

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 167 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=167>)**

From: Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester (Nonsuch);

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: [1570s?]

Summary: Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, writes to Bess (countess of Shrewsbury), regretting that he is not there to greet her (at an unspecified location), as he is attending the queen at 'Nonsuch'; but invites her to 'command & dispose of house & all that is in it even as you would of your very own'.

Archive: Lambeth Palace Library, Talbot Papers, MS 3198, fols 298r-99v

Delivery status: to Bess, sent

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

Hands: Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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## People Associated with Letter 167: Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester

Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester (1532/3-88), courtier and magnate, was a childhood friend of Elizabeth I and her earliest favourite as queen. He was appointed to the privy council in 1562 and played a very significant role in English politics. Given his prominence in the period, it is not surprising he was a frequent correspondent of Bess and her fourth husband, earl and countess of Shrewsbury.

Other letters associated with Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester:

21 January 1568/9 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=107>)

27 June [1576?] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=110>)

18 May [1577?] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=109>)

2 August 1578 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=197>)

16 July [1580?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=118>)

12 July 1585 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=151>)

23 November 1586 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=214>)

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## People Associated with Letter 167: 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 167

To ye right honorable my verry good lady the Countes of Shrewsburye

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Good Madame I am both sorrey and ashamed to ... at your yll enterteynment you suffer in that pore hospyta[lity] whear ther ys nether good ... nor any other comodytye to byd you so welcome as in vearly dede the ... good wyll of the howse wold wyshe for you. but the best ys, he knoweth you ar in your own whilst you are in any of his whome you may as farr comand & dyspose of as of any frend ells you haue in England. hereby Madame hit trowbleth me not a lytle though hit shuld be to your further trowble that I can not be ther to bed you as welcome as I may, though not so well as I wold. but as hit ys no smale contentacion to me that you wold take yat pore lodging at this time, so I pray you my good lady comand & dyspose of howse & all that ys in yt euen as ye wold of your very owen & I pray you think that next her majeste, ther ys no two in England better welcome then your Lord & your selfe ys & shalbe whear I haue to do. And you shal[l] cause my Lord to thynk now yat I haue performyd parte of his earnest request & desuer to me which was that I wold haue the same care toward your lady yat I wold to him self. but that I do yt not as I wold I trust Madame you wyll hold me excused by reason of this absence & thorowe attendance vppon her majeste, other cause shold there haue ben none to lett me from being with you or this tyme And thus with a 2000 thankes & most harty comendacions to your good ladyship I wyll take leaue for this tyme. at nonsuch this wensday.

your ladyship's very loving ffrend and cousen

R Leycester

Madame her Majeste hath asked oft of your recouery and desierus to hear well of you. & very gladd to know ... is thus well alredy with you./ Leycester

## Diplomatic view of Letter 167

[Address Leaf]

### [Address Leaf: Notes]

E of Leycester [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To y<sup>e</sup> right hon<sup>r</sup> able  
my verry good la. the  
Countes of Shrewsburye

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[Overleaf]

### [Overleaf: Notes]

29... [Foliation, hand: archivist]

[Letter Text]

### [Letter Text: Notes]

X X [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

2... [Foliation, hand: archivist]

298 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

Good Madame I am both sorrey and ashamed to ...  
at yo<sup>r</sup> yll enterteynment yo<sup>u</sup> suffer in that pore hospyta...  
whear ther ys nether good ... nor any other comodytye  
to byd you so welcome as in veary dede the ...  
good wyll of the howse wold wyshe for yo<sup>u</sup> . but  
the best ys, he know<sup>th</sup> yo<sup>u</sup> ar in yo<sup>r</sup> own whilst  
yo<sup>u</sup> are in any of his whome yo<sup>u</sup> may as farr  
comand & dyspose of as of any frend ells yo<sup>u</sup> haue  
in England. hereby Madame hit trowbleth me  
not a lytle though hit shuld be to yo<sup>r</sup> further trowble  
that I can not be ther to bed yo<sup>u</sup> as welcome as I  
may, though not so well as I wold. but as hit  
ys no smale contentacion to me that yo<sup>u</sup> wold take  
y<sup>t</sup> pore lodging at this time, so I pray yo<sup>u</sup> my  
good la. comand & dyspose of howse & all that  
ys in yt euen as ye wold of yo<sup>r</sup> very owen &  
I pray yo<sup>u</sup> think that next her ma<sup>te</sup> , ther ys

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no two in England better welcome then yo<sup>r</sup> L. & yo<sup>r</sup>  
selfe ys & shalbe wher I haue to do. And yo<sup>u</sup> shal...  
cause my L. to thynk now y<sup>t</sup> I haue *performyd parte*  
of his ernest request & desuer to me w<sup>ch</sup> was that I  
wold haue the same care toward yo<sup>r</sup> la y<sup>t</sup> I wold to him  
self. but that I do yt not as I wold I trust Madame  
yo<sup>u</sup> wyll hold me excused by reason of this absence &  
thorowe attendance vppon her ma<sup>te</sup>, other cause shold there  
haue ben none to lett me from being w<sup>t</sup> yo<sup>u</sup> or this tyme  
And thus w<sup>t</sup> a 2000 thankes & most hartly comendacions  
to yo<sup>r</sup> good la. I wyll take leaue for this tyme. at  
nonsuch this wensday.

yo<sup>r</sup> la very loving  
ffrend and cousen

R Leycester

Madame her Ma<sup>te</sup> hath asked oft of yo<sup>r</sup> recouery  
and desierus to hear well of you. & very gladd to know  
... is thus well alredy w<sup>t</sup> you./ Leycester

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