

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 168 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=168>)

From: Elizabeth Smyth (Ashton, Derbyshire);

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: 10 December 1578

Summary: Elizabeth Smyth writes to Bess (countess of Shrewsbury), thanking her for accepting 'of part of my little one' (Bess stood as godmother to Smyth's daughter), and for a gift, 'a bowl with a cover'.

Archive: Lambeth Palace Library, Talbot Papers, MS 3205, fols 34r-35v

Delivery status: to Bess, sent

Letter features: two seals over ribbon, red wax, arms embossed Ribbon, yellowish-green (close to Michel 5-2-8, 5-7-6 and 5-7-5) Letter packet - accordion

Hands: Elizabeth Smyth | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

People Associated with Letter 168: Elizabeth Smyth

Nothing is known of Elizabeth Smyth apart from the one surviving letter she wrote to Bess (who stood as godmother for Elizabeth's daughter) in 1578.

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People Associated with Letter 168: 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.

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Other letters associated with Ashton, Derbyshire

[c.1575?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=76>)

Normalised view of Letter 168

To the Right honorable; my very good Lady; the Cownettesse of Shrowsbury; be theas delivered

My moste honorabel good Lady; I thought it my duty to sende to geue your honor humbel thanckes; that it would please you to acseppte of parte of my lettell one, so that therby your honor hath bownde bothe me and myne; if it please god to blese her with liue; to do you seruise; For I haue allwayes founde your honor so lyke a Mother vnto my selfe; that it made me presume to geue your Ladyship parte of my Childe; I haue reseued frome master Hamond a Boule with a couer; for the whiche I moste humbely thancke your honor in my gerles behalfe; Thus moste humbely Crauinge pardon for this my bowldnes: and geueinge your honor humbel thanckes for all your fauors contenually bestowed apoune me; desiering no longer to liue then I shall by all meanes sycke to deserue the same besehinge your honor to remember my humbel duty to my Honorable Good Lord; I most humbely take my leaue: prainge to god for the increase of all honor and happynes to you bothe; From Aishton the .x. of December .1578:

Your honors humbly to be commanded

Elizabeth Smyth

Diplomatic view of Letter 168

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

Eliz Smith to the
Countess

1578 [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]
10Du [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To the Right honorable; my
very good Lady; the Cownetesse
of Shrowsbury; be theas
delivered

[Overleaf]

[Overleaf: Notes]

35 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

34 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

My moste honorabel good Lady; I thought it my duty to sende
to geue your honor humbel thanckes; that it would please you
to acseppte of parte of my lettell one, so that therby your honor
hath bownde bothe me and myne; if it please god to blese her
with liue; to do you seruisse; For I haue allwayes founde your
honor so lyke a Mother vnto my selfe; that it made me ~
presume to geue your La: parte of my Childe; I haue reseued
frome m:^r Hamond a Boule with a couer; for the whiche I
moste humbely thancke your honor in my gerles behalfe;
Thus moste humbely Crauinge pardon for this my bowldnes:
and geueinge your honor humbel thanckes for all your ~
fauors contenually bestowed apoune me; desiering no longer
to liue then I shall by all meanes sycke to deserue the same
beshinge your honor to remember my humbel duty to my
Honorable Good Lord; I most humbely take my leaue:
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Your honors humbly to be
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[significant space]

Elizabeth Smyth

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