

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

**Letter ID: 237 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=237>)**

From: Aletheia Howard, countess of Arundel;

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: [1606-8]

Summary: Aletheia Howard (née Talbot), countess of Arundel, writes a letter to her grandmother, Bess (dowager countess of Shrewsbury), apologizing for 'deferring so long the presenting [of] my duty', but making assurances of her sincere affection. Interestingly, this letter is written on unusual, ornately decorated paper.

Archive: Unknown, Unknown, Sotheby's sale catalogue, 26 June 1974, Lot 2840 (copy of the letter)

Delivery status: to Bess, sent

Letter features: two seals over ribbon (as can be seen from the image in the Sotheby's sale catalogue for 26 June 1974, lot 2840; the letter was sold into private ownership and its current location is unknown) 'white silk ties' (according to the Sotheby's sale catalogue for 26 June 1974, lot 2840; the letter was sold into private ownership and its current location is unknown)

Letter packet - accordion

Hands: Aletheia Howard, countess of Arundel |

Version: 1.0

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# Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

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## **People Associated with Letter 237: Aletheia Howard, countess of Arundel**

Aletheia Howard (née Talbot), countess of Arundel, Surrey and Norfolk, and suo jure Baroness Furnivall, Baroness Talbot, and Baroness Strange of Blackmere (b. after 1582, d.1654), was Bess's granddaughter, the youngest of five children of Gilbert and his wife (Bess's daughter) Mary Talbot (née Cavendish), seventh earl and countess of Shrewsbury. A patron and collector of art, she was also, like her mother, a devout Roman Catholic and in 1606 married Thomas Howard, fourteenth earl of Arundel and fourth earl of Surrey (1585-1646) - a member of England's most powerful Catholic family. Prominent at the court of King James I and Queen Anne, Lady Arundel acted in many masques, including some by Ben Jonson in 1608-9. She also spent many years in Europe, including fourteen years of self-decided exile in Amsterdam (apart from her husband for unknown reasons) at the end of her life. As her two brothers died in infancy, Lady Arundel and her two sisters (Mary Herbert, countess of Pembroke, d. 1650; and Elizabeth Grey, countess of Kent, 1582-1651) became joint heirs to their father's titles and great estate.

# Bess of Hardwick's Letters

## People Associated with Letter 237: 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.

## Normalised view of Letter 237

Madam., I must hombley carue pardon of your ladyship for defering so loing the presinting my duty, which I had loing seinces done if my lord's accasions would haue permitted him to haue attinded you which hee and I (booth) has much dessired but sinces it is not yin good fortunye to wayte of your ladyship att this time, I beseche you to geue me leaue by these lines to make knowne to your ladyship that you haue no child that can more cencerely and affectionatly strife to serui you then my selfe who will euer remayne

your Ladyships most obbedint daughter

Arundell

## Diplomatic view of Letter 237

[Letter Text]

Madam., I must hombley carue par==don of y<sup>o</sup> r la:<sup>p</sup> for defering so loing  
the presinting my duty, w<sup>ch</sup> I had

loing seinces done if my lo: accasion==es would haue permitted him <sup>^</sup>to haue attinded y<sup>u</sup> <sup>^</sup>w<sup>ch</sup>  
hee and I (booth) has much dessired  
but sinces it is not yin good fortunye  
to wayte of your la:<sup>p</sup> att this time,  
I beseeche you to geue me leue leaue  
by these lines to make knowne to y<sup>r</sup>  
la:<sup>p</sup> that you haue no child that  
can more cencerely and affectionatly  
strife to serui you then my selfe  
who will euer remayne

your La:<sup>ps</sup> most  
obbedint and  
daughter

Arundell §

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