

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 122 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=122>)**

From: Bess of Hardwick ([Richmond Palace, London?]);

To: William Cecil, Lord Burghley;

Date: 24 October 1578

Summary: Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) writes to William Cecil, Lord Burghley, thanking him for his friendship and describing the accommodation arranged for her at court by Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester. In a postscript she notes that she has not yet moved any suit to the queen.

Archive: Hatfield House, Cecil Papers, 10/70, fols 125-6

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

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

Hands: Bess of Hardwick | unknown scribe | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

## People Associated with Letter 122: 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 122: William Cecil, Lord Burghley

William Cecil (1521-98), Lord Burghley, was a chief minister to Queen Elizabeth I for most of her reign. Most importantly, he served as secretary of state (1558-71) and lord high treasurer (from 1571) and he was elected chancellor of Cambridge University. He was an especially constant friend to Bess's fourth husband, George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury; therefore, upon becoming the countess of Shrewsbury, Bess's own friendship with Cecil was also strengthened.

Other letters associated with William Cecil, Lord Burghley:

13 October 1571 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=225>)

14 May 1578 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=188>)

23 September 1578 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=121>)

22 June 1579 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=189>)

28 January 1581/2 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=162>)

2 August 1584 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=150>)

6 October 1585 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=152>)

[13 June 1586] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=230>)

6 October 1587 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=156>)

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

11 April 1591 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=159>)

21 September 1592 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=163>)

9 August 1593 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=108>)

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## **Other letters associated with [Richmond Palace, London?]**

4 Aug 1586 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=202>)

## Normalised view of Letter 122

To the Ryght my vary goode lord borley lorde of enlonde

24. October 1578 The Countesse of Shrewsbury to my Lord thanks/

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my good Lord I fynde my selfe so meche bouend to your Lordship for all your honorabell fauores as I can not but acknolege that I take a sengeuler comforte thereyn, and holde my selfe ryght hapey for the great benyfytte of so fast a frend/ thynkenge yt my parte to desyre knolege yn what statt of helthe your Lordship ys/ for whych respecte I chefely thought good to sende and here by also to aduertys that my Lord of Leycester be fore my comynge to courte aponted one vary good chamber with some of other Letyll rome to be made redy for me beyng parte of hys owne logynge wereof I reste vary glade for that I hade rather haue albeyett neuer so letyll acorner withyn the courte then greater easement forder of. har magystye vouchsafed moust gracuous speche and acceptance of my deuty, and as I haue alwaye[s] so I shall thynke my selfe moust humbly bonde trewly to honore sarue and prey for har magystye whyle I leue. good my lord for that I hope shortely to se you at courte I wyll now ceasse assuryng I wysse your Lordship and al your as to myselfe al hapey welfare with moust harty comendacyons to your Lordship my good lady your wyffe and good lady oxford with har letyll swette lady I end recmond the xxiiij of october

your good Lordship's moust assured

EShrouesbury

as yt I haue not moued any sute to har magystye

## Diplomatic view of Letter 122

[Address Leaf]

To the Ryght  
my vary goode  
lord borley lorde  
of enlonde

24. Octob. 1578

The Countesse of Shrewsbu=ry to my L.  
thankes/

[Overleaf]

**[Overleaf: Notes]**

126 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

[Letter Text]

**[Letter Text: Notes]**

70 [Item number, hand: archivist]

125 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

my good Lord I fynde my selfe so meche bouend to  
your .L. for all your honorabell fauores as I can  
not but acknolege that I take a sengeuler comforte  
theryn, and holde my selfe ryght hapey for  
the great benyfytte of so fast a frend/ thynkenge  
yt my parte to desyre knolege yn what statt  
of helthe your .L. ys/ for whych respecte I thog  
chefely thought good to sende and here by also  
to aduertys that my .Lo. of Leycester be fore  
my comynge to courte aponted one vary good  
chamber w<sup>t</sup> some of other Letyll rome to be made  
redy for me beynge parte of hys owne logynge  
wereof I reste vary glade for that I hade rather  
haue albeyett neuer so letyll acorner w<sup>t</sup> yn the  
courte then greater easement forder of. har  
magystye vouchsafed moust gracyous speche

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and acceptance of my deuty, and as I haue alwaye...  
so I shall thyn ę ke my selfe moust humbly bonde  
trewly to honore sarue and prey for har magystye  
w ȳ hyle I leue. good my .lo. for that I hope shortely  
to se you at courte I wyll now ceasse assurynge  
I wysse your .L. and al your as to myselfe  
al hapey welfare w<sup>t</sup> mouste harty comendacyons  
to your .L. my good lady your wyffe and good  
lady oxfort w<sup>t</sup> har letyll swette lady I end  
remond the xxiiij of october

your good .L. moust assured

EShrouesbury

as yt I haue not moued  
any sute to har mag ę ystye

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