

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 152 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=152>)

From: Bess of Hardwick (Wingfield);

To: William Cecil, Lord Burghley;

Date: 6 October 1585

Summary: Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) writes to William Cecil, Lord Burghley, three years into her dispute over lands and money with her husband George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury. She is adamant to 'make a final end between my lord, me and my children of such wrongs as is done to us'. Although George had promised the queen that he would 'send often' for Bess, she has found that he 'will not suffer me to come to him'.

Archive: The National Archives, State Papers Domestic, Elizabeth I, 12/183, ff 7r-8v (item 4)

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

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

Hands: Scribe A | archivist | Bess of Hardwick |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 152: 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 152: William Cecil, Lord Burghley

William Cecil (1521-98), Lord Burghley, was a chief minister to Queen Elizabeth I for most of her reign. Most importantly, he served as secretary of state (1558-71) and lord high treasurer (from 1571) and he was elected chancellor of Cambridge University. He was an especially constant friend to Bess's fourth husband, George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury; therefore, upon becoming the countess of Shrewsbury, Bess's own friendship with Cecil was also strengthened.

Other letters associated with William Cecil, Lord Burghley:

13 October 1571 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=225>)

14 May 1578 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=188>)

23 September 1578 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=121>)

24 October 1578 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=122>)

22 June 1579 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=189>)

28 January 1581/2 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=162>)

2 August 1584 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=150>)

[13 June 1586] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=230>)

6 October 1587 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=156>)

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

11 April 1591 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=159>)

21 September 1592 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=163>)

9 August 1593 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=108>)

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Other letters associated with Wingfield

28 Jun [1568?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=64>)

[1569?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=67>)

28 May 1576 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=82>)

6 Oct 1587 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=156>)

5 Nov 1588 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=37>)

22 Apr 1589 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=38>)

11 Apr 1591 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=159>)

Normalised view of Letter 152

To the right honorable my very good Lorde, Lorde Tresurar of England

my very good Lord, yt pleased her magestye at my Laste attending of her highnes, of her gracyus goodnes to assure me that your Lor[dship] and master Secretary should in shorte tyme heare and make a fynall end betwene my Lord me and my chyldryn, of such wronges as ys done to vs; my Lord then promysed to send vp his sonne harry Talbott to attende one your Lordship and master Secretar for the fenishing of thes Lamentable Longe delayed causes, yet ys the mattar styll put of and yt ys now iij yeares and more that I and myne haue indured thes extreme wronge, I beceache your Lordship to be ameane to her magesty that we be no Longar delayed and that by your Lordship's paynes and trauell therin we may growe to some ende, else are we not able to indure yt any further, but to our vtter vndoing, her magestye knowes I haue comytted no faulte, my desire was to doe the beste saruice that dyd Lye in me, without respecte of any perryll myght happen to me or myne my assured hope ys that her magesty wyll deleuar me and not suffar Longar delays, and that I may Leue with my husband as I oughte, my Lord makes asporte at this broken reconsylment seing he ys suffared to vse me as he Lyste since his coming downe hath he not ben paste thryse with me, stayed not aboue a day at a tyme; nevar would suffar me to come to him to any other of his houses, tho I earnestly sued for yt, and that he promysed her magesty to sende often for me./ her magestys good pleasur was and comandymente that I should adresse my selfe to your Lordship from tyme to tyme, for any thinge wherin I found my selfe wronged, which makes me presume to troble your Lordship the more, knowing that your Lordship wylbe moste ready to see althinges performed that her magestys pleasur ys to haue done./ and thus beseeching the almighty to send your Lordship amoste happye Longe Lyffe I humble take my Leauē./ at wengfeld this vjth Octobar

your Lodyship's pore frende greatly oppressed

EShrouesbury

Diplomatic view of Letter 152

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

Eliz

Domestic

6 Oct (1585)

~ [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

Eliz

Dom [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To the right honorable my
very good Lorde, Lorde
Tresurar of England

[Overleaf]

[Overleaf: Notes]

8 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

8 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

413A [Old item number, hand: archivist]

4 [Item number, hand: archivist]

7 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

7 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

(4) [Item number, hand: archivist]

my very good Lord, yt pleased her magestye at my Laste attending
of her highnes, of her gracyus goodnes to assure me that your Lor...
and m^r Secretary should in shorte tyme heare and make a fynall
end betwene my Lo: me and my chydryn, of such wronges as
ys done to vs; my Lo: ^{then} promysed to send vp his sonne harry Talbott
to attende one your Lo: and m^r Secretar for the fenishing of thes
Lamentable Longe delayed cause & s, yet ys the mattar styll put of
and yt ys now iij yeares and more that I and myne haue indured
thes extreme wronge, I beceache your Lo: to be ameane to her ma:^{ty}
that we be no Longar delayed and that by your Lo: paynes and

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trauell therin I we may growe to some ende, else are we not able to indure yt any further, but to our vtter vndoing, her magestye knowes I haue comytted no faulte, my desire was to doe the beste saruice that dyd Lye in me, wth out respecte of any perryll myght happen to me or myne my assured hope ys that her ma:^{ty} wyll deleuar me and not suffar Longar delays, and that I may Leue wth my husband as I oughte, my Lo: makes asporte at this broken reconsylment seing he ys suffared to vse me as he Lyste since his coming downe hath he not ben paste thyrse wth me, stayed not aboue a day at a tyme; neuar would suffar me to come to him to any other of his house & s, tho I earnestly sued for yt, and that he promysed her ma:^{ty} to sende often for me./ her magestys good pleasur was and comandymente that I should adresse my selfe to your Lo: from tyme to tyme, for any thinge wherin I found my selfe wronged, w^{ch} makes me presume to troble your Lo: the more, knowing that your Lo: wylbe moste ready to see althinges parformed that her magestys pleasur ys to haue done./ and thus beseching the almighty to send your Lo: amoste happye Longe Lyffe I humble take my Leauē./ at wengfeld this vjth Octobar

your Lo: pore frende greatly
oppressed

EShrouesbury

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