

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 229 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=229>)

From: Bess of Hardwick (Highgate);

To: George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury;

Date: 14 October [1585]

Summary: Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) writes to her husband, George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, amidst their prolonged discord, assuring him that she has been a good and faithful wife to him and recounting the ways in which he has wronged her. She finds herself in debt because he has sent her away, and hopes to live with him again, 'as we ought'.

Archive: Arundel Castle, Autograph Letters 1585-1617, No 111

Delivery status: from Bess, sent

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

Hands: Scribe A | George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury | archivist | Bess of Hardwick |

Version: 1.0

Copyright Information

All material is made available free of charge for individual, non-commercial use only. The copyright and other intellectual property rights in the transcribed letter text, metadata about the letters and the design of the letter display are owned by the University of Glasgow.

You are permitted to access, print and download letters from this site on the following conditions:

- use of all material on this site is for information and for non-commercial or your own personal use only; any copies of these pages saved to disk or to any other storage medium may only be used for subsequent viewing purposes or to print extracts for non-commercial or your own personal use.
- the content must not be modified in any way.
- any use of the material for a permitted purpose must be accompanied by a full source citation.

No part of this site may be reproduced or stored in any other web site or included in any public or private electronic retrieval system or service without the University of Glasgow's prior written permission. Commercial exploitation of the transcribed letters, including use by radio or television programme makers and examination boards, is prohibited without licence from the University of Glasgow.

Further information on copyright and citation can be found at:- (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/background.jsp?id=171>)

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

People Associated with Letter 229: 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

Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

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 229: 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>)

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

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>)

Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

26 August [1584] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=116>)

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>)

Normalised view of Letter 229

To my Lord my husband the earle of Shrouesbury.//

Answered & sente henry talbott therewith

My Lord, you know I neuer comytted any offence, wherby I should submyt my selfe, more then that I was bound in duty of a wyffe to doe to you; I beseache you charge me partcularly, that I may know my faults. I am assured, that non leueing, could be more dutyfull, trew, faythfull, and carefull to a husband, then I haue euar ben to you; I haue sought all means to haue pleased you yf yt would haue ben, and many years, you thought well of me; I well hoped of lat, when yt pleased you to saye to me, beare all thyngs that ys past, and let not appeare to the world the dyscontentment that ys betwext vs, and I wyll promys of my fayth to become anew man, in vowing most earnestly, you loued me so well that you also loued the stepes I trade one; thys was alettell before master myldmays coming and not past ij monthes before you sent me away; at which tyme you pecked no quarryll to me, but alleged the lettelines of your house, want of carryage for my stufe, and want of beds for my wemen and groumes./ my Lord you cannot forget how much greued I was to part with you (which pronostycated that which followed) and yet beleued your words, of my coming to you ageane within one monthe./ my Lord you can not forget, how you set one your hole house to crye out of me, and to charge me with that I was Innosent of, how I bare that and many other thyngs, I rather wyshe, that of your selfe you cauled them to remembrance, then I to wryte them./ you say I seme to excuse and iustfyfe my selfe and chyldryn, yet you know the contrary, and charge me and them with wecked dealing, to the ovarthrow of you and your house; the almyghty knows my innocensye therin./ my Lord I pray you geue me leaue to say, that yf you thenke so, you doe me and them wronge, and I pray the lord so to prosper me as I haue ben carefull for you and your house, your extreme dealing, which hath only ruinated me and myne, could not force me so much as in my harte to thenke, or onst to wyshe the ovarthrow of you or your house; and I beseache you not to condeme me for standing in my owne defence; your selfe forces me to yt, god put into your harte to weaye in equall balance my desarts to you, and your dealing towards me yf I had ben as you tearme me wecked, so I had not comytted horedome, yt ys more then a suffesyent reuenge, though you contenew not styll in yt, to torne me away, to withdrawe the allowance from me you gaue me when I was with you, to enter into all the land was myne, and agreat parte of others that was nether yours nor myne, and you content styll to take a great parte of our leueings, and I to leue in all want and meserye, my great debts not ... to you. thes extremetys wyll force my chyldryn to sell all they haue for my meantynance, and to pay my debts; I haue not left to leue vpon (rentes anuetys and many other charges going out of the land being payd) cleare thre hondryth pounds a yeare; for my chyldryns land I can not leue of that which most part ys owing for and they

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

forced by thos extremetys to sell that ys left, you may buy yt yf yt please you, all thes thyngs and many other wrongs consedered I trust non wyll condeme me in seking to helpe my selfe by all good means./ but all thes and many more, greues me not so much nor touche me so neare as that I se your loue ys withdrawne from me, but my constant duty and affectyon conteneys so to you, that yf my tyme weare longe, as yt ys sure to be short, I shall nevar cease to seke and sue by all good means, that I may lyue with you as I ought, and doubt not but in the end the almyghty wyll torne your harte and make you thenke of me as I haue dyssarued, and that we may leue together according to hys lawes./ my lord I may say with grefe that I am the furst Innosent wyffe, that euar was so very extremly vsed in thys realme, god make me the last, for yt ys well knowne to be adangarus example in aparson of your state, but I beseache the almyghty god to torne your harte in some tyme towards me, that we may leue together as we ought, so wyll he be best pleased whith all your doings, you better satysfyed in consyance and I obtayne that which of all worldly thyngs I most desyar, and non dyspleased but such as are not good./ and so I cease beseaching you to except of my good meaning./ at hygatt the xiiijth of octobar.//

your faythfull wyffe most sorrowfull

EShrouesbury

Diplomatic view of Letter 229

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

See a letter from the Earl
in Lodge. II. 317., wherein
he alludes to this. [hand: archivist]

To my Lord my husband the
earle of Shrouesbury.//

Answered & sente henry
talbott therew^t

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

111 [Item number, hand: archivist]
9 [Old foliation/item number, hand: archivist]

My Lord, you know I neuar comytted any offence, wherby I should submyt my selfe, more then that I was

bound in duty of a wyffe to doe to you; I beseache you charge me partecularly, that I may know my faults.

I am assured, that non leueing, could be more dutyfull, trew, faythfull, and carefull to a husband, then I

haue euar ben to you; I haue sought all means to haue pleased you yf yt would haue ben, and many years, you thought well of me; I well hoped of lat, when yt pleased you to saye to me, beare all

thyngs that ys past, and let not appeare to the world the dyscontentment that ys betwext vs, and I wyll promys of my fayth to become anew man, in vowing most earnestly, you loued me so well that

you also loued the steps I trade one; thys was alettell before m^r myldmays coming and not past ij monthes before you sent me away; at w^{ch} tyme you pecked no quarryll to me, but alleged the lettelnnes of your house, want of carryage for my stufe, and want of beds for my wemen and groumes./ my L. you cannot forget how much greued I was to part wth you (w^{ch} pronostycated that w^{ch} followed) and yet beleued your words, of my coming to you ageane wth in one monthe./ my L. you can not forget, how you set one your hole house to crye out of

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

me, and to charge me wth that I was Innoſent of, how I bare that and many other thyngs, I rather wyſhe, that of your ſelfe you cauſed them to remembrance, then I to wryte them./ you ſay I

ſeme to excuſe and iuſtyfye my ſelfe and chyldryn, yet you know the contrary, and charge me and them [*deletion*]

wth wecked dealing, to the owarthrow of you and your houſe; the almyghty knows my innocenſye therein./ my Lord I pray you geue me leaue to ſay, that yf you thenke ſo, you doe me and them wronge, and I pray the lord ſo to proſpar me as I haue ben carefull for you and your houſe, your extreme dealing, w^{ch} hath only ruinated me and myne, could not force me ſo much as in my harte to thenke, or onſt to wyſhe the owarthrow of you or your houſe; and I beſeache you not to condeme me for ſtanding in my owne defence; your ſelfe forces me to yt, god put into your harte to weaye in equall balance my deſarts to you, and your dealing towards me yf I had ben as you tearme me wecked, ſo I had not comytted horedome, yt ys more then a ſuffeſyent reuenge, though you conteneu not ſtyll in yt, to torne me away, to wth drawe the allowance from me you gaue me when I was wth you, to enter into all the land was myne, and a great parte of others that was nether yours nor myne, and you content ſtyll to take a great parte of our leueings, and I to leue in all want and meſerye, my great debts not ... to you. theſe extremetys wyll force my chyldryn to ſell all they haue for my meantynance, and to pay my debts; I haue not left to leue vpon (rentes anuetyſ and many other charges going out of the land being payd) cleare thre hondryth pounds a yeare; for my chyldryns land I can not leue of that w^{ch} moſt part ys owing for and they forced by thoſe extremetys to ſell that ys left, you may buy yt yf yt pleaſe you, all theſe thyngs and many other wrongs conſedered I truſt non wyll condeme me in ſeking to helpe my ſelfe by all good means./ but all theſe and many more, greues me not ſo much nor touche me ſo neare as that I ſe your loue ys wth drawne from me, but my conſtant duty and affectyon conteneuſ ſo to you, that yf my tyme weare longe, as yt ys ſure to be ſhort, I ſhall neuar ceae to ſeke and ſue by all good means, that I may lyue wth you as I ought, and doubt not but in the end the almyghty wyll torne your harte and make you thenke of me as I haue dyſſarued, and that we may leue together according to hys lawes./ [*deletion*] my lord I may ſay wth grefe that I am the firſt Innoſent wyffe, that euar was ſo very extremly vſed in thys realme, god make me the laſt, for yt ys well knowne to be adangarus example in aparſon of your ſtate, but I beſeache the almyghty god to torne your harte in ſome tyme towards me, that we may leue together as we ought, ſo wyll he be beſt pleaſed wth all your doings, you better ſatysfyed in conſyance and I obtayne that w^{ch} of all worldly thyngs I moſt deſyar, and non dyspleaſed but ſuch as are not good./ and ſo I ceae beſeaching you to except of my good meaning./ at hygatt the xiiijth of octobar.//

your faythfull wyffe moſt
ſorrowfull

Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

EShrouesbury

Version: 1.0