

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 125 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=125>)

From: Bess of Hardwick (Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire);

To: Sir Robert Cecil;

Date: 2 June 1600

Summary: Bess (dowager countess of Shrewsbury) writes to Sir Robert Cecil, asking him to favour her cause regarding family lands, as her stepson and son-in-law, Gilbert Talbot, seventh earl of Shrewsbury, 'goeth about to overthrow the estate of some lands formerly conveyed to my children'. She refers Cecil to her son, William Cavendish, who will explain the matter further.

Archive: Hatfield House, Cecil Papers, 80/9 [unfoliated:, fols 1-2]

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

Letter features: Seal intact - no. Ribbon/floss – no. Letter packet - tuck and fold

Hands: Scribe B | unknown scribe | archivist | Bess of Hardwick |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 125: 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 125: Sir Robert Cecil

Robert Cecil, first earl of Salisbury (1563-1612), leading administrator, politician and courtier, was the only son of William Cecil, Lord Burghley. Like his father, he held a number of important positions, including secretary of state, lord high steward to Queen Anne of Denmark (King James I's wife), lord treasurer and master of the wards.

Other letters associated with Sir Robert Cecil:

20 May 1595 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=124>)

6 October 1600 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=126>)

28 April 1601 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=127>)

[January] 1602/3 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=136>)

18 January 1602/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=139>)

2 February 1602/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=130>)

6 February 1602/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=131>)

21 February 1602/3 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=133>)

21 February 1602/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=132>)

3 March 1602/3 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=134>)

13 April 1603 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=140>)

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Other letters associated with Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire

- 1 Dec [c.1564] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=30>)
- 20 Jan [c.1565] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=31>)
- [1574?] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=41>)
- 3 Aug [1580s?] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=205>)
- 2 Aug 1584 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=150>)
- 4 Aug 1584 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=119>)
- 18 Feb [1591?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=233>)
- 21 Sep 1592 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=163>)
- 11 Mar 1593 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=160>)
- 19 Sep 1594 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=1>)
- 20 May 1595 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=124>)
- 27 Feb 1596 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=16>)
- 11 Aug 1597 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=46>)
- 28 Feb [1598?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=187>)
- [c.1600] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=7>)
- 6 Oct 1600 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=126>)
- 28 Apr 1601 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=127>)
- 21 Dec 1602 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=44>)
- 9 Jan 1603 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=128>)
- 18 Jan 1603 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=139>)
- 29 Jan 1603 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=129>)
- 2 Feb 1603 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=130>)
- 6 Feb 1603 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=131>)
- 21 Feb 1603 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=132>)
- 3 Mar 1603 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=134>)
- 10 Mar 1603 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=135>)

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- 18 Apr 1603 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=140>)
- 31 Jan 1604 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=161>)
- 12 May 1604 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=63>)
- 18 Jun 1604 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=45>)
- 4 Jul 1604 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=21>)
- 16 Dec 1605 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=242>)
- 15 Jan [1606] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=180>)
- 7 Mar 1606 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=49>)
- 13 Feb 1607 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=14>)
- 25 May [1607] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=3>)
- 22 Jun 1607 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=34>)
- 27 Jun [1607] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=4>)
- 30 Nov 1607 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=179>)
- 31 Dec 1607 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=35>)

Normalised view of Letter 125

To the Right honorabell Sir Robert Sicill knight principall Secretary to hir Majestie

1600. 2 Iune. The Countesse of Shrewsbury to my Master

good master Secretary. I am lothe to be trobelsom to you, but when matters concerne me greatly, you wyll geue me leue to resorte to your honorable fauor, I haue and doe rely theron, and now occasion is offred wherein you may plentyfully shoe yt without the hurte of any, in mayntening me in my honest and just cause./ I am wronged by those, who in reson shold seke my comforte./ the erle of Shrosbery under pretence of a graunt of conceled Lands, goeth about to ouerthroe, thestate of some Lands formerly conueyed to my children, and derly obteyned by me, and uppon great considerations, the matter I haue caused to be briefly set downe, which my sonn william Cauendysshe wyll present to you./ I besech god to graunt you long and happy health with all honor./ from hardwyck the second of June 1600

your assured faythfull frend

EShrouesbury //

Diplomatic view of Letter 125

[Address Leaf]

To the .R. honorabell S.^r Robert
Sicill knight principall
Secretary to hir Ma.^{tie}

1600.

2 Iune.

The Countesse of Shrewsbury
to my M^r

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

9 [Item number, hand: archivist]

good m^r Secretary. I am lothe to be trobelsom to you, but when matters concerne me greatly, you wyll geue me leue to resorte to your honorable fauor, I haue and doe rely theron, and now occasion is offred wherein you may plentyfully shoe yt wth out the hurte of any, in mayntening me in my honest and just cause./ I am wronged by those, who in reson shold seke my comforte./ the erle of Shrosbery under pretence of a graunt of conceled Lands, goeth about to ouerthroe, thestate of some Lands formerly conueyed to my children, and derly obteyned by me, and uppon great considerations, the matter I haue caused to be briefly set downe, w^{ch} my sonn w.^m Cauendysshe wyll present to you./ I besech god to graunt you long and happy health wth all honor./ from hardwyck the second of June 1600

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