

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 1574, was the son of The Earl of Leicester, Queen Elizabeth I's favourite, and Lady Douglas 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 that were being prepared for another Spanish Armada against England.

Now it was time to settle down...



DISCOVER THEIR STORY

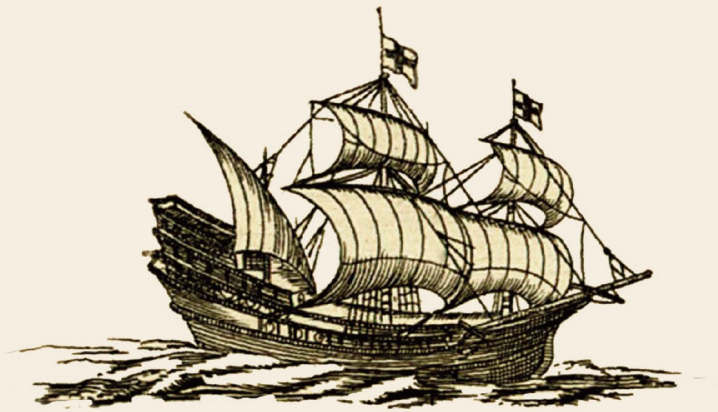
A short time together

Alice and Robert married at Ashow church in 1596, he was 22 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, who was disguised as a page! They converted to Catholicism, were married by papal dispensation and had 13 children.

Robert never came back to England. When he refused an order to return in 1607, Kenilworth Castle and the lands at Ladbroke were confiscated. 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 and became independent and wealthy. In 1618 she was given an allowance of £300 per year from the manor of Ladbroke. In 1624 Alice was created femme sole which allowed her to sell property and in 1644 she was made Duchess in her own right. Alice was generous to churches and to the poor, both in life and after her death, aged 90. She is buried at Stoneleigh church and her monument there records many of her good deeds.



Discover
the places