

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 156 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=156>)**

From: Bess of Hardwick (Wingfield);

To: William Cecil, Lord Burghley;

Date: 6 October 1587

Summary: Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) writes to William Cecil, Lord Burghley, thanking him for his support in the dispute with her husband (George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury) and for a letter sent to her via her son, William Cavendish. Since George has neglected her and withdrawn all his provisions, Bess asks Burghley to once again act on her behalf so that 'my long delayed matters may now receive end'.

Archive: The National Archives, State Papers Domestic, Elizabeth I, 12/207, f 44 (item 31)

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

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

Hands: Scribe A | William Cecil, Lord Burghley | archivist | Bess of Hardwick |

Version: 1.0

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# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

## People Associated with Letter 156: 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 156: 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>)

6 October 1585 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=152>)

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

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 1585 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=152>)

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 156

To the Right honorable my esspecyall good Lord, the Lorde Burgley Lorde Tresurar of England./

6. october 1587 The Countess of Shrewsbury

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my sengiular good Lord, I moste humble and hartely thanke your Lordship for your Lettar sente by my sonne Wylliam Cauendish, yt ys my greatest comferte that yt pleaseth your Lordship to haue Care of me, your honorable fauors hath only supported me, else grefe and dyspleasur would haue enddyd my dayes./ now to segnefyte to your Lordship my present state wherof yt pleased your Lordship to wyll me to aduertys you since my coming into the contrie my Lord my husband hath come to his house wengfeld wher I moste remayne not paste iij tymes more haue I not sene him, he stayed not ovar aday at a tyme at his being heare not vnquiat nether well pleased, since my coming downe he hath allowed me grosse prouegions as beefe mutton and corne to sarue my house but now not Longe since he hath sente me word that he wyll not allowe me any further and doth withdrawe all his prouegion not suffaring me to haue suffecyent fyar, yf yt myghte please my Lord that I may remayne in house with him as I oughte and as her majesty put me in comferte I should I shall not desire any prouegions, tyll then I truste he shall not be suffared to withdrawe them from me, yt pleased her majesty to assure me that my Lord's prouegions to me should be bettar worthe then seuen hondreth pound a yeare, ovar and besydes the thre hondreth pound in mony he alloweth me./ I heare by Charles my Lord hath ben dysquiated with a Lettar your Lordship hath sente him of Latte, concerning me, the more honorable and frendly yt pleaseth your Lordship to write of me, the more ys he or some aboute him dyscontente I moste humble thanke your Lordship for your moste honorable remembrance of me to him, I know your Lordship hath euar ben his beste frend, and yf I mighte conteneu with my Lord I assure my selfe howsoeuar he ys now parswaded he would then thenke and acknowledge him selfe much behoulding to your Lordship for wishing and aduising him to vse me well, yt was sonne aftar the receate of your Lordship's lettar that he stayed his prouegions from me what he wyll doe further I know not, I humble beceeche your Lordship that my Longe delayed mattars,

may now receue ende, tyll then my enemys wyll take great aduantage to sture vp my Lorde ageanste me and myne, and styll deuide vs, I humble thanke your Lordship for your greate fauors to my sonne this bearar, whom I beseche your Lordship's Lyscence to attend one you for my mattars, and thus humble craueing pardon for my trobuling your Lordship in this sorte I moste humble cease with my dayly prayar to sende your Lordship all comfortes./ with a most happy Longe Lyffe, at wengfeld this vjth of octobar

your Lordship's moste faythfull frend and so bounde./

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EShrouesbury

## Diplomatic view of Letter 156

[Address Leaf]

### [Address Leaf: Notes]

1587 Oct 6

Dom [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To the Right honorable my essepyall  
good Lord, the Lorde Burgley  
Lorde Tresurar of England./

6. october 1587

The Coutess of Shrewsbury

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[Overleaf]

### [Overleaf: Notes]

45 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

62 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

[Letter Text]

### [Letter Text: Notes]

438 [Old item number, hand: archivist]

31 [Item number, hand: archivist]

44 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

61 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

(31) [Item number, hand: archivist]

my senglular good Lord, I moste humble and hartely thanke your  
Lo: for your Lettar sente by my sonne Wylliam Cauendish, yt  
ys my greatest comferte that yt pleaseth your Lo: to haue  
Care of me, your honorable fauors hath only supported  
me, else grefe and dyspleasur would haue enddyd  
my dayes./ now to segnefy to your Lo: my present  
state wherof yt pleased your Lo: to wyll me to aduertys yo  
aduertys you since my coming into the contrie my  
Lord my husband hath come to his house wengfeld  
wher I moste remayne not paste iij tymes more haue  
I not sene him, he stayed not ovar aday at a tyme  
at his being heare not vnquiat nether well pleased,



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since my coming downe he hath allowed me grosse  
prouegions as beefe mutton and corne to sarue my house  
but now not Longe since he hath sente me word  
that he wyll not allowe me any further and doth  
w<sup>th</sup> drawe all his prouegion not suffaring me to haue  
suffecyent fyar, yf yt myghte please my Lo: that I  
may remayne in house w<sup>th</sup> him as I oughte and as  
her ma:<sup>ty</sup> put me in comferte I should I shall not  
desire any prouegions, tyll then I truste he shall not  
be suffared to w<sup>th</sup> drawe them from e me, yt pleased  
her ma:<sup>ty</sup> to assure me that my L. prouegions to me  
should be bettar worthe then seuen hondreth pound  
a yeare, owar and besydes the thre hondreth pound  
in mony he alloweth me./ I heare by Charles  
my L. hath ben dysquiated w<sup>th</sup> a Lettar you L. hath  
sente him of Latte, concerning me, the more  
honorable and frendly yt pleaseth your L. to write  
of me, the more ys he or some aboute him dyscontente  
I moste humble thanke your Lo: for your moste  
honorable remembrance of me to him, I know your  
L. hath euar ben his beste frend, and yf I mighte  
contenew w<sup>th</sup> my Lo: I assure my selfe howsoeuar  
he ys now parswaded he would then thenke and  
acknowledge him selfe much behoulding to your Lo:  
for wishing and aduising him to vse me well, yt  
was sonne aftar the receate of your L. lettar that he  
stayed his prouegions from me what he wyll doe  
further I know not, I humble beceeche your Lo:  
that my Longe delayed mattars,

[page break]

may now receue ende, tyll then my enemys wyll take great  
aduantage to sture vp my Lorde ageanste me and myne, and  
styll ðœ deuide vs, I humble thanke your Lo: for your  
greate fauors to my sonne this bearar, whom I beseeche  
your Lo: Lycence to attend one you for my mattars, and  
thus humble craueing pardon for my trobuling your  
L. in this sorte I moste humble cease w<sup>th</sup> my dayly  
prayar to sende your Lo: all confortes./ w<sup>th</sup> a most e

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happy Longe Lyffe, at wengfeld this vj<sup>th</sup> of octobar

your Lo: moste faythfull  
frend and so bounde./

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