

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 189** (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=189>)

From: Bess of Hardwick (Chatsworth House, Derbyshire); George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury (Chatsworth House, Derbyshire);

To: William Cecil, Lord Burghley;

Date: 22 June 1579

Summary: Bess's husband, George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, writes to William Cecil, Lord Burghley, concerning complaints made by tenants at Ashford (Derby) who are now bringing petitions to the court. He asks Burghley to punish 'those bad persons of Ashford who complain against my wife'. Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) adds a postscript to the same effect.

Archive: Lambeth Palace Library, Talbot Papers, MS 3206, fol. 967

Delivery status: from Bess and Shrewsbury, or from Bess and William Cavendish, sent

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

Hands: George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury | unknown scribe | archivist | Bess of Hardwick |

Version: 1.0

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# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

## People Associated with Letter 189: 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 189: 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>)  
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>)  
26 August [1584] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=116>)

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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>)

9 June 1586 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=176>)

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>)



## People Associated with Letter 189: 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>)

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>)

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 Chatsworth House, Derbyshire

- 15 Mar [1550s?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=200>)
- 31 Mar [1550s?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=198>)
- 13 Apr [c.1550] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=13>)
- 14 Nov [1552] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=99>)
- 13 Jan [c.1560] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=47>)
- 4 Sep [1560?] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=59>)
- 12 Oct [c.1560] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=60>)
- 24 Oct [c.1560] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=61>)
- 18 May 1562 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=55>)
- 20 Nov [1565?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=17>)
- 8 Dec [c.1565] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=28>)
- 26 Feb [1566?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=18>)
- Jun [1568?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=157>)
- 28 Jun [1568?] (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=64>)
- [1570s?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=210>)
- [1570] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=178>)
- 28 Jul 1570 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=25>)
- 31 Aug 1570 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=170>)
- 21 Sep 1571 (destination) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=26>)
- [1577] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=182>)
- 2 Aug 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=197>)
- 23 Sep 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=121>)
- 15 Jul 1582 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=175>)
- 8 Apr 1594 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=236>)
- 8 May 1594 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=102>)



## Normalised view of Letter 189

To the Ryght honorabell[e] my very good lord my Lord burghly Lord tresurar of englande

22: June 1579 The Erle of Shrewsbury to my Lord The tenantes of Ashford.

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My very good Lord as I Am lothe to trobell your Lordship with Any brablyng mattares. so wold you take it vnfriendly if whan Any thyng of Importans hap me I forbere to crave at your handes those frendly you Arre wyllenge to doo./ there is sarten lewde & ... persuns cobby holdares in Amanare of my wyfes called Asford within this counte of Darbe that beinge boldened with the favore my tenantes of gloss[ope] hadde lately At the courte & there Retorne withoutte ponesmente. dare & doo presume to perswade th[e] members to loyne with them in complentes & exclamacy[ons] to hur majeste Rathare sekenge hur majeste vnquyete thereby than Apon Any Iust cause At All & where sum of them of late made petecion to me for Redresse of there supposed grefe & I apoynted this daye to here there grefes wyche I dyd with promes that my celfe wold this weke see the plase where they suppose wronge to be. & gyve ordare if cause were for Reformasyon to there Resonabell contentement. & yett notwithstandinge sum offe them as I Am Informed cett towards the courte with commpents to her majestie wherefore good my to A... the lyke presumsyons & Inconveyences maye grow thereby. Lett me have your nobell frendly favore towards the ponesment of those bade persvns of Asford woh now complene Agenst my wyfe & with no Reson can be satesfyed & helden At home & yett doo nott I seke to hyde or kepe from your knolege any wronge or extremyte they can Immagen my wyfe hath done to them/ but wold nott have her majeste trobled with any complents./ out of thes partes where All is quyett but these few lewde persuns. if therefor your Lordship with sum my Lords & othare of the counsell wyll take the penes to ... the cause of there complentes & what can be sayd one my wyfes behalfe thervnto or if they be nott therewith conten[t]ed to compell them to seke there Remede in sum hur majestes court[s] where they beste lyke & yett nott to escape without ponesmente due for there prosumsyon. this is my Requeste to your Lordship & to my Lords of othares of the councell one my wyfes behalfe/ that it may be sum tarrore to the lyke offendares & so Refarrence vs holy to your Lordship's frendly consyderacyon I take my leve of your good Lordship with my wifes most harty commendacions Chatsworth xxij of Iune 1579

Your Lordship's evare Assured

G Shrewsbury

Good my lorde yt shall falle out yn proffe that thoyes at asshorde whych complene haue nether wronge att all nor are preuyudysed by me any wayes I desyre nothyng more then the truthe

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may apeare to your Lordship and the reste of the lordes of har magystyes consell my only feare ys leste har magystye shulde be trobeled with ther complentes wherof as of all the reste that apertenes to me your Lordship wyll hau[e] as frendly care as I cane wysse and therfor leuyng my sone forder to ynforme your Lordship therof I take my leaue of your good Lordship with my moste harty comendacyon to my good lady burley and my lady of oxforde

your Lordship's moste assuryed louynge frends

EShrouesbury

## Diplomatic view of Letter 189

[Address Leaf]

To the Ryght honorabell...  
my very good lord  
my L burghly L  
tresurar of  
englande

22: Jun 1579  
The Erle of Shrowsbury  
to my L.  
The tenantes of Ashford.  
§

[Letter Text]

### [Letter Text: Notes]

X [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

967 [Foliation, hand: archivist]

My very good L as I Am lothe to trobell yor L  
w<sup>t</sup> Any brablyng mattares. so wold you take it  
vnfriendly if whan Any thyng of Importans hap  
me I forbere to crave at yo<sup>r</sup> handes those frendly  
you Arre wyllenge to doo./ there is sarten lewde & ...  
*persuns* cobby holdares in Amanare of my wyfes called  
Asford w<sup>t</sup> in this counte of Darbe that beinge bo  
boldened w<sup>t</sup> the favore my tenantes ha of gloss...  
hadde lately At the courte & there Retorne w<sup>t</sup> outte  
ponesmente. dare & doo presume to *perswade* th... members to Ioyne w<sup>t</sup> them in complentes  
& exclamacy...  
to hur ma.<sup>te</sup> Rathare sekenge hur ma.<sup>te</sup> vnquyete  
thereby than Apon Any Iust cause At All  
& where sum of them of late made petecion  
to me for Redresse of there supposed grefe & I  
apoynted this daye to here there grefes wyche I dyd  
w<sup>t</sup> promes that my celfe wold this weke see

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the plase where they suppose wronge to be. &  
gyve ordare if cause were for Reformasyon to there  
Resonabell contentemente. & yett nottw<sup>t</sup> standenge  
sum offe them as I Am Informed cett <sup>^towardes^</sup> the courte  
w<sup>t</sup> commpents to her ma.<sup>tie</sup> wherefore good my to A...  
the lyke presumsyons & Inconveyences maye  
grow thereby. Lett me have yo<sup>r</sup> nobell frendly  
favore towardes the ponesment of those bade  
persvns of Asford woh now complene Agenst my  
wyfe & w<sup>t</sup> no Reson can be satesfyed & helden At  
home & yett doo nott I seke to hyde or kepe from  
yo<sup>r</sup> knolege any wronge or extremyte ean they can Immagen  
my wyfe hath done to them/ but wold nott have her ma<sup>te</sup>  
trobled w<sup>t</sup> any complents./

[page break]

out of thes partes where All is quyett but these  
few lewde persuns. if therefor yo<sup>r</sup> L w<sup>t</sup> sum my L  
& othare of the counsell wyll take the penes to ...  
the cause of there complentes & what can be sayd one my  
wyfes behalfe thervnto or if they be nott therw<sup>t</sup> conten...  
to compell them to seke there Remede in sum hur ma<sup>tes</sup> court...  
where they beste lyke & yett nott to escape w<sup>t</sup> out  
ponesmente due for there prosumsyon. this is my  
Requeste to yo<sup>r</sup> L & to my LL of <sup>^othares of^</sup> the counsell one  
my wyfes behalfe/ that it may be sum tarrere  
to the lyke offendares & so Refarrence vs holy to yo<sup>r</sup>  
L frendly consyderacyon I take my <sup>^leve^</sup> of yo<sup>r</sup> good  
Lordship w<sup>t</sup> my wifes most hartly commendacions  
Chatsworth xxij of Iune 1579

Yo<sup>r</sup> L evare Assured

G Shrewsbury  
§

Good my lorde yt shall falle out yn proffe that

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thoyes at asshorde [*deletion*] <sup>^whych^</sup> complene[*deletion*] haue nether  
wronge att all nor are preuyudysed by me any  
wayes I desyre nothyng more then the  
truthe may apeare to your .L. and the  
reste of the lordes of har magystyes  
consell my only feare ys leste har  
magystye shulde be trobeled w<sup>t</sup> ther  
complementes wherof as of all the reste  
that apertenes to me your .L. wyll hau...  
as frendly care as I cane wysshe and  
therfor leuyng my sone forder to ynforme  
your .L. therof I take my leaue of your good  
.L. w<sup>t</sup> my moste harty comendacyon to my  
good lady burley and my lady of oxforde

your .L. moste assuryed louynge  
frends

EShrouesbury

[Overleaf]

## [Overleaf: Notes]

967x [Foliation, hand: archivist]

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