

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 137 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=137>)

From: The Lords of the Council (Court at Richmond);

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: 14 March 1602/3

Summary: Lords of the Council write to Bess (dowager countess of Shrewsbury) regarding her troublesome granddaughter, Arbella Stuart, instructing Bess to keep her pacified and to allow the letter bearer (unspecified, but 'known to us to be of good religion') to see Arbella as often as she will admit him. They also suggest that Bess's son, William Cavendish, attend to the matter more than he does and ask Bess to remind another son, Henry Cavendish, of his duty to respond to charges made against him at court.

Archive: Hatfield House, Cecil Papers, 135/168-9, fols 220-21

Delivery status: to Bess, not sent (i.e. a draft or contemporary copy)

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

Hands: unknown scribe | Levinus Munck | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

People Associated with Letter 137: The Lords of the Council

The 'Lords of the Council' in Bess's correspondence refers to members of the privy council - especially to do with Arbella Stuart in letters written in the early 1600s - so notably Robert Cecil, first earl of Salisbury (1563-1612) and Sir John Stanhope (c.1540-1621). The privy council served as the principal executive branch of English government and, in the course of its decision making, letters were often written by scribes and sent out on behalf of the lords to the relevant party, or parties.

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

People Associated with Letter 137: 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.

Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

Other letters associated with Court at Richmond

27 Feb 1596 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=16>)

21 Feb 1603 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=133>)

Normalised view of Letter 137

1602

March 14 Mynute to my Lady Shrewsbury by Master Holford

Concerning the Lady Arbella/

Madame. We are verie sorry to fynde by the strange stile of the Lady Arbellaes lettres that she hath her thoughts noe better quieted especially consideringe her Majestes owne ready inclynation notwithstanding her errour first errour in delinge with my lord of Hertford to haue taken noe other course with her then was expressed by our first ioynt letter under tow. of our handes./ to then and because we would be verie gladd even for the suppression of vayne reports that the bottome of her heart weare knowne, seeinge the bearer hereof is knowne to vs to be of good Religion, and seemeth to be agreeble vnto her in respect of his dependeng vppon her howse. It is thought fitt that your Ladyship should suffer him to haue accesse vnto her, as often as she shall desyre him Next whereas your Ladyship complaynes, that she is not remooued from you, we must repleye vnto you for the present, that her Majesty can in noe sort be brought vnto it, but rather wisheth that seeinge Fashion all thinges, as the yonge Lady, may not mislike her habitation, soe as your Ladyship doe assigne Master William Cavendish to attend her, whoe is a gentleman that can both please her and advise her in a dew proportion. And thus for this tyme we committ your Ladyship to Gods protection. From the court at Richmond this of March 1602

your Ladyships verie Lovinge freinds./

she groweth soe troublesoem both to her selfe and to others that you will deale as myldly with her in wordes as you can howsoever she may offend you in this tyme of her passion because that is one pretence of her querell. and that as much as may be her sendinge vpp and downe such strange lettres may be forborne. in the which we must tell you truly and soe we pray you to lett Master William Cauendish know that her Majesty and my Lordes doe expect at his hand that he should interpose himselfe more earnestly and perticilerly toward the discouery of her meaninge by theise vayne fancyes then he doth seeinge it is her Majestes pleasure and soe we doe agayne signifye to you that he doe ease your Ladyship of that contynuall care which we see you take the same beinge a great trouble to your selfe and more proper for him whose company is more agreeable vnto her/ Theise dyrections we haue

thought fitt to give you in her case, first because the dispersinge of her lettres abroad of such straunge subiectes she writes is inconvenient for many respects, and in our opinion disgraceful

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

to her selfe, which maketh vs the rather woonder that her vncles there, are noe more sensible of it, nor doe not by their lettres or otherwise open themselves vnto vs ether in their desyre and

and industry to prevent and suppress these thinges or in discoveringe their knowledge of such perticilers as haue come to there vnderstanding especially, Master Henry Cavendish whoe knowinge himselfe to be charged in the first matter of my Lord of Hartford ought in duty ether to haue written or come vpp to haue given satisfacion, whereof ... we pray your Ladyshipp, to take notice vnto him in that as to Master William Cauendish, of that which is expected by the state at his handes. Lastly we intreat your Ladisshipp for your owne part to Lay from you all suspition or feare that any of her vnquiett informations can touch you in her Majestes opinion nether ought in wisdome to be, soe apprehended by you towards her as to be mooued thereby, to any such Course, as might hurt your health or give her cause of further vexation to her selfe, whom her Majesty would haue, barred, of noe thinge fitt for her where she remaynes as longe, as those discreet freinds of hers whom you assigne to accompany and attend her can keepe her within bounds of temper and quiettness of ... which though we can iudge but by her lettres yet you must thinke that we assure our selves that they which doe dayly accompany her haue soe much discrete as to discover the causes

the ende and the remedyes of all actions if they list./

Diplomatic view of Letter 137

[Address Leaf]

1602

March 14
Mynute to my Lady ~
Shrewsbury by M^r
Holford

Concerning the Lady
Arbella/

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

169 [Item number, hand: archivist]
221 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

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especially consideringe her Ma.^{tes} owne ready inclynation notw^t hstandinge
her [*deletion*] *errour* ^first *errour* in delinge w^t h my l. of Hertford to haue taken ~~any~~ noe other course w^t h
her then was expressed by our first ioynt letter under tow. of our handes./^ to ~~forbear~~ any further offence
towards her ~
then ~~did appeare by our ioynt lre.~~ Wherein ^and^ because we would
be verie gladd even for the suppression of vayne reports that the
bottome of her heart weare knowne, seeinge the bearer hereof is
knowne to vs to be of good Religion, and seemeth to be ~~much~~ ^agreeble^ ~~~
~~interested in her.~~ ^vnto her in respect of his dependeng vpon her howse.^ We would be verie gladd ^It
is thought fitt^ that your ~~would~~ ^La: should^ suffer
him to haue accesse vnto her, as often as she shall desyre him ~
Next whereas your La: complaynes, that she is not remooued from
you, we must repleye vnto you for the present, that her Ma.^{ty} can
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Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Fashion all things, as the yonge Lady, may not mislike her habitation, soe as your La: doe assigne M.^r William Cavendish to attend her, whoe is a gentleman that can both please her and advise her in a dew proportion. And thus for this tyme we committ your La: to Gods protection. From the court at Richmond this of March 1602

your La:ps verie Lovinge freinds./

she groweth soe troublesoem both to her selfe and to others that you will deale as myldly w^t h her in wordes as you can howsoever she may offend her ^{^you^} in this tyme of her passion ^{^because that is one pretence of her querell^} . and that as much as may be her sendinge vpp and downe such strange ~~farr~~ *lettres* may be forborne. in the w^c h we must tell you ~ truly and soe we pray you to lett M^r William Cauendish know that her Ma.^{ty} and my Ldes doe expect at his hand that he should ~~seeke to~~ interpose himselfe more ~~earefully~~ ^{^earnestly and perticilerly^} toward the discouvery of her mynde meaninge by these vayne fancyes and ~~temperinge~~ then he doth seeinge it is her Ma.^{tes} pleasure and soe we doe agayne signifye to you that he doe ~~riid~~ ^{^ease^} your Ladyship of

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

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thought fitt to give ^{^you^} in her case, first
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towards her as to be mooued thereby, to any such
Course, as might hurt your health or give her cause
of further vexation to her selfe, whom her Ma.^{ty} would
haue, barred, of noe thinge fitt for her ether ~~in your~~ ^{^where she^}
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Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

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[Overleaf]

[Overleaf: Notes]

168 [Item number, hand: archivist]

220 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

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