

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 095 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=095>)

From: Sir Francis Willoughby (Buxton, Derbyshire);

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: 26 April 1589

Summary: Sir Francis Willoughby writes to Bess (countess of Shrewsbury) with urgency, asking to borrow her litter to transport his weak wife home from Buxton, where treatment has provided 'no help' for her long-standing sickness.

Archive: Folger Shakespeare Library, Cavendish-Talbot MSS, X.d.428 (126)

Delivery status: to Bess, sent

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

Hands: unknown scribe | archivist | Sir Francis Willoughby |

Version: 1.0

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People Associated with Letter 095: Sir Francis Willoughby

Sir Francis Willoughby (1547-1596), coal owner and industrialist, had a troubled childhood marked by the loss of both of his parents and his family's involvement in the plot to thwart Queen Mary's accession and put Lady Jane Grey (a cousin to Francis) on the throne, which subsequently led to the imprisonment and execution of several of Francis' caretakers. Nonetheless, he was carefully schooled and succeeded to his family's inheritance, built up at Wollaton in Nottinghamshire, in 1559. In 1564 he married his first wife, Elizabeth (née Littleton). Their marriage would prove to be one of the most infamously dramatic matches of Elizabethan England and both were known to have turbulent dispositions towards each other as well as others. Willoughby's revenues for his coal pits during the 1560s and 1570s helped fund his iron forge at Middleton (1570), as well as the new hall he had built at Wollaton during the 1580s. Following the death of his first wife (to whom he was then reconciled) in 1595, Willoughby remarried, to the widow Dorothy Tamworth - although he died (intestate) a mere fifteen months later.

Other letters associated with Sir Francis Willoughby:

8 May 1594 (Recipient)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=102>)

26 September 1595 (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=216>)

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

People Associated with Letter 095: 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.

Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

Other letters associated with Buxton, Derbyshire

[30 Jun 1578?] (origin) (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=83>)

Normalised view of Letter 095

To the right honorable my verie good Ladie the Countesse of Shrewsburie give thease./

master wyllobye

Bwxton

Vrgent occasyon hath made me bolde to write vnto your Ladieshippe at this instant; My wife hath beene longe sicke, and for the recoverie of her health is at Buckstones, wheare havinge receaved noe healpe is growne to suche weakenesse, that nowe beinge desyrous to retorne home is not able to adventure the iorneye eyther on horsebacke or in a coache. Whearfore I am humblie to desyre your Ladieshippe to lende her your horselitter & furniture, that by your Ladishippes good meanes she may salflie goe home. Thus hopinge of your Ladieshippes favour, in this bothe I & my wife in anye service we cann rest readie at your Ladieshippes commaundement. desyringe God to have your Honour alwayes in his protection. At Buckstones this xxvjth of Aprill 1589

Your Honors to commaunde

Fra: Wyllughby

Diplomatic view of Letter 095

[Address Leaf]

[Address Leaf: Notes]

Francis Willoughby whom

I take to be Cousin to the

Countess of Shrewsbury. as her

Brother James Hardwick

Esqr of Hardwick ~~calls him a~~ ^{mentions}

Cousin Willoughby. [Later editorial note, hand: archivist]

To the right honorable my
verie good Ladie the
Countesse of Shrewsburie
give thease./

m^r wyllobye

Bwxton

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

X.d.428

(126) [Item number, hand: archivist]

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

77 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

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to desyre your Ladieshippe to lende her your horselitter
& furniture, that ^{by} your Ladishippes good meanes she
may salflie goe home. Thus hopinge of your Ladieshippes

Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

favour, in this bothe I & my wife in anye service we
cann rest readie at your Ladieshippes *commaundement*.
desyringe God to have your Honour alwayes in his
protection. At Buckstones this xxvjth of Aprill 1589

Your Honors to commaunde §

Fra: Wyllughby
§

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