

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

Letter ID: 097 (URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=097>)

From: Elizabeth Wingfield;

To: Bess of Hardwick;

Date: 2 January [1576?]

Summary: Elizabeth Wingfield writes to her half-sister, Bess (countess of Shrewsbury), describing how well the queen liked the garments sent by Bess and her husband George, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, and how it 'has caused her to give out such good speeches of my lord and your ladyship as I never heard of'. A postscript reports that all are well at Hackney.

Archive: Folger Shakespeare Library, Cavendish-Talbot MSS, X.d.428 (130)

Delivery status: to Bess, sent

Letter features: Seal intact - no. Ribbon/floss – no. Letter packet - slit and band

Hands: Elizabeth Wingfield | archivist |

Version: 1.0

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Bess *of* Hardwick's Letters

People Associated with Letter 097: Elizabeth Wingfield

Elizabeth Wingfield (née Leche) was Bess's half-sister from her mother's second marriage, to Ralph Leche. Elizabeth married Anthony Wingfield of Suffolk.

Other letters associated with Elizabeth Wingfield:

21 October [1567] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=96>)

8 December [c. 1585] (Author)(URL: <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=98>)

Bess of Hardwick's Letters

People Associated with Letter 097: 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 097

Lady

my humbil duty remembred yow honour shall know that after my cousin wilame and my carefull toyll by reason of the shurt tyme we haue reped such recompence as could not dissire better furst her majesty neuer liked any thinge you gaue her so well the color and strange triminge of the garments with the reche and grat cost bestowed vpon yt hath caused her to geue out such good speches of my lord and yow ladyship as I neuer hard of better she toulde my lord of Lester and my lord chamberlen that you had geuen her such garments thys yere as she neuer had any so well lyked her/ and sayd that good nobell copell the show in al things what loue the bere me and surely my lord I wyll not be found unthankfull/ if my lord and yow ladyship had geuen v hundrd pound in my opennon yt would not haue bene so well taken/ and for yow other thinge my cousins william and charls wyll geue yow ladyship full aduertysment but surely in generall al was so well and thankfully taken as ys posibell with master aturnoye and hys wyues most humbill duty/ and now I humbely pray yow honour that I may reseae the rest of the money I haue received lli and haue promised payment for the rest with spede and so I beseche the almighty to make the rest of my very good lorde and yow ladyship's yeres as prossorous as thys beginynge so with my humbill prayer to god for you and all yours I end with my humbill duty thys ij Ienouory

yow honors

E wingflde

al ar well at hacney and my lady arbella our lord bles her a goody childe I pray yow ladyship let me know often how my lord gorge doth

Diplomatic view of Letter 097

[Address Leaf]

Lady

[Letter Text]

[Letter Text: Notes]

X.d.428

(130) [Item number, hand: archivist]

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

101 [Old foliation, hand: archivist]

my humbil duty remembred yow h shall know that after
my c wilame and my carefull toyll by reason of the shurt tyme
we haue reped such recompence as could not dissire better furst
her ma neuer liked any thinge you gaue her so well the color
and strange triminge of the garments *with* the reche and grat
cost bestowed vpon yt hath caused her to geue out such
good speches of my lo and yow la as I neuer hard of
better she toulde my lo of S Lester and my lo chamberlen
that you had geuen her such garments thys yere as
she neuer had any so well lyked her/ and sayd that good
nobell copell the show in al things what loue the bere
me and surely my lo I wyll not be found unthankfull/
if my lo and yow la had geuen v hundrd pound in my
opennon yt would not haue bene so well taken/ and for yow
other thinge my c will and charls wyll geue yow la full
aduertysment but surely in generall al was so well and
thankfully taken as ys posibell *with* mr aturnoye and hys
wyues most humbill duty/ and now I humbely pray
yow h that I may reseae the rest of the money I haue
re^{li} and haue promised payment for the rest *with* spede
and so I beseche the almighty to make the rest of my
very good lorde and yow la yeres as prossorous as thys
be-guninge beginyng so *with* my humbill prayer to god for
you and all yours I end *with* my humbill duty thys ij
Ienouory

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yow honors

E wingflde

al ar well at hacney and my la arbella
our lo bles her a goody childe I pray yow la let
me know often how my l gorge doth

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