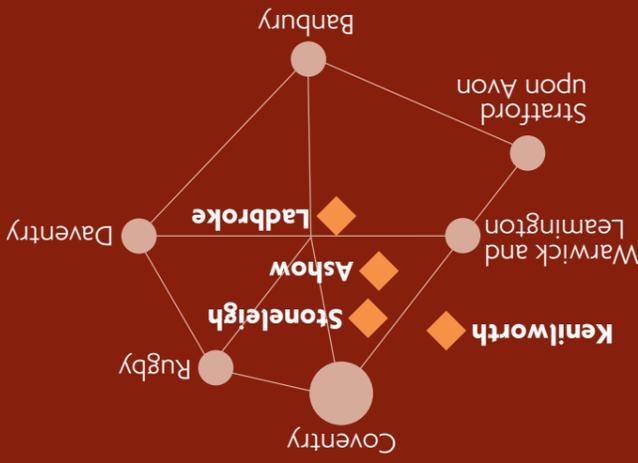




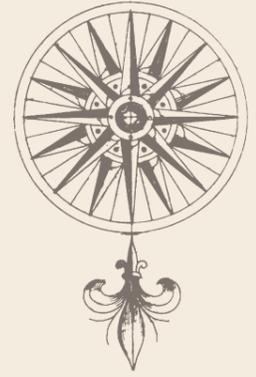
# Alice and the Adventurer



ladbrokeheritage.org.uk

Many secrets are hidden in plain sight. One of Warwickshire's best forgotten stories is that of Alice Leigh and Robert Dudley. We invite you to find out about them and visit the places involved. Each of these has a fascinating history stretching back at least 800 years. Amazing!

Cover image inspired by 16th and 17th paintings by Anguissola, Ghirlandajo, Hilliard, and an unknown artist



Around 400 years ago the story of Alice and Robert was on everyone's lips. It was a tale of the rich and famous, politics and religion, bigamy and family love, legal battles and generosity. Discover this story and let it take you to some amazing places in Warwickshire, from tiny picturesque villages to a ruined castle and a stately home restored to its former elegance.

# Alice and the Adventurer

## Two young people

**Alice, born in 1579**, was the second daughter of Sir Thomas Leigh and granddaughter of the rich merchant, also Thomas Leigh, who had been Lord Mayor of London. Alice grew up at the family home, Stoneleigh Abbey in Warwickshire.

**Robert, born in 1573**, was the son of The Earl of Leicester, Queen Elizabeth I's favourite and Lady Douglass Sheffield. It was never clear if they were officially married or not. After the earl died in 1588 and the earl's brother in 1590, Robert inherited Kenilworth Castle but not his father's title.

**A busy youth**, Robert studied at Christchurch Oxford aged 14. He married Mary, the sister of the circumnavigator Thomas Cavendish, inherited two of his ships, commanded an expedition to Trinidad and Guiana and was widowed, all by the age of 21.

**Two years later he was knighted** for taking part in the raid on Cadiz, burning ships being prepared for another Spanish Armada against England.

Now it was time to settle down...



## DISCOVER THEIR STORY

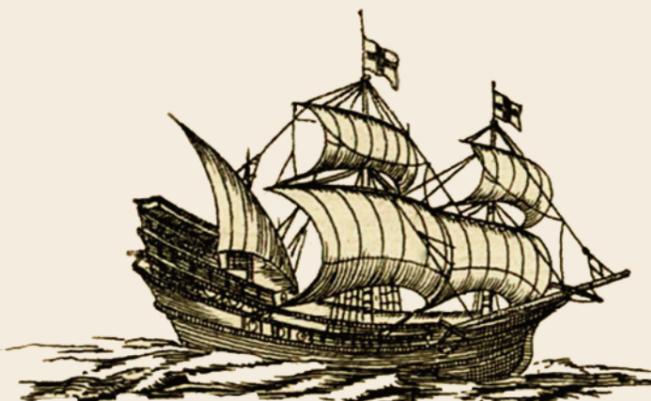
### A short time together

**Alice and Robert married** at Ashow church in 1596, he was 23 and she was just 17 years old. They lived at Kenilworth Castle and in London and over the next 8 years had 5 children, all daughters.

**Investing in land, a bit like a game of monopoly**, they bought up properties in Ladbroke from many owners including the manor from Robert Catesby, a leader of the gunpowder plot, and land owned by the ancestors of Princess Diana for "£1200 and a velvet gown worth £20 for Lady Spencer."

**When Queen Elizabeth I died** in 1603, Robert immediately tried to prove his parents were married so that he could inherit his father's title of Earl of Leicester. The case went against him and annoyed at the outcome he obtained permission to travel to Europe for three years.

But he did not go alone...



## Long lives apart

**Robert left England** in 1605 accompanied by a cousin, Elizabeth Southwell, disguised as a page! They converted to Catholicism, were married by papal dispensation and had 13 children.

**In 1607 Robert was ordered to return to England** and when he refused, Kenilworth Castle and Ladbroke were seized. In Italy he was employed by The Duke of Tuscany, helping design the new port at Livorno and on other nautical matters. Robert built himself a palace in Florence, and published *Arcano del Mare*, a vast maritime encyclopedia. He died in 1649.

**Alice brought up her daughters**; two went on to marry strong supporters of the King in the Civil War. In 1618 Alice was given an allowance of £300 per year from the manor of Ladbroke; a few years later she was created femme sole which allowed her to sell property and in 1644 she was made Duchess in her own right. A great benefactor to churches and the poor, both in life and after her death, aged 90, Alice is buried at Stoneleigh church and her monument there records many of her good deeds.



## Ladbroke Church and Village



All Saints Church with its unusual striped tower, Gilbert Scott interior and fine stained glass sits in a picture postcard setting.

Newly weds, Alice and Robert bought parts of Ladbroke from a number of landowners and it was income from this land that helped Alice bring up her daughters after Robert deserted her.

With a population of 250, similar to that recorded in the Domesday book, visitors will find Ladbroke has few facilities but it is steeped in history and is just right for those wanting an unhurried visit to a picturesque English village, not on the usual tourist circuit.



Visit the church, open daily 10-4pm, or discover something new on a self-guided walk around the village past thatched cottages, majestic trees and depending on the season, snowdrops, lambs, bluebells or brilliant autumn colours.

It can really lift your spirits.



Individual and small group tours are available.

We also give on-line or in person talks, tailored to your group, about:  
Alice and the Adventurer,  
Ladbroke Church and  
Ladbroke Village.

For more information or to download the village trail or church leaflet see

[ladbrokeheritage.org.uk](http://ladbrokeheritage.org.uk)

[ladbrokechurch.org.uk](http://ladbrokechurch.org.uk)

## Stoneleigh Abbey



With humble beginnings as a Cistercian monastic house in 1154, Stoneleigh Abbey was seized by the crown at the dissolution of the monasteries.

Alice's grandfather, Thomas Leigh, the Lord Mayor of London in 1558, acquired the estate and it remained in the Leigh family until 1990.

The Tudor house is overshadowed by an enormous west wing which played host to several people of note, including Queen Victoria and novelist Jane Austen.

[stoneleighabbey.org](http://stoneleighabbey.org)

## St Marys, Warwick

Robert's father, stepmother, young half-brother and uncle are all buried with impressive monuments in the marvellous Beauchamp Chapel.

[stmaryswarwick.org.uk](http://stmaryswarwick.org.uk)

## Ashow Church



Off the beaten track, but accessible to walkers, is The Assumption of Our Lady church in the tiny hamlet of Ashow.

This church, beside the meandering River Avon was where Alice and Robert were married.

It is still a haven of peace and prayer for those that seek it and is usually open every day.

[achurchnearyou.com](http://achurchnearyou.com)

## EXPLORE THE PLACES

### Stoneleigh Church

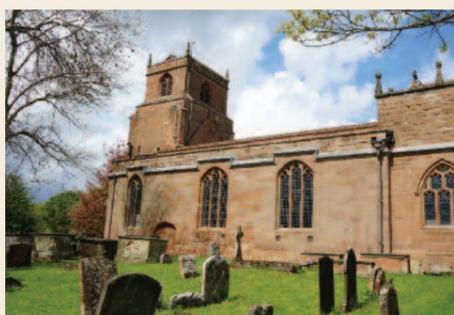
Within the red sandstone walls of St Mary the Virgin, Stoneleigh is the last resting place of Alice, Duchess Dudley. It is marked with a huge marble memorial to Alice and one of her daughters, made many years before Alice herself died.

The church oozes history with two impressive Norman arches, an 11th century carved font and box pews.

As well as being a place of worship, Stoneleigh's parish church houses a small heritage centre in the Leigh Chapel.

[achurchnearyou.com](http://achurchnearyou.com)

[stoneleighhistorysociety.org.uk](http://stoneleighhistorysociety.org.uk)



## Kenilworth Castle



Originally built as a fortress and defended with a man-made lake, by Tudor times Kenilworth Castle was a place of pleasure.

This impressive place was made even more spectacular by Robert's father adding a new tower and garden to entertain Queen Elizabeth I, in the vain hope of marrying her.

All this was confiscated and lost when Robert refused to come back to England and his wife, Alice.

Today visitors can explore the castle, run by English Heritage, or take to the public footpaths for magnificent views of the ruins and to discover how people and events shaped the landscape around the castle.

[english-heritage.org.uk](http://english-heritage.org.uk)

[discoveringbritain.org](http://discoveringbritain.org)

## St Giles in the Fields, London

Although rebuilt in the 18th century, Alice's generosity lives on in this beautiful Palladian Church, an oasis of calm and prayer in central London.

[stgilesonline.org](http://stgilesonline.org)