

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 076 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=076>)

From: George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury (Ashton, Derbyshire);

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: [c. 1575?]

Summary: George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, sends news to his wife, Bess (countess of Shrewsbury), regarding the health of 'this lady' (probably Mary Queen of Scots) and mentions others' health as reported in a letter from Elizabeth (née Cavendish), countess of Lennox. He advises that the latter be advised to eat fruit, 'which she loves well' (probably in reference to her pregnancy with Arbella Stuart at the time).

Archive: Folger Shakespeare Library, Cavendish-Talbot MSS, X.d.428 (98)

Delivery status: to Bess, sent

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

Hands: George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 076: 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>)

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

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14 October [1585] (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=229>)

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>)

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People Associated with Letter 076: 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.

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Other letters associated with Ashton, Derbyshire

10 Dec 1578 (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=168>)

Normalised view of Letter 076

To my wyfe the countes of Shrewsbury

My dere harte as you longe to be with me so Assuredly I Am as desyrvs to have you/ I thanke you for your lettar & thynges you sent me this lade hathe bene this day in the well with All hur wemen to helpe hur & bellars nede che was this laste nyght very fente & ill Ates che lyes most oft hur bedde/ I perseve by my lade lynoxe lettar to you suttun & Anothar is fawlen syke/ if they hadd cum they wold have hadd it here wyche hadde nott bene so good/ bedd your daughttar take hede for etynge frute wyche che loves well because you Arre In dout wethar it wylbe late befor you cum heddar I wyll sende sum folkes to wete apon you commend me to my daughttar talbott & god blyse hur & you As my one harte/ this fryday at Astar iiij of the cloke ///

Your fethefull husbande

G Shrewsbury

Diplomatic view of Letter 076

[Address Leaf]

To my wyfe the
countes of Shrewsbury

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

X.d.428

(98) [Item number, hand: archivist]

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

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

My dere harte as you longe to be w^t
me so Assuredly I Am as desyrvs to have
you/ I thanke you for yo^r lettar & thynges
you sent me this lade hathe bene
this day in the well w^t All hur wemen to
helpe hur & bellars nede che was this
laste nyght very fente & ill Ates che lyes
most oft hur bedde/ I perseve by my lade
lynuxe lettar to you suttun & Anothar is
fawlen syke/ if they hadd cum they wold have hadd
it here wyche hadde nott bene so good/ gyve ^{^bedd^} yo^r
daughttar take hede for etynge frute wyche che loves well
because you Arre In dout wethar it wylbe late
befor you cum heddar I wyll sende sum folkes to wete apon you
commend me to my daughttar talbott & god blyse hur & you
As my one harte/ this fryday at Astar iiij of
the cloke / / /

Yo^r fethefull husbande

G Shrewsbury

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Version: 1.0