

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 176 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=176>)**

From: Bess of Hardwick;

To: George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury;

Date: 9 June 1586

Summary: Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) writes to her husband, George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, informing him that 'I have not attended on your lordship at this time proceeding only out of a great fear of your lordship's wrath & heavy displeasure conceived against me'. She would rather suffer 'dispossession of any earthly benefits' than continue to be chastised with the 'extreme rigour of words'.

Archive: Lambeth Palace Library, Talbot Papers, MS 3198, fol. 331r-v

Delivery status: from Bess, not sent (i.e. a draft or contemporary copy)

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

Hands: unknown scribe | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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## People Associated with Letter 176: 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 176: George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury

George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury (c.1522-90), was the eldest and only surviving son of Francis Talbot, fifth earl of Shrewsbury (1500-60), and his first wife, Mary (d.1538). In 1538, at the age of sixteen, he took up the title of Lord Talbot, until he succeeded to the earldom after his father's death twenty-two years later. In 1539 he married his first wife, Gertrude (née Manners; d.1566/7), with whom he had seven children: four daughters and three sons. Early on he acquired a number of honours stemming from his family's well-established prominence in the north: knight bachelor (1547), member of the council of the north (1549), knight of the Garter (1561), and lord lieutenant of Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire (1565). Following the death of his first wife, he married Bess, then the widow of William St Loe (c.1520-65?), in 1567. At this point Shrewsbury was one of the wealthiest men in England, derived from his estates and also business adventuring in farming, shipping, coal-mining, glassworks and lead extraction and production. Soon after his marriage to Bess, however, he was appointed keeper of Mary Queen of Scots, a custodianship he would hold from 1569-84. Shrewsbury prided himself on his loyalty to Elizabeth I, but he soon found her reluctant to provide sufficient diet money to keep Mary and her retinue. This, in addition to the monies needed for expensive building projects (at Worksop and Chatsworth), and his eldest son Gilbert's debts led to serious financial anxiety for Shrewsbury. Furthermore, he was forced to remain with Mary at all times and was therefore losing his place at court. As Shrewsbury's stresses grew and he became increasingly irascible, his marriage with Bess broke down spectacularly amid quarrelling to do with family finances and the allocation of estates. Scandal and mutual bad-mouthing soon became very public and the queen herself intervened, eventually dictating that Shrewsbury pay Bess a regular income (from 1587), while the two lived apart. Shrewsbury was an ill man for many years and suffered with a severe rheumatic condition, what he referred to as 'gout', which contributed to his terrible handwriting. He died in the company of his mistress, Elinor Bretton, at Sheffield Manor, on 18 November 1590, after being administered a mercury cure. His son Gilbert Talbot succeeded him as the seventh earl of Shrewsbury.

Other letters associated with George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury:

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

[December 1568] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=65>)

13 December [1568] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=66>)

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

[1570s?] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=184>)

[c. 1570] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=9>)

[1570] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=178>)

[1570s] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=203>)

[c. 1570] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=68>)

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4 November 1570 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=226>)  
4 November 1570 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=171>)  
[c. 1571] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=70>)  
[c. 1571] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=69>)  
[1574?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=72>)  
[1574?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=71>)  
8 August 1574 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=73>)  
[c. 1575?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=76>)  
[c. 1575] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=75>)  
[1575-7] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=245>)  
7 June 1575 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=74>)  
June 19 [c. 1575?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=77>)  
20 February 1575/6 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=165>)  
19 November [1576?] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=115>)  
[1577] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=183>)  
[1577] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=182>)  
18 May [1577?] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=109>)  
4 June 1577 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=221>)  
25 June 1577 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=172>)  
14 May 1578 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=188>)  
[30 June 1578?] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=83>)  
2 August 1578 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=197>)  
28 December 1578 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=193>)  
13 February 1578/9 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=166>)  
28 February 1578/9 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=174>)  
22 June 1579 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=189>)  
17 January 1579/80 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=190>)  
13 May 1580 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=194>)  
21 June 1580 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=78>)  
11 September 1580 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=154>)  
10 October 1580 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=79>)  
8 February 1581/2 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=195>)  
4 August 1584 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=119>)

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26 August [1584] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=116>)  
14 October [1585] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=229>)  
23 October 1585 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=117>)  
4 August 1586 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=202>)  
[April 1587] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=186>)



## Normalised view of Letter 176

A copy of my lettre to my Lord 9: Iunij .1586.

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I doe hereby in all bounden duty, & hum... [m]y selfe before your Lordship moste humblie becechinge p...are playnely & truly: the cause why I have not attended on your Lordship at this tyme proceding only oute of a great feare of your Lordshipes wrathe & hevy displesure conceived againste me; which I have harde by veye many hathe bene more styrred of late then of a longe tyme before, thorrow sondry Informacions of my vndutifullnes towards your Lordship whereby I have doubted your Lordship wolde now faule into the same manner of offence againste me which hertofore your Lordship hathe done, espetially once at Sheffeld castell at ye same tyme the Earle of Leycester was at Buxstons, whereby ther entred into me then suche an Impression of vehement grefe And vexation of mynde thorrow conceyte of a dutyfull vnkyndnes as the same wente nerer my lyffe, or losse of my pore wyttis & sences, then is allmoste possible for your Lordship to conceve or beleve And albeit I righte well know yat I owghte, bothe by the lawes of god nature & men, patiently to beare what correction by wordes or deedes, it shall please your Lordship to laye vppon me (knowinge well the same muste nedes fyrste procede oute of a fa...my welldoynge) yet is there suche an inward instyncte of...at when any suche wordes shall procede oute of your...as sheweth the wonted love which I know ... & cleane altered; I am then presently ...of mynde yat bereves me of all comforte of lyffe; And ...e as nothing but godes omnipotent grace can restore me ffor better proffe wherof & yat this procedethe oute of suche inclynacion, & nothyng els, I will in all duty & humblenes subiecte my selfe to any other manner of correction ether by dispossession of any erthly benefytes in present or future or any other way of losse or punishment whatsoever, so as it myghte ples[e] your Lordship to forbear to chastyse me with the extreme rygoure of wordes which wolde depryve me of all ioy or comforte of lyffe or worldly thynges. And as nature hathe wroughte this effecte in me this way, so hathe the favorable & lovinge speches of your Lordship heretofore vnto me, wroughte the other way, as espetially ye laste tyme I did wayte on your Lordship at your goynge from London, when I returned the moste ioyed in harte yat ever I was in my lyffe, & so continued vntyll I sente one to your Lordship shortely after, vnto whom I harde your Lordship publikely vttered your former wrathe & great displesure agenst me./. Thus moste humblie on my knees becechinge your Lordshipes blessinge with my wonted bounden prayers for your Lordshipes moste perfyte healthe, honour & longe lyffe, I humblie cease this 9 of Iune .1586.

## Diplomatic view of Letter 176

[Address Leaf]

A cobby of my *lettre* to my  
L:<sup>d</sup> 9: Iunij .1586.

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[Letter Text]

### [Letter Text: Notes]

X X [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

331 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

I doe hereby in all bounden duty, & hum... ..y selfe before  
my se yo<sup>r</sup> Lp: moste humblie becechinge p...are playnely &  
truly: the cause why I have not attended on yo<sup>r</sup> Lp: at this tyme *proceding*  
only oute of a great feare of yo<sup>r</sup> Les: wra<sup>t</sup>he & hevy displesure conceved  
againste me; w<sup>ch</sup> I have harde by verye many hathe bene more styrred  
of late then of a longe tyme before, thorow sondry Informacions of my  
vndutifullnes towardes yo<sup>r</sup> Lp: whereby I have doubted yo<sup>r</sup> Lp: wolde  
now faule into the same manner of offence againste me w<sup>ch</sup> hertofore  
yo<sup>r</sup> Lp: hathe done, espetially once at Sheffield castell at y<sup>e</sup> same  
tyme the Earle of Leycester was at Buxstons, whereby ther  
entred into me then suche an Impression of vehem<sup>t</sup> grefe And  
vexation of spiritt <sup>^mynde^</sup> thorow conceyte of a dutyfull [*deletion*] <sup>^vnkyndnes^</sup>  
as the same wente nerer my lyffe, or losse of my pore wytt &  
sences, then is allmoste possible for yo<sup>r</sup> Lp: to conceve or beleve  
And albeit I righte well know y<sup>t</sup> I owghte, bothe by the lawes of  
god nature & men, patiently to beare what correction by wordes or  
deedes, it shall please yo<sup>r</sup> Lp: to laye vppon me (knowinge well the same  
nedes muste nedes fyrste *procede* oute of a fa...my welldoyng)  
yet is there suche an inward instyncte of...at when  
any suche wordes shall *procede* oute of yo<sup>r</sup> ...as sheweth  
the wonted love w<sup>ch</sup> I know ...  
& cleane altered; I am then p<sup>r</sup> sently ...of mynde  
y<sup>t</sup> bereves me of all comforte of lyffe; And ...e as nothing



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but godes omnipotent grace can restore me ffor better *proffe* wherof  
& y<sup>t</sup> this *procedethe* oute of suche *inclynacion*, & nothyng e<sup>s</sup>, I will in  
all duty & *humblenes* subiecte my selfe to any other *manner* of correction  
ether by dispossession of any erthly benefytes in p<sup>r</sup> sent or future  
or any other way of losse or punishm<sup>t</sup> whatsoever, so as it myghte ples...  
yo<sup>r</sup> Lp: to forbear to chastyse me w<sup>th</sup> the extreme rygoure of wordes  
w<sup>ch</sup> wolde depryve me of all ioy or comforte of lyffe or worldly  
thynges. And as nature hathe wroughte this effecte in me this  
way, so hathe the favorable & lovinge speches of yo<sup>r</sup> Lp: heretofore  
vnto me, wroughte the other way, as espetially y<sup>e</sup> laste tyme I did  
wayte on yo<sup>r</sup> Lp: at yo<sup>r</sup> goynge from London, when I returned the  
moste ioyed in harte y<sup>t</sup> ever I was in my lyffe, & so continued  
vntyll I sente one vnto yo<sup>r</sup> Lp: shortly after, vnto whom I harde  
yo<sup>r</sup> Lp: publikely vttered yo<sup>r</sup> former wrathe & great displesure agenst  
me./. Thus moste humblie on my knees becechinge yo<sup>r</sup> Les: blessinge w<sup>th</sup>  
my wonted bounden prayers for yo<sup>r</sup> Les moste *perfyte* healthe, *honour*  
& longe lyffe, I humblie cease this 9 of Iune .1586.

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