quenes moust
excelente magystye

16. Mar 1577
The Countes of Shrewsbury
to the Quenes ma.^{tie}

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

62 [Item number, hand: archivist]

101 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

may yt plese your moust exelente magystye I am outterly
onhabyll to expresse the monyfolde causus I hau...
to yelde your magystye my moust humbyll
thankes and presently yn that I vnderstand
by my vary good lorde of lescester that yt hat...
plesed your magystye of your moust especyall
and gracyous goodnes to grante vnto my
poure dowter lenex the costody of har chylde
nott w^l standyng that ther were dyuers
meanes yoused to your heghnes for the
conterary someche the more am I bounden to
rest your faythefoull and thanfoull
saruant for the same/ and I do beseche
your magystye that I may commette
wolly vnto your moust Gracyous Consedera ^{^cyon^}
my sayde poure dowteres case of whoyes only
goodnes I repose my wolle troust/ besechinge
your magystye also to haue yn remembrance
the forder sutte of my lord and me one
theyes two owre chyldeyne behalfe, and so
as we are moust ^{^bowden^} we wyll neuer seasse to prey

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to the almyghte god longe to prosper your
magystye yn all joy perfytt healthe and selycyte
w^t longe and happy reyne ouer vs at shefelde
the xvij of marche

your magystyes moust
bouden subgett and saruant

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