

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 196 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=196>)**

From: Katherine Herbert, countess of Pembroke (Ramsbury, Wiltshire);

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: 23 March 1574/5

Summary: Katherine, countess of Pembroke, writes to her mother-in-law, Bess (countess of Shrewsbury), to ask her to persuade her father (Bess's husband), George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, to allow her sister, Mary Talbot, to accompany her on a summer trip to Wales.

Archive: Sheffield Archives, MD 6277

Delivery status: to Bess, sent

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

Hands: Katherine, countess of Pembroke | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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## **People Associated with Letter 196: Katherine Herbert, countess of Pembroke**

Katherine Herbert (née Talbot), countess of Pembroke (d.1576) was the daughter of George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, and his first wife, Gertrude (née Manners; d.1566) - therefore Bess's step-daughter, following her marriage to the sixth earl in 1567. She married Henry Herbert, second earl of Pembroke (she being his second wife) in 1563. They had no children.

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## People Associated with Letter 196: 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 196

To my lady my Mother.

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I am loathe to lett passe any fitt messenger, without visiting your ladyship with my lettres; and being desirous to heare of your health, do the oftener send to enquier of the same. At this present I am to craue your furtheraunce, bothe to my lord my father, (whom least I should any waies displease) am loathe my self to moue, and to this bearer my Brother Savile, who dothe refer his consent, till he knowe my lordship's pleasure therin; that they will agree, that my sister marie, who is no smale comforte vnto me, maie staie here to goo this sommer into Walles with me. herein your ladyship shall verie muche pleasure me, wherof as sondrie other your curtesies, you shall find, I will neuer be vnmyndfull. Thus my humble deutie remembred with like commendacions to your ladyship, do even so take my leaue. Ramesburie this xxijth of marche 1574/

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Your ladyship's assured loving daughter.

K Pembrok

## Diplomatic view of Letter 196

[Address Leaf]

### [Address Leaf: Notes]

Catherine Countess of Pembroke  
to her Mother in Law y<sup>e</sup> Countess of  
Shrewsbury; She was 1<sup>st</sup> D<sup>r</sup> of Geo. E  
of Shrewsbury by Gertrude his Wife,  
& mar.<sup>d</sup> Hen L.<sup>d</sup> Herbert, afterw.<sup>d</sup> E.  
of Pembroke. [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]  
MD 6277 [Old item number, hand: archivist]  
Ex Ph 20556 [Old item number, hand: archivist]

To my la my Mother  
in law y<sup>e</sup> Countesse of  
Shrewsburie./

To my la my Mother.

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[Letter Text]

### [Letter Text: Notes]

MD  
6277 [Old item number, hand: archivist]

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Your la. <sup>^assured^</sup> loving daughter.

K Pembrok

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