

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 235 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=235>)

From: Hercules Clay;

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: 19 March 1585/6

Summary: Hercules Claye, a servant, writes to Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) to report how 'at York assizes all things have proceeded against master Basford [i.e. Beresford]', with detailed information regarding those present.

Archive: The National Archives, State Papers Domestic (Eliz) Shrewsbury Papers, 12/207, f 8r-8v (item 5)

Delivery status: to Bess, sent

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

Hands: unknown scribe | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 235: Hercules Clay

Hercules Clay (d.1632) was one of Bess's servants. He was certainly in her employment by July 1584 as he contributed to a declaration regarding the circumstances of Bess's fourth husband Shrewsbury's attempted forced entry into Chatsworth during their estrangement (State Papers Domestic, Vol. CCVII, No. 32). He was married to Margaret, daughter of James Atherton of Lancashire, they had three sons (Thomas, William and Hercules) and in 1610 he held 58 acres in Sutton-in-Ashfield.

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People Associated with Letter 235: 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 235

To my lady/

In most humble wyse/ att yorcke assisses all thinges haue proceded against master Basford with greate percialitie. We could retayne no Sergante agaynst my lorde. Soe we intertayned one master pepper a Iustis of peace in that Cuntry and one master heskethe./ vppon wedsenday in the morninge the proceded to tryall haueinge there, Soliciters, master Coplay, bayly Dickenson, Tomson and Ihon bouth. The Iury beinge cauled and full, master Basfordes Counsell put in the challenge, and pleded kinred betwne my lorde and the Shreffe, which my Lordes Counsell denyed to be trewe, wherevppon an Issue was Ioyned and tryeres apoynted, videlicett William Vesser and Thomas blowme, hearevppon master Basfordes counsell gaue in evidence the pedegree vnder master Somersetes hande, and I was Sworne it was made by the same harroulde, and sett downe as yt is in the harrouldes booke. and the kindred openly confessed by master Shreffe him self, beinge twyse publickly asked by master Iustis Clenche; wherevnto master Coplay very Impudently answered, that the herroulde had mistaken the Lycke, and soe might mistake this. which was all that coule bee sayde agaynst the pedegre: Notwithstandinge the tryers beinge without doubtte determined before to fynd for my lorde. founde for his Lordshippe, contrary to the pedegre, and the Shreffes open Confession, whereatt the audience dide greatly wonder and some sayde that the tryers cane in noe wyse cleare them selues of wilfull periury. Afterwardes when the Counsell for master Basforde made Lawfull challenge to diueres of the Iury beinge my lordes one men and master Edwardes talbotes: The weare Lykewyse allowed as indifferent men. Then for the proufe of the wordes thate master Basford should speacke was produced Richarde and Robert Ridler onely, agaynst whom we offered to showe acertificatte vnder diuers Iustices handes of glocestershire to be red to the Iurours Declaringe the conversations and Lyfes with there beggery, which would not be Suffered to be shewed to the Iury. Then for the Creditt of the Ridders too as vn honest as them selues one Bayinarde and Byse weare deposed that the weare comitted very honest men in there Country and ether of them satte of iiij xxli rente, which as your Ladishipes knoweth the be thre yeare behinde for, to Sir Charles and William Cavendishe, for these thre years last past, and otherwayes indetted to them not able to paye, and promuised adischarge from my lorde: This was opened, but nothinge that we sayde stode for reason, and Bayinarde and bysse sayd the harde master Basforde saye that his Lordshipe had reased twentie thousande men, to which was answered by one of oure Counsell that master Basford sayd where there was aspeach that the peacke wales should be pulled downe, that yf soe many should haue come thither as his lordshipe had directed his preceptes for there would haue bene to that number/ which preceptes master Coplay coule not deny but sayde that the weare made for the someninge of Courtes. Vppon this the matter was referred to the Iury who haue founde agaynst master Basford, and haue giuen his lordship athousand pounce

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damages agaynste equitie and Conciencie: But after in the towne there was such speches of the manner of procedinge, as I will warrant in this part great men maye doe what the Lyste for meane men will not adverties nay the see thinges be proved that never was spoken. Shortly I shall wayte of your Ladishipp, and therefore now I touche all thinges but brefely. And thus with my dealy prayer to the almighty for your Ladishipes Lonnge & prosperous health with present quiettnes and Increase of honores I humbly cease Rawthorne the sixth of march

Your Ladishipes most humbly

Hercules Claye

Diplomatic view of Letter 235

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

§ [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

9 [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

19 Marche 1585

A letter written from
to the Countesse of
Shrewsburie from a
sevante of hers. [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]
1585/86 March 19
Done [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]
To my lady/

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

5 [Item number, hand: archivist]

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

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

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Hercules Claye

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