

Blog #98 - Hardwick Hall / Lady Anne 5:
Tuesday, 26 May 2020



Although I am drafting this blog in May, it may be some time before I get around to typing it and sorting out all the images to include with it. However, whenever when you finally do receive it, I sincerely hope you enjoy reading the contents.

Also, please be aware that some of the content all took place some time ago. For example - visited the amazing Hardwick Hall in September 2019.

We have now been out of 'total' lockdown for almost two weeks but not much has changed at our place as level 3 still has so many restrictions on us because of our age and vulnerability.

Keith though is going out, because, as he says, he never has to see anyone when he is working and if his work was left undone for any more length of time all the garden properties he maintains would become a wilderness and he'd have so much difficulty restoring them.

Pictured to the right are views of parts of one of many garden properties he maintains.

As you can see, Lillie accompanies him every day.



As 'social distancing' and 'no gatherings' allowed, I have decided that the Needlework Gallery is to remain closed and stitch groups and NATTER day should not resume.

Initially when lockdown began I thought I'd catch up on all sorts of tasks that had been neglected but unfortunately this did not happen.

Instead, whenever not stitching, so much of my time was taken up with supplying needlework products to New Zealanders and needlework orders from overseas. I guess everyone in those countries was like ourselves and had more time on their hands and so began searching the Internet.

Received these orders through my Etsy shops -

www.etsy.com/shop/barberryrowdesigns / www.etsy.com/shop/thelittlekitco



As mentioned in my blog #94, enjoyed lockdown due to not having the pressure of having to have certain tasks done by a certain time of the day. I especially loved the 'no guilty' feeling whenever I spent hours and hours stitching.

A couple of blogs ago I related my intention of stitching my latest mystery sampler again but this time with just two toning shades of one colour.

Pictured to the right is a sneak peek at Part One and Part Two -

Threads I have chosen are:
DMC 936 & 3011



Also, I began the finishing of the final piece of the pink/mauve version of the "Sampler Keep" design that I wrote about in blog #92. I have to confess that finishing is not a favourite thing to do but it is SO important.

Here are a few pics of the process and a pic to remind you of the other pieces - a pin keep and a scissors fob.

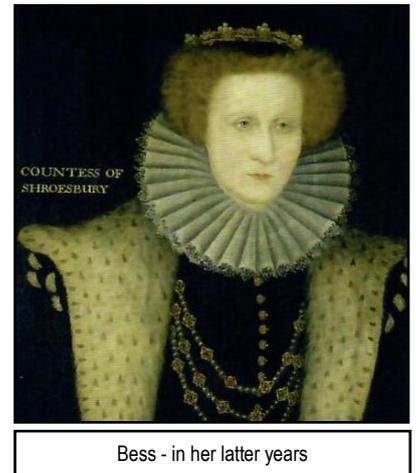


And now to continue sharing my wonderful experiences of Day 5 of Lady Anne's Needlework Retreat - As per my previous blog ending - another much anticipated day. After an almost two hour bus trip from Stamford we arrived at Hardwick Hall, one of England's architecturally significant Elizabethan country houses sited on a hilltop overlooking the Derbyshire countryside and ordered by the formidable, four-times widowed, Bess of Hardwick, Countess of Shrewsbury and ancestress of the Dukes of Devonshire. It was built between 1590 and 1597 at a time when it was no longer necessary or legal to fortify a domestic dwelling. To begin though, a little historical background of Bess

Bess was born at the old Hardwick Hall, then a small manor house, in 1527 and was the sixth child of John (a country squire) and Elizabeth (nee Leake) Hardwick whose ancestors had been established at Hardwick for at least six generations.

Her father died when she was less than a year old, leaving his family in reduced financial circumstances due to the revenue-raising rules revived by Henry VIII. That is, at least half of the estate was seized by the Crown and was sold into 'wardship' meaning that the farm revenues could be taken by the Crown until the heir, Bess's toddler brother, James, came of age.

Bess's mother did the only thing possible - she remarried to keep her family together. Bess, faced with the adversity from early childhood learnt hard lessons that stood her in good stead. For the rest of her life she would fight for what was rightfully hers, dealing skilfully with financial and legal matters to become the second richest woman in Britain.



Bess - in her latter years

Bess was first widowed at the age of sixteen. When she married her second husband in 1547 - Sir William Cavendish - Bess persuaded him to buy the Chatsworth estate and a year later, the land surrounding it, and Bess embarked on her first major building project of revamping the existing Chatsworth house. But before it was finished, Sir William died in 1554 and in 1558 when Elizabeth became Queen, Bess was appointed Lady-in-Waiting and went to live at court. Here she met widower, Sir William St. Loe and they married in 1559.

She then divided her time between London and Chatsworth until she was appointed a Lady of the Bed Chamber, one of the most prestigious positions in the court.

When this husband died in 1564, as a three-times widow, Bess became a very wealthy widow and before long one of the richest men in England made her a proposal - George Talbot, 6th Earl of Shrewsbury,

However, as a married woman all her considerable wealth, land and property was all taken by her husband and she lost all her financial independence and he gained full control of her lands. However, she had a clause written into her marriage settlement that, in exchange for giving all her land, property and wealth to Shrewsbury, one third of his unsettled income would go to her on his death. She also made stipulations about Chatsworth to ensure that it would pass to her eldest son and heir Henry Cavendish on her death. Marriage in the upper society of sixteenth-century England was very much a business arrangement and the combined wealth of the Cavendish and Shrewsbury families from properties, land holdings, mineral rights and farming was enormous.

Once married to George, Bess no longer attended court but was still very much a favourite of Queen Elizabeth I. One message the Queen wrote to her said ...

"I have been glad to see my Lady St. Loe, but I am now more desirous to see my Lady Shrewsbury. I hope my Lady hath known my good opinion of her ... I assure you there is no Lady in this land that I better love and like".



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Queen Elizabeth I

The above portrait hangs in the Long Gallery at Hardwick Hall

Image used with permission

In the autumn of 1568, just a year after their marriage, Shrewsbury was informed that he and Bess had been chosen as the custodians of Mary, Queen of Scots. This turned out to be an arduous and financially onerous task as Mary's household consisted of over sixty.

The Shrewsburys though treated Mary with unfailing courtesy and consideration, aware that one day she might be Queen of England, and in the early days of her captivity Bess had a very good relationship with her. Despite their twenty-year age difference they were both gifted needlewomen and spent time together embroidering in Bess's own chamber.

Keeping Queen Elizabeth informed of events, in March 1569 Shrewsbury wrote: 'The queen continueth daily resort into my wife's chamber where she sits working with the needle. They talk together of indifferent trifling matters, without any sign of secret dealing or practice'.



Mary - Queen of Scots

It was during their early years together that the joint embroideries attributed to them at Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire and Oxburgh Hall, Norfolk and elsewhere, were completed.

But - little did Shrewsbury know! Hidden inside parcels of silks and sewing materials sent to Mary there were often concealed notes from her Catholic sympathisers, who were constantly plotting on her behalf. There were frequent plots to free Mary, and when it was discovered that Mary was participating fully in escape plans, she was unrepentant.

By December 1578 things were no longer harmonious between Bess and Shrewsbury. Not only was he not prepared to honour the agreements drawn up at the time of their marriage such as providing a dowry for her daughter, Elizabeth, he was also refusing to give £20,000 to each of Bess's sons when they reached the age of twenty-one.

When Bess's brother James Hardwick, who had inherited the Hardwick estate that had been Bess's childhood home, was declared bankrupt, he was thrown into debtor's prison. Bess asked Shrewsbury to help pay off her brother's debtors but he refused and overreacted with uncalled-for hostility, even to the extent that Queen Elizabeth intervened by requesting them to patch up their differences. After long and heated discussions they eventually came to an agreement that Shrewsbury would be excused from paying what they had agreed in their 1567 marriage settlement if he returned to Bess all the land and property she had inherited from her third husband, William St. Loe.

When James Hardwick died in debtor's prison in April 1581, Bess raised enough capital to purchase the Hardwick estate of her dead brother for £9,500. She was convinced that if the estate was managed well it could provide a good return on the mineral reserves alone. Bess was a shrewd businesswoman and extremely competent. She acquired interests in land and mineral rights, and provided a much-used money-lending service to members of the nobility, dipping into the coffers stacked under her bed of loans at competitive rates.

However, Shrewsbury started a vendetta against her, and although he'd agreed to return her property, he seized rents from the estates which he had returned to her, harried her tenants and renewed his hostility towards her. It was inevitable that the family were drawn into the incessant quarrels and disputes. Shrewsbury's son Gilbert Talbot, now heir to the earldom, tried to act as mediator but without success. Then, in the most bitter, underhanded act of all, Bess's own son and heir Henry Cavendish, who would inherit Chatsworth on Bess's death, decided to evict her. He teamed up with his stepfather and things came to a head in July 1584 when their men mounted an armed attack to forcibly take possession of Chatsworth. William Cavendish, Bess's second son, managed to hold off the attackers while Bess fled to Hardwick, where she took refuge in fear of her life.

For thirty years Bess had devoted all her money, time and energy into building Chatsworth. She had overseen every stage of the building, the landscaping and décor and now she had been forced to leave her beloved home by her own deceitful, scheming son.

It was under this immense pressure that Bess surveyed the farmhouse and buildings at Hardwick that had grown piecemeal since Bess had lived there as a girl, with additions and repairs undertaken when money was available. It was damp and unwelcoming and not in a fit state to accommodate her young and motherless granddaughter (Arbella Stuart), herself and her household, having stood empty since her brother's death.

Shrewsbury died in November 1590, and this was a new beginning for Bess. Despite several quarrels with Gilbert Talbot (the new Earl of Shrewsbury due to father's and elder brother's deaths), she finally gained possession of all the land and properties to which she was entitled under the original marriage arrangement. Her one regret though was losing her beloved Chatsworth.

However, she had rebuilt the Old Hardwick Hall, and began building a new Hardwick Hall beside it, finally taking up residence with her now twenty-two-year-old granddaughter in 1597. Arbella was of royal blood (her father - Charles Stuart - being the son of the Countess of Lennox & Mary, Queen of Scots mother-in-law). This meant that after the death of Mary, she was joint next-

in-line with cousin, James of Scotland. Sadly she died at the Tower of London in 1615 (seemingly of self inflicted starvation) after being placed there after her secret marriage without royal consent.

In her advanced years, Bess purchased a site for her vault at the far end of the south altar of All Hallows Church in Derby (now Derby Cathedral). Her elaborate tomb includes a life-size painted effigy.

On 13 February 1608, Elizabeth, Countess of Shrewsbury died.

Her body was embalmed, and she lay in state for three months while arrangements were made for her to be interred.



Effigy of Bess of Hardwick, Derby Cathedral



Bess of Hardwick's tomb

A woman of indomitable character developed through adversity, Bess was charismatic, forceful, flamboyant and fascinating.

She was a woman ahead of her time who set out to build a dynasty and succeeded.

Her descendants have flourished on the foundations laid by Bess and now include the Dukes of Devonshire, Portland, Kingston and Newcastle, and the Earls of Shrewsbury, Pembroke, Arundel and Kent.

And now to a little of the Hall which was created to proclaim the wealth and status of this extraordinary woman known simply as Bess of Hardwick and a look at some images of its grand chambers furnished with beautiful precious tapestries and rare needlework hangings ...

The most significant feature of this residence are the exceptionally large and numerous windows which proclaim wealth as, at the time, glass was a luxury, leading to the saying, "Hardwick Hall, more glass than walls".

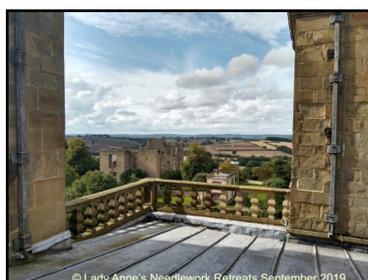
The chimneys are built into the internal walls of the structure in order to give more scope for huge windows without weakening the exterior walls.

The second significant feature is the six rooftop banqueting house pavilions crowned with Bess of Hardwick's initials (ES) and her coronet,

and standing between two of the six great turrets is her coat of arms incorporating the Hardwick stags with their collars of wild roses or eglantines.

It is recorded that after dining in the High Great Chamber and whilst the room was being "voided" or cleaned for after-dinner entertainment that Bess used to like to take her guests across the "leads" of the roof where they could admire the view and enjoy quince cakes, jellies and creams and Banbury cake.

We too walked the "leads" and enjoyed the view from the roof and a banqueting room.

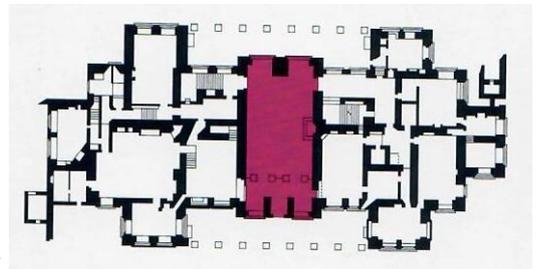


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The ruins of the old hall can be seen from the rooftop & one of the turrets

The third feature of the house is that the internal layout of the rooms within the house has broken from tradition - The Great Hall (pictured in red) runs through the centre of the house from front to back rather than lying across the width, left or right, from the entrance.

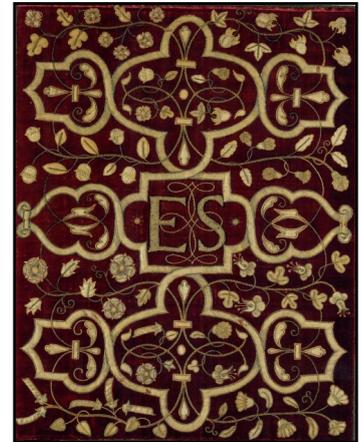


Also, each of the three main storeys has a higher ceiling than the one below, the ceiling height being indicative of the importance of the rooms' occupants : least noble at the bottom and grandest at the top.

In the Great Hall, in prime position over the fireplace is Bess's coat of arms finely worked in plaster.



In her day brightly coloured tapestries would have covered every inch of the walls of this area.



Today one has to walk behind the piece pictured to the right to begin their tour of the house which today contains a large collection of embroideries (cushion covers and bed-hangings), mostly dating from the late 16th century, many of which were listed in the inventory made by Bess and Arbella in 1601. There is also a large amount of Flemish tapestries, carpets from Persia and Turkey, rare painted wall hangings and furniture from the 16th & 17th centuries.

On the ground floor is the 'Stitches in Time' exhibition. Here we saw the 'Virtuous Women' hangings made from sumptuous materials cut from ecclesiastical copes (cloaks). Silks, satins, cloth of gold and velvets have been stitched together to show Penelope, Lucretia, Zenobia and Artemesia - some of the most important Elizabethan needlework pieces in existence.



Much of the work was made for Bess's Chatsworth and brought to furnish Hardwick in the 1590's. Bess always employed at least one 'imbroderer', her accounts showing that he was given rooms in Hardwick Old Hall in 1591. The inventory shows that 'beams for imbroderers' were kept in the new Hall. These 'beames' would have been the frames on which pieces such as cushion covers were worked. As a fine needlewoman, Bess would have worked with her gentlewomen and they would have made many of the smaller pieces.

From the Great Hall a wide, winding, gently curved shallow-stepped stone staircase leads up to the family rooms on the first floor and then another winding stone staircase leads up to the state rooms on the second floor,



All the staircase walls are covered with magnificent tapestries.

Only a few are pictured.

The first of the magnificent state rooms to be reached is The High Great Chamber.



*In this vast room
a frieze covers the upper half of the wall
and Brussels tapestries cover the lower walls.*

*Above the chimneypiece
is the Coat of Arms of Queen Elizabeth I.*

*And several chairs covered with embroidery
were in this room.*



A portion of the frieze and a couple of the tapestries

*A lot more chairs could be seen in the next area
reached by passing beneath the tapestry
pulled to one side pictured in the above image to the right - The Long Gallery.*

*The Long Gallery is the largest
surviving Elizabethan long gallery
and the only one
to retain its original tapestries
and many of its original pictures.*

*It is here that the portrait of Queen Elizabeth I
(as can be seen on blog page #2) hangs.*

*Back down on the first floor
in the bedrooms are wonderful canopied beds
richly and magnificently embroidered
but these are from later periods although the Brussels tapestries are amongst Bess's 1601 inventory.*



Some of the chairs

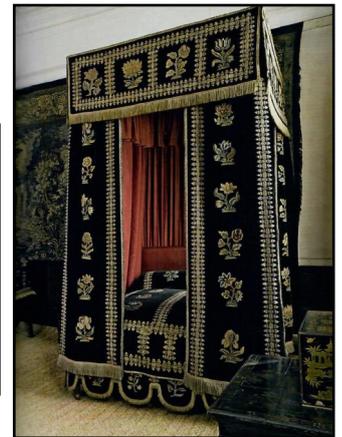
*There is one room on this floor - known as the Mary, Queen of Scots Room.
Why is there a chamber at Hardwick Hall bearing the name of a queen
who was executed at Fotheringay Castle in 1587
before the house was built?*

*The legend that she had lived here grew over the centuries,
so it seems the chamber was furnished to feed the myth.*

*In Bess's day this room was part of an apartment
within the Best Bedchamber.*



*Over the door of this room is a panel
enclosing the Scottish royal arms and the initials MR (Mary Regina).
This was probably brought from Chatsworth where Queen Mary had been sometimes imprisoned.*



Being part of the Lady Anne's Needlework Retreat, our tour of the house was a privately conducted tour, thus meaning we did not have to compete with other tourists and it also meant we were taken to areas that the public do not see.

In these special climate controlled environments we viewed additional needlework pieces such as the bed coverings pictured and the other piece on the next page. Indescribably beautiful!



Note:
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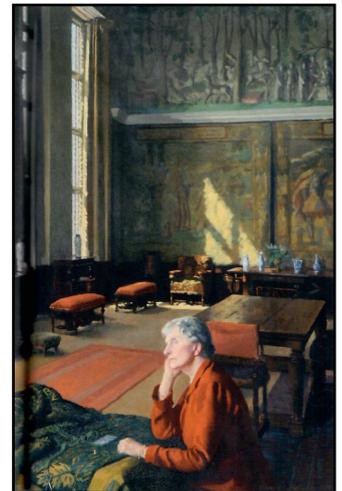


After Bess's death in 1608 the house passed to her second son, William Cavendish, 1st Earl of Devonshire. His great-grandson, William, was created 1st Duke of Devonshire in 1694. The Devonshires made Chatsworth their principal seat. Hardwick House thus became relegated to the role of occasional retreat for hunting and sometime dower house. As a secondary home it escaped the attention of modernisers and received few alterations after its completion.

The sixth Duke was one of the first to conserve the furnishings, particularly the tapestries and this was continued by his great-niece, Lady Louisa Egerton and Louisa's duty of care was handed to Duchess Evelyn whose husband inherited in 1908. Hardwick became her dower house when her Duke died in 1938, from which time she devoted herself to restoring the needlework and tapestries. A fine needlewoman, she did much of the work herself, experimenting with cleaning methods and undertaking the 'infinitely laborious' process of weaving with a needle to repair the tapestries.

A little snippet ... Duchess Evelyn's daughter, Maud Baillie, remembers a jigsaw puzzle session with the 'Verdue' tapestry, now hanging on the main staircase landing. It had, she wrote, been 'ruthlessly cut' to fill gaps. She, her sisters and mother assembled 25 pieces, missing only the brush of a fox. Maud spent hours on hands and knees tacking the pieces together when the odd job man 'appeared one day with the joyful news that he had found the missing fox's brush in a dark corner'. Duchess Evelyn 'worked the joins together till they were almost indistinguishable from the original weave'.

The Duchess later wrote: "I think this is the pleasantest of tapestries to live with".



Evelyn Fitzmaurice
Duchess of Devonshire (1950)

In 1950, the unexpected death of the 10th Duke of Devonshire, with the subsequent death duties (rated at 80%), caused the sale of many of the Devonshire assets and estates. At this time, Hardwick (as noted above) was occupied by Evelyn. The decision was taken to hand the house over to HM Treasury in lieu of Estate Duty in 1956. The Treasury transferred the house to the National Trust in 1959. The Duchess remained in occupation of the house until her death in 1960.

Another little snippet ... What is a Mistress of the Robes?
The role of Mistress of the Robes still exists in the royal household today.
The person who holds the title is effectively the Queen's chief lady in waiting.
Duties include: Accompanying the Queen on engagements home and abroad :
Handling correspondence to the Queen : Organising the rota for the other ladies in waiting.
Duchess Evelyn occupied the role of Mistress of the Robes to Queen Mary for over forty years (1910-1916 & 1921 until Mary's death in 1953).

And with that last indifferent trifling matter (in George Talbot's words),
I will bring this blog to a close.

Another awesome day indulging in my passion for needlework
and all things beautiful.
How blessed I have been.

Back to the hotel to rest up for the next day and a visit to Burghley House.

Bye for now.

