

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 138 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=138>)

From: Unknown correspondent;

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: [1578]

Summary: An unidentified author writes to Bess (countess of Shrewsbury), apologising for a delayed response to her letters due firstly to sickness and then the recent visit of Jean de Simier to the English court. The writer fears that a letter forwarded from 'my cousin Sidney' has not reached Bess and has therefore sent her another copy. Also, Bess's son, 'master Cavendish', has not been seen since her last departure, but the writer would wish him there now in order to introduce him to 'my cousin' for a potential match.

Archive: Hatfield House, Cecil Papers, 202/158 [unfoliated, fol. 1]

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

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

Hands: unknown scribe | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 138: Unknown correspondent

null

Other letters associated with Unknown correspondent:

22 October 1564 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=62>)

[December?] 1573 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=143>)

3 August [1580s?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=205>)

21 May 1591 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=215>)

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People Associated with Letter 138: 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.

Normalised view of Letter 138

Madame The cause why I have stayed to render you thanks for your most frindly lettre hath proceeded through a fever I was late visited withall since the recovery whereof we have been greatly troubled with wooinge matters vpon the arrivall of one Monsieur de Cymieur servant to the frenche Kinges bother who carieth himselfe in his charge with yat modesty & tem perance as he doth greatly content all this courte. But what wilbe thissue of his arrande he onely knoweth yat sitteth above

About a fortnight past I sent vnto your Ladyship a copie of the aunswere I received from my cousin Sidnaye whereunto I prayed your Ladyship that I might receive your opinion how you did like thereof. And for yat I have received from you no aunswere It maket[h] me greatly to doubte yat the sayd lettres are not come to your handes. wherefore I have thought good to send you here inclosed an other copie. The gentleman himself according to his promise is come vp whom I finde verie well inclined to do as I shall direct him, he asked me whether yat your Ladyship ment to bestowe vpon your sonne anie of your westerne lande you had by Sir William Sentlowe which if it might be brought to passe I perceave wolde greatly content him. I promised him to writte vnto your Ladyship and procure your speady aunswere therin which I humbly beseche you yat I may receive accordingly.

Since your departure I have not seen your sonne Master Cauendishe I wolde be glad he were here yat my cousin might see him in case you continue affected to the matche which I suppose will bothe content you for the person & for the Lyvinge. And so prayinge once again your Ladyship speady aunswere I most humbly take my leave.

1578

Diplomatic view of Letter 138

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

106 [Old item number, hand: archivist]

1578

C [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

106 [Old item number, hand: archivist]

158 [Item number, hand: archivist]

106 [Old item number, hand: archivist]

24 [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

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this *courte*. But what wilbe thissue of his
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a copie of the aunswere I received from my
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inclosed an other copie. The *gentleman* himself

[page break]

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yo^r sonne anie of yo^r westerne lande you
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yo^r Lad: and procure yo^r speady aunswere ^{^therin^}
which I humbly beseche you y^t I may receive
accordingly.

Since yo^r departure I have not seen yo^r
sonne M^r Caundishe I wolde be glad he were
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I suppose will bothe content you for the
person as & for the Lyvinge. And so prayinge
once again yo^r Lad: speady aunswere I
most humbly take my leave.

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