

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 148 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=148>)**

From: Bess of Hardwick (Sheffield, Yorkshire);

To: Sir Francis Walsingham;

Date: 7 February 1582/3

Summary: Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) writes to Sir Francis Walsingham regarding her nephew John Wingfield's marriage to the countess of Kent (Susan Bertie, widow of Reynold Grey de jure earl of Kent), which she has heard was not approved of by the queen.

Archive: The National Archives, State Papers Domestic, Elizabeth I, 12/158, ff 160r-161v (item 58)

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

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

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

Version: 1.0

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# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

## People Associated with Letter 148: 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 148: Sir Francis Walsingham

Sir Francis Walsingham (c.1532-1590), was a principal secretary and an intelligencer to Elizabeth I. During the reign of Queen Mary, he lived in exile in Europe. Then, having returned to England following the accession of Elizabeth I, he married Ursula (née St Barbe; with whom he had two daughters); and backed by powerful figures at court (such as Cecil and Leicester) he was initially appointed as an ambassador to France in 1570. In 1573 he was appointed as principal secretary and a privy councillor. By the early 1580s he was one of the queen's key advisors and intimates - evidenced by her nickname for him, her 'Moor'. Walsingham is known to posterity mainly for his complex coordination of intelligence operations - most famously for the discovery of the Babington Plot in 1586, which ultimately led to the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, previously held in the custodial charge of Bess and her fourth husband, George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury.

Other letters associated with Sir Francis Walsingham:

8 June 1576 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=234>)

29 December 1578 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=123>)

28 January 1581/2 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=144>)

6 May 1582 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=146>)

6 May 1582 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=145>)

6 April 1584 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=149>)

2 December 1585 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=153>)

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## Other letters associated with Sheffield, Yorkshire

- 27 Aug 1567 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=114>)
- 3 May 1571 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=29>)
- 8 Aug 1574 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=73>)
- 7 Jun 1575 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=74>)
- 19 Jun [c.1575?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=77>)
- [Oct 1575?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=218>)
- 13 Oct 1575 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=217>)
- 29 Mar 1576 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=103>)
- 27 Jun [1576?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=110>)
- 18 May [1577?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=109>)
- 1 Aug 1577 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=85>)
- 17 Mar 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=120>)
- 14 May 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=188>)
- 29 Dec 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=123>)
- 17 Jan 1580 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=190>)
- 13 May 1580 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=194>)
- 21 Jun 1580 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=78>)
- 31 Jan 1581 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=228>)
- 31 Jan 1581 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=227>)
- 28 Nov 1581 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=104>)
- 28 Jan 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=144>)
- 28 Jan 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=162>)
- 8 Feb 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=195>)
- 6 May 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=146>)
- 6 May 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=145>)
- 10 Jun 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=105>)

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24 Nov [1582?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=204>)

4 Aug 1584 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=119>)

23 Oct 1585 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=117>)

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

14 Apr [1600?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=2>)

## Normalised view of Letter 148

To my honorable good frend/ Master Secritory walsingam

1582 7 February The Countesse of Shrewsbury

on the behalfe of Master Iohn Wingfield

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good master secretorye I presume so much of your accustomed fauor as I styll make bould to be a troblesome sutor vnto you, and nowe to requeare your Lyke frendshepe for the quallyfying of a dyspleasuar I heare her majesty conseued for the maryage betwext the countys of kente and master Ihon wengfeld my nephewe. I would be ryght sory her majesty should conteneue in any dyslyke of them with any being most dutyfully affected towards her hyghnes as I know they are can not bear without extrem grefe./ and albeyt he were not of such Leueing as myght merryt so good a maryage yet being a Ientylman and of that house wherof dyuars haue most dutyfully sarued her majesty and her prodecessors and he also of honest dyscrete conuarsatyon and very zealously religious in the trewe feare of god so as he can not but showe hym selfe almost obedyent subiect to her majesty I trust her hyghnes welbe easly parswaded to thenke of them as they shall dyssarue, wher vnto yt shall [please] you to be ameane for them at my instance I shalbe ... bound ... therby as I am dyuarsly hereto fore ... then I can any way dyssarue more then by my faythfull goodwyll to doe you what pleasuar may Lye in ... me, and so pray the almyghty to sende you Longe healt[h] and what else may be to your greatest felecetye./ Sheffield thys vijth of february

your assured Louing frend

EShrouesbury



## Diplomatic view of Letter 148

[Address Leaf]

### [Address Leaf: Notes]

456 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

7 Feb. 1582/3

Domestic [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

7 Feb<sup>y</sup> 82 [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To my honorable good  
frend/ M<sup>r</sup> Secritory  
walsingam

1582

7 Feb.

The Countesse  
of Shrewsbury

on the behalfe of M<sup>r</sup>  
Iohn Wingfield

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[Overleaf]

### [Overleaf: Notes]

161 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

455 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

139 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

[Letter Text]

### [Letter Text: Notes]

58 [Item number, hand: archivist]

160 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

453 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

138 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

(58) [Item number, hand: archivist]

good m<sup>r</sup> secretorye I presume so much of your accustomed fauor  
as I styll make bould to be a troblesome sutor vnto you, and nowe  
to requeare your Lyke friendshepe for the quallyfying of a



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dyspleasuar I heare her ma:<sup>ty</sup> conseued for the maryage  
betwext the countys of kente and m<sup>r</sup> Ihon wengfeld my  
nephewe. I would be ryght sory her ma:<sup>ty</sup> should conteneu  
in any dyslyke of them w<sup>th</sup> any being most dutyfully affected  
towards her hyghnes as I know they are can not bear w<sup>th</sup> out  
extrem grefe./ and albeyt he were not of such Leueing as  
myght merryt so good a maryage yet being a Ientylman and  
of that house wherof dyuars haue most dutyfully sarued her  
ma:<sup>ty</sup> and her prodecessors and he also of honest dyscrete  
conuarsatyon and very zealously religious in the trewe feare  
of god so as he can not but showe hym selfe amost obedyent  
subiect to her ma:<sup>ty</sup> I trust her hyghnes welbe easly parswaded  
to thenke of them as they shall dyssarue, wher vnto yt shall  
... you to be ameane for them at my instance I shalbe  
... bound ... therby as I am dyuarsly hereto fore ...  
... then I can any way dyssarue more then by my  
faythfull goodwyll to doe you what pleasuar may Lye in ...  
me, and so pray the almyghty to sende you Longe healt...  
and what else may be to your greatest felecetye./  
Sheffeld thys vij<sup>th</sup> of february

your assured Louing  
frend

EShrouesbury

[Overleaf]

## [Overleaf: Notes]

454 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

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