

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 019 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=019>)**

From: George Clifford, earl of Cumberland;

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: [June 1603?]

Summary: George Clifford, earl of Cumberland, writes to Bess (dowager countess of Shrewsbury) with apologies for his long silence, which he explains was brought on by preparations for the king's visit. The bearer shall deliver more information about negotiations regarding his daughter as well as 'a further suit I am forced to make to you'.

Archive: Folger Shakespeare Library, Cavendish-Talbot MSS, X.d.428 (20)

Delivery status: to Bess, sent

Letter features: papered seal, arms embossed Ribbon/floss – no. Letter packet - tuck and fold

Hands: unknown scribe | archivist | George Clifford, earl of Cumberland |

Version: 1.0

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## **People Associated with Letter 019: George Clifford, earl of Cumberland**

George Clifford, third earl of Cumberland (1558-1605), was a courtier and privateer. His royal nickname was Elizabeth's 'rogue' and in 1590 he was made the queen's champion (a post he held until her death). After sitting on the commission which tried Mary Queen of Scots in 1586, he began his life as a privateer. He fought, with two of his ships, in the Armada campaign of 1588. His most significant expedition was to the West Indies in 1598, where he took San Juan de Puerto Rico, although he was forced to abandon it and returned to England with very little plunder.

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## People Associated with Letter 019: 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 019

To the Right honorable and my verie good Lady, the Countese Dowager of Shrewesbury. these delivered

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Good Madam, pardon my thus longe silence, hauynge beene sence my cummyng from you, soe trobled with preparyng for his Maiesty's cumnyng to this ruinated place, that I haue had nether leasure nor fitt meane till noue, when I dooe as I will euer acknouledge my selfe soe much bound to you for your many fauorrs, that I protest you shall euer command me, and would be as glad of any cause wherin I myght showe it, as of any fortune that could happen to me, which I praye you hould your selfe assured of. I will not noue troble your Ladyship with wrytyng answeere to the speech that passed betwyxt hus concernyng my Doughter, nor with a further sute that I am forced to macke to you, but refer all to this berer, whom I pray your Ladyship trust, he is the man that I most dooe. soe wyshyng your Ladyship all happynes I rest

euer to be commanded by you

Cumbreland

## Diplomatic view of Letter 019

[Address Leaf]

### [Address Leaf: Notes]

Margeret

The Countess of Cumberlands Letter Wife or

^rather^ Widow of Geo. E. of Cumberland in K. James y<sup>e</sup> 1.<sup>st</sup>

Time. She had only one D.<sup>r</sup> Anne [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To the Right honorable and my  
verie good Lady, the Countese Dowager  
of Shrewesbury. these *delivered*  
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[Letter Text]

### [Letter Text: Notes]

X.d.428

(20) [Item number, hand: archivist]

169 [Old foliation/item number, hand: archivist]

113 [Old foliation/item number, hand: archivist]

Good Madam, pardon my thus longe silence,  
hauynge beene sence my cummyng from you,  
soe trobled w<sup>th</sup> preparyng for his Mai: cum=nyng to this ruinated place, that I haue  
had nether leasure nor fitt meane till noue,  
when I dooe as I will euer acknouledge my  
selfe soe much bound to you for your many  
fauorrs, that I protest you shall euer command  
me, and would be as glad of any cause wher=in I myght showe it, as of any fortune  
that could happen to me, w<sup>ch</sup> I praye you  
hould your selfe assured of. I will not nou  
troble your La: w<sup>th</sup> wrytyng answeare to  
the spech that passed betwyxt hus concer=nyng my Doughter, nor w<sup>th</sup> a further  
sute that I am forced to macke to you,  
but refer all to this berer, whom I pray  
your La: trust, he is the man that I most  
dooe. soe wyshyng your La: all happynes I

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rest

uer to be comm<sup>anded</sup> by you

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