

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 140 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=140>)

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

To: Sir Robert Cecil;

Date: 13 April 1603

Summary: Bess (dowager countess of Shrewsbury) writes to Sir Robert Cecil in reply to a letter written on behalf of her 'unnatural son, Henry Cavendish', craving pardon to withhold her support of him in relation to 'those matters lately objected against him' as he has dealt so poorly with her in the past.

Archive: Hatfield House, Cecil Papers, 99/114 [unfoliated, fols 1-2]

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

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

Hands: unknown scribe | archivist | Bess of Hardwick |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 140: 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 140: 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>)

2 June 1600 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=125>)

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>)

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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>)
- 2 Jun 1600 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=125>)
- 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>)

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- 10 Mar 1603 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=135>)
- 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 140

To the Right honorable Sir Robert Cecill Knight Principall Secretarie to the Kinges Majestie
with speed speed//

1603. April 13 Countess Dowager of Shrewsbury to my master

Good master Secretarie./ this xijth of Aprill, I received your letter in the behaulf of my vnnaturall sonne, Henry Cavendishe./ I wishe he had lived so that he were cleyre of all faultes imputed to him (as in this it seemeth you ar informed or at least, some woulde make showe he shoulde be./ had it ben so, I wishe I had knowne it soner/ that then I might have taken less greif and care for his and others vndutifull and vnnaturall dealinges./ I coulde soner be perswaded he were innocent of those matters lately obiected agaynst him, had I not ben credibly and certenly informed (as I knowe your self and others that were of hir Majesties most honorable Privie Counsell were, of his former acting and dealing in the same matter./ no frend I have should rather or soner perswade me to doe for him then your self; but I have ben so hardly and vnnaturally dealt withall by him and others whoe I take it spetially sought my overthrowe, and having no likelier meanes then to worke some nere me, little or not at all before then suspected by me, to ioyne with them in theyr bad actions., that I must crave pardon of you, yf I refuse to doe for those whoe not only in this matter but in many others have by all possible meanes they coulde, sought to hurt & hinder me (god I thank him without any desert of my part./ So good master Secretarie wishing you all honor and happynes I Cease./ ffrom Hardwick this xijth of Aprill 1603./

your assured ffaythfull ffrend./

EShrouesbury

Diplomatic view of Letter 140

[Address Leaf]

To the Right honorable S.^r Robert
Cecill Knight Principall ~
Secretarie to the Kinges Ma.^{tie}
wth speed speed//
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1603 .
Aprill 13
Countess Dowager of Shrews=~~bury~~ to my m.^r

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

114 [Item number, hand: archivist]

Good m.^r Secretarie./ this xiiijth of Aprill, I received yo.^r letter in the behaulf of my ~
vnnaturall sonne, Henry Cavendishe./ I wishe he had lived so that he were cleyre of
all faultes imputed to him (as in this it seemeth you ar informed or at least, some
woulde make shoue he shoulde be./ had it ben so, I wishe I had knowne it soner/
that then I might have taken less greif and care for his and others vndutifull and
vnnaturall dealinges./ I coulde soner be perswaded he were innocent of those matters
lately obiected agaynst him, had I not ben credibly and certenly informed (as I
knowe yo.^r self and others that were of hir Ma.^{ties} most honorable Privie Counsell ~
were, of his former acting and dealing in the same matter./ no frend I have should
rather or soner perswade me to doe for him then yo.^r self; but I have ben so hardly
and vnnaturally dealt wth all by him and others whoe I take it spetially sought
my overthrowe, and having no likelier meanes then to worke some nere me, little
or not at all before then suspected by me, to ioyne wth them in theyr bad actions.,
that I must crave pardon of you, yf I refuse to doe for those whoe not only in this
matter but in many others have by all possible meanes they coulde, sought to hurt
& hinder me (god I thank him wth out any desert of my part./ So good m.^r Secretarie
wishing you all honor and happynes I Cease./ ffrom Hardwick this
xiiijth of Aprill 1603./

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yo.^r assured ffaythfull ffrend./

EShrouesbury

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