

Faith and Fortune

The Stories of Katherine and Alice  
Leigh  
(and the men they married)

The stories of two sisters of the Leigh family in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries reveal much about the position of women at that time. As would be the case for women of such status for many years to come, their destinies were determined by their family. Competing royal and political interests at the time show us, too, how their fates could become bound up in the national story. Katherine and Alice Leigh, born in the middle of Elizabeth's reign, were destined to find themselves linked not only with some of the great county families of Warwickshire, but also with events of national importance.

It will help to give their background.

At the heart of Warwickshire lay a grand estate. Centred on the fine new house which was once a Cistercian monastery, Stoneleigh Abbey had been bought by an erstwhile Lord Mayor of London, Sir Thomas Leigh. He and his wife Alice had built a great country house on the footprint of the former religious property, and by the time of his death in 1571 Thomas and Alice had produced four sons and five daughters. Of the sons, the second to be born was named Thomas after his father, and he inherited the Warwickshire estates his father had purchased and built up. His older brother, the first-born, was named Rowland and inherited lands owned by the family in Gloucestershire, centred on Longborough and Adlestrop.

Sir Thomas Leigh had been Lord Mayor of London in 1558-9, and had escorted a young Queen Elizabeth through the streets of the City of London in January 1559, on the day before her coronation. He was among the richest men in England and after the coronation he was knighted. He had been admitted to the freedom of the Mercers Company in 1526 and by 1528 had amassed a considerable fortune as Merchant of the Staple in Antwerp. He lived in a great house in London's Old Jewry, and was elected master of the company three times between 1554 and 1564.



*Sir Thomas Leigh, Lord Mayor of London 1558-9*

Thomas was considered a safe pair of hands when Queen Elizabeth succeeded her Catholic sister, Mary. He had the difficult task of maintaining public order during a potentially difficult transition to Protestantism, and apparently managed it with diplomacy. By the time he died in 1571 he held properties in many counties of England.

Sir Thomas was, then, a man with a mercantile background. This, however, belies his descent from some key players in English medieval history. His ancestor Sir Piers Legh (sic) was beheaded by King Henry IV as an adherent of Richard II. He had fought bravely at Crecy on behalf of Edward III and had been the Black Prince's standard bearer. This Sir Piers' son, another Sir Piers Legh, fought for King Henry V and was wounded at Agincourt in 1415. Thomas's descendants would go on to play their parts within a complicated web of the most important families of the country.

When Sir Thomas died in November 1571 his grand country house was still being built. It was left to his widow, Alice, to continue the project, along with their son Thomas. But son Thomas was in expansionist mode: he had allied himself with the Spencers of Wormleighton and Althorp.

One of the most influential families of the sixteenth century, the Spencers had risen, one might say, on the back of sheep. By the end of the century we find Sir John Spencer and his wife Lady Katherine with four daughters and three sons, son John ultimately being made Baron Spencer of Althorp.



*Spencer effigies at Wormleighton*

Not surprisingly, the daughters were destined to become allied with other great families. Elizabeth, Alice and Anne Spencer were so famed for their beauty that the poet Edmund Spenser – a distant relative - immortalised them in his work as Phyllis, Amaryllis and Charillis. Elizabeth married George Carey, Baron Hunsdon and grandson of Mary Boleyn (the other Boleyn girl); Alice first married Ferdinando Stanley, Earl of Derby and secondly Thomas Egerton, Baron Ellesmere; Anne married Robert Sackville, Earl of Dorset; and Katherine? She married Thomas Leigh of Stoneleigh.



*No portrait exists of Katherine but Alice and Elizabeth Spencer are pictured here. The first portrait used to hang at Stoneleigh Abbey.*

It may be thought that young Katherine Spencer made a less glittering marriage than did her sisters. Thomas Leigh, however, would have been seen by Katherine's father as an astute man of business: his name appears with great frequency in deeds of property transfer in several midlands counties. When, in 1611, he bought himself a baronetcy from King James I, he was one of only four Midlands gentlemen to do so, probably because it was an expensive purchase. In that year the king created this hereditary honour to be conferred on just two hundred recipients. Only men with lands worth at least £1,000 a year were eligible, and the price was £1,095, which was seen as a contribution to the king's army in Ulster. Sir Thomas Holte of Aston purchased his baronetcy in November 1611, as did three other Warwickshire knights in the same year – Sir L'Estrange Mordaunt of Walton, Sir Edward Devereux of Castle Bromwich and Sir Thomas Leigh of Stoneleigh.



*Sir Thomas Leigh, 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet*

Well before becoming a baronet, Thomas had set about forging alliances between his children and good families. He and his Katherine had five children, three boys and two girls – the girls being the main characters in our story. The two younger boys seem to have died young without marrying, but his eldest son John was married to Ursula, the daughter of Sir Christopher Hoddesdon, like Thomas's own father a Merchant Adventurer. Sadly John, too, died young, aged just 31, at Stoneleigh, predeceasing his father but having produced a son who would go on to become the first Baron Leigh of Stoneleigh.

And what, then, of the two daughters? Katherine and Alice Leigh were, like so many girls of that time, expected to marry men chosen by their father. In this they were not unusual. Neither they nor their father, however, could have known how their lives would unfold.

Katherine Leigh, the elder sister, was born, probably, in 1575, as she was seventeen when she married. On March 2, 1592, an indenture was drawn up showing a marriage to be solemnized between Katherine and Robert Catesby. The bride's portion was £2000 - £1000 on the day of marriage and £1000 in the following December. The three parties to the indenture were firstly the bridegroom's father, Sir William Catesby of Ashby St Ledgers; secondly, Sir Thomas Leigh of Stoneley (sic), and Robert Catesby; thirdly, Sir John Spencer of Althorp – the bride's maternal grandfather, together with Sir William Leigh of Newnham and Thomas Spencer of Clarendon. The marriage took place a few days later, fittingly, in the Mercers Chapel – because of her grandfather's connection, Katherine would have been eligible to marry there.



*Marriage entry for Robert Catesby and Katherine Leigh*

The name of Robert Catesby has passed into history as one of the principal plotters against King James I in the infamous Gunpowder Plot of 1605. The Catesby family were eminent landowners of long standing, despite the unfortunate beheading of ancestor William Catesby in 1485, following the defeat of King Richard III at Bosworth Field. Their lands centred on Ashby St Ledgers in Northamptonshire, but they had extensive holdings in Gloucestershire and Warwickshire. Robert's father William had been knighted by Queen Elizabeth in 1575, but had Catholic leanings for which he paid heavy fines; he converted to Catholicism around 1580, in fact. He had married Anne Throckmorton of Coughton Court in Warwickshire- hers was a famously Catholic family; her sister Muriel married Thomas Tresham, another noted Catholic of the day.

It is unclear why Sir Thomas Leigh should wish to marry his daughter to a man whose family were already in trouble for their religious leanings. Of course he was thinking in economic, land-holding terms, his daughter being a pawn in this particular game. What might Katherine herself have thought? Robert seems to have been an attractive man: "Physically, Catesby was more than ordinarily well-proportioned, some six feet tall, of good carriage and handsome countenance. He was grave in manner, but attractively so. He was considered one of the most dashing and courageous horsemen in the country. Generous and affable, he was for that reason much loved by everyone." (Tesimond)

Katherine perhaps had little to complain about, then, and when, a year after they married, Robert's grandmother died and he inherited Chastleton in Oxfordshire, they had a grand house. (The house was demolished in 1607 and the present house built.)

Nevertheless "Catesby was much devoted to his religion, as one would expect of a man who made his communion every Sunday. Indeed his zeal was so great that in his own opinion he was wasting his time when he was not doing something to bring about the conversion of the country." This was certainly at variance with the solid Protestant background of the Leighs.

What we know of Katherine after her marriage is very little: she bore two sons – her son Robert was baptised, perhaps surprisingly, in the Anglican church at Chastleton in 1595. The other son, William, died young, and Katherine herself died in November 1598 at Ashby St Ledgers; she was just twenty-three years old. Did she die in childbirth? We shall probably never know.

Business connections between her father and her husband remained strong for many years afterwards, though Sir Thomas must have spent time regretting his decision to marry his daughter to a Catesby. Robert was both imprisoned and fined for his faith, and one by one various manors he held were mortgaged or sold. Sir Thomas Leigh's signature is seen in several of these transactions. In 1596 Robert had mortgaged Chastleton to Sir Thomas, for example, against an increase in his wife's jointure.

Robert's zeal for Catholicism seems to have increased following his wife's death and that of his own father in April 1598. Once again he mortgaged Chastleton for £3000 to Sir Thomas and others in 1599, and ultimately sold the house to a wealthy lawyer in 1602, after he had been heavily fined for supporting the Earl of Essex's rebellion against Queen Elizabeth.

The rest, as they say, is history: the Gunpowder Plot against King James I was hatched not long after his accession in 1603, when it became clear that he was not disposed to be forgiving towards Catholics. Robert Catesby was a leading conspirator in the plot which reached its peak in November 1605, with the plan to blow up the Houses of Parliament at the State Opening, when the royal family together with lords and MPs would be present. Thirty-six barrels of gunpowder were placed in a vault under the parliament building; as soon as Guy Fawkes was discovered there and arrested, Robert fled from London, first to Ashby St Ledgers, and then on to his property in Staffordshire, Holbeache House. Here he and other conspirators were found a few days later, and, refusing to lay down their arms, "Catesby protested..., that not for themselves, but for the cause of Christ, not for their wives and children, but for the Church, the spouse of Christ, and saving so many thousand souls, the children of God, from eternal flames, they attempted with fire to cut off the chiefest heads and only causes of that greater ruin." An eye-witness account said that "Catesby and Percy, standing back to back and fighting furiously, were shot through the body with two bullets from the same musket. Catesby, crawling into the house upon his hands and knees, seized an image of the Virgin and dropped down dead with it clasped in his arms."



So by 1605 both Katherine and her husband were dead. What of Sir Thomas Leigh, baronet of Stoneleigh? His heir, John, died in 1608, and his two younger sons had already died in the 1590s. Now, poor Katherine had died young too, with a marriage which had turned out so very differently from what might have been imagined when grand alliances were being planned, years before. Robert Catesby had appeared to be of good character, good abilities and good family when the marriage settlement had been drawn up in 1592. Thomas's troublesome son-in-law had died in the thick of religious and political scandal. Times must have been very difficult for the Leighs and also for his wife's family, the Spencers. After all, Thomas's brother-in-law had become Baron Spencer as recently as 1603, on the accession of the very king Catesby had plotted to murder.

But 1605 was a difficult year, too, for the other Leigh daughter, Alice.

Alice Leigh was the second daughter of Sir Thomas Leigh and his wife Katherine nee Spencer. She was to have a very different life from her sister Katherine – a much longer one, as she lived, like her grandmother Alice, the wife of Sir Thomas Leigh the Lord Mayor, into her nineties. The two Alices' names are still remembered every day in Stoneleigh's village almshouses, whereas Katherine Catesby is forgotten.

Alice was probably born in 1579, as when she married, in 1596, she was 17. Her marriage took place in the tiny church of Our Lady of the Assumption at Ashow, just across the fields from her family home, Stoneleigh Abbey. The register tells us that her parents were witnesses, as one might expect, but preceding their names as witness was "my Lady of Derby" – her aunt Alice, her mother's sister, Spenser's famed Amaryllis.

Just as had happened with her sister Katherine, Alice was marrying a man whose prospects seemed, to her father, excellent. When Robert Catesby was being heavily fined for his Catholic sympathies, and had to sell various estates as a consequence, his father-in-law Sir Thomas Leigh helped with negotiations, as we have seen. In at least one case, that of Ladbroke, Sir Thomas signs documents which transfer ownership from Catesby to Alice's husband – Robert Dudley. Sir Thomas could perhaps see that one son-in-law had not turned out well, and was pinning hopes on another.

The name "Robert Dudley" will be well-known to most – but with Queen Elizabeth's favourite in mind. Alice married his son, and her future life would be determined by the fortunes – or misfortunes – of both men called Robert Dudley.

No Warwickshire family could have been ignorant of the Dudley family, whose pedigree and activity in the story of England was famous. Robert senior is not the subject of our story, but is important in understanding what happened to Alice Leigh. He was the fifth child of John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland and narrowly escaped the fate of his father, brother Guildford and sister-in-law Lady Jane Grey when they were executed.



He was created Earl of Leicester by Queen Elizabeth; in popular memory he is forever associated with her, and with Kenilworth Castle. His older brother Ambrose was Earl of Warwick. His relationship with the Queen created endless difficulty as his hopes of marrying her were repeatedly dashed, yet she remained jealous of any other possible romantic liaison he might make. Thus, his marriage to Amy Robsart created problems, and her death from a fall in 1560 raised conspiracy theories about his part in it. In 1578 he secretly married the Queen's cousin, Lettice Knollys, and they had a son, Robert (usually known as the "noble imp") who died, much mourned, as a boy of five, in 1584.

There had been another "marriage", however: in 1573/4 he had had an affair with Lady Douglas Sheffield, the eldest daughter of Sir William Howard, Baron Effingham. Her husband, Sir John Sheffield, had died in 1568. She may well have expected that Robert would marry her, though she would have been well aware of the Queen's displeasure. She later claimed that a marriage had indeed taken place. If so, when she and Robert had a son in August 1574 – the Robert Dudley of our story, husband-to-be of Alice Leigh, the child would have been legitimate. Her hopes were in ruins, however, when Robert wrote to her "my brother you see long married and not like to have children, it resteth so now in myself; and yet such occasions is there ... *as if I should marry I am sure never to have [the queen's] favour.*" He knew that the Dudley lineage depended on himself, since Ambrose had no issue, and yet at the same time despaired of the Queen ever permitting him to marry. As far as he was concerned, they were not, nor were ever likely to be married.



Despite this, Robert acknowledged Douglas's son as his own, and had him educated and brought up as his son. Five years later, she married another – Sir Edward Stafford.

Sir Thomas Leigh of Stoneleigh, in casting about for a good husband for his daughter Alice in 1596, might well have thought that young Robert Dudley would be a good catch. He knew the Earl of Leicester well, who stayed with him at Stoneleigh while hunting on at least one occasion, in 1585. Oxford-educated and experienced in warfare (he had joined his father aged 14 in 1588 as the Spanish Armada threatened) young

Robert had travelled widely and led expeditions to the lucrative West Indies. When the Earl of Leicester died in September 1588 he left Kenilworth to his brother Ambrose for life, at whose death it was to go to young Robert, his only child. Ambrose died in 1590, and so now Robert was heir to both Kenilworth and Warwick. He was a young widower, having married Margaret Cavendish, aged 17, but she had died soon afterwards, childless. In 1596 Robert had returned from a successful expedition with the Earl of Essex at Cadiz, and had been knighted. His future looked bright when, a few months later, he plighted his troth to young Alice Leigh in the little Ashow church, a bare three miles from his castle at Kenilworth. Sir Thomas must have been confident that he had made a good match for his second daughter, and the Leigh/ Dudley dynasty would prosper.

Alice may well have thought she had a good bargain, too: Robert was described as “of exquisite stature, with a fair beard and noble appearance”, and they lived for much of the time in the early days of their marriage at Kenilworth Castle. Within a year their first daughter, inevitably called Alice, was born. They were to have at least four more daughters, Douglas, Frances, Anne and Katherine. No sons.



*Young Robert Dudley*

Late in the century things began to go wrong: Robert’s father, as we have seen, had married Lettice Knollys in 1578. If Robert’s marriage to Douglas Sheffield had been valid, that with Lettice would not have been. She could equally well argue that as Douglas had married Edward Stafford, she must have felt free, that is unmarried, to do so. This meant that young Robert was illegitimate. Questions then arose about the validity of his inheritance. The Stuarts, succeeding to the English throne after Elizabeth’s death in 1603, also cast their eyes on Kenilworth Castle.

Inevitably Robert took up the cause of his parents’ marriage. After many challenges at law, however, the marriage was deemed not to have taken place (at least, lawfully), and by 1605 Robert knew that his claim to his father’s title was in ruins. This must have been

a horrific moment for the young couple. But for Alice, matters took an even worse turn: Robert deserted her – and England – leaving in July 1605, with his mistress, Elizabeth Southwell. Their clandestine flight was made the more dramatic as she was disguised as a page. Given the circumstances of the Gunpowder Plot a few months later, it must have doubly horrified the Leigh family that Robert declared himself Catholic, saying that his own marriage to Alice was invalid, which of course if so, would render their daughters illegitimate. He married Elizabeth in Lyons, France, the following year. His conversion is probably explained by the fact that his new wife was descended on the maternal side from the Howards, her maternal grandfather being Charles Howard 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Nottingham...remarkably, brother of Lady Douglas Sheffield!

Alice, then, was a deserted wife, with a family of young daughters and a precarious hold on desirable properties and estates. In 1607 the king ordered Robert home, to provide for Alice, and when he refused, declared him an outlaw – which meant that his estates were confiscated by the Crown. Alice's position was thus made even worse, and in 1609 her father Sir Thomas Leigh spent much time fighting her case against the Crown for ownership of Kenilworth.

Over the next few years the royal family made the situation worse still: Henry, Prince of Wales offered £14,000 for the castle, but had actually paid less than £3,000 before his death in 1612. The new Prince of Wales, the future King Charles I, took possession of Kenilworth but failed to pay the balance owing, later transferring the earldoms of Warwick and Leicester to others, as punishment to Robert. Alice was in a parlous position, and eventually in 1621 found herself having to sell her estates to the king for £4000. She had inherited other Warwickshire manors, however, and received annuities from them; after a difficult few years she clearly became a wealthy woman again.

It took another twenty years before Alice's name appears in state documents once more: King Charles I seems to have realised that his family had treated both Alice and Robert unjustly, and wrote that "holding ourselves in honour and conscience", he felt "obliged to make reparation." He recognised Robert's legitimacy and created Alice "the title of Duchess Dudley for life". Two of her daughters had married men who had supported the king in the Civil War, and perhaps this made a difference because he also gave them the privileges and precedences due to a duke's daughter.

Robert, meanwhile, had accrued fame and fortune abroad. He and Elizabeth had thirteen children – she died a day after giving birth to the last – and he had been created Duke of Northumberland by Duke Ferdinand II of Tuscany. Settling in Florence, he established himself as an ingenious architect, mathematician and engineer, but above all as a navigator, shipbuilder and mapmaker. He drained the marshes around Pisa, allowing Livorno (Leghorn) to flourish as a town, and built himself a palace. The duke presented him with a villa above the city of Florence, where he died in 1649.



*Frontispiece and sample page from the first edition of Robert's great work*

It is certainly worth considering that, had Robert not been obsessed by his ancestry, he and Alice might have continued to live quietly in Warwickshire. If this had been so, he would never have produced a work which is still recognised today as a masterpiece of map-making, “Dell’Arcano del Mare,” or “Secrets of the Sea” – in six volumes with 130 original maps, including some based on his own explorations.

There is some doubt about whether he is buried in the church of San Pancrazio in Florence, but certainly Elizabeth had been buried there, and in the nineteenth century a memorial was affixed to the wall by an admirer of Robert’s works. The church is now deconsecrated, and functions as a gallery.



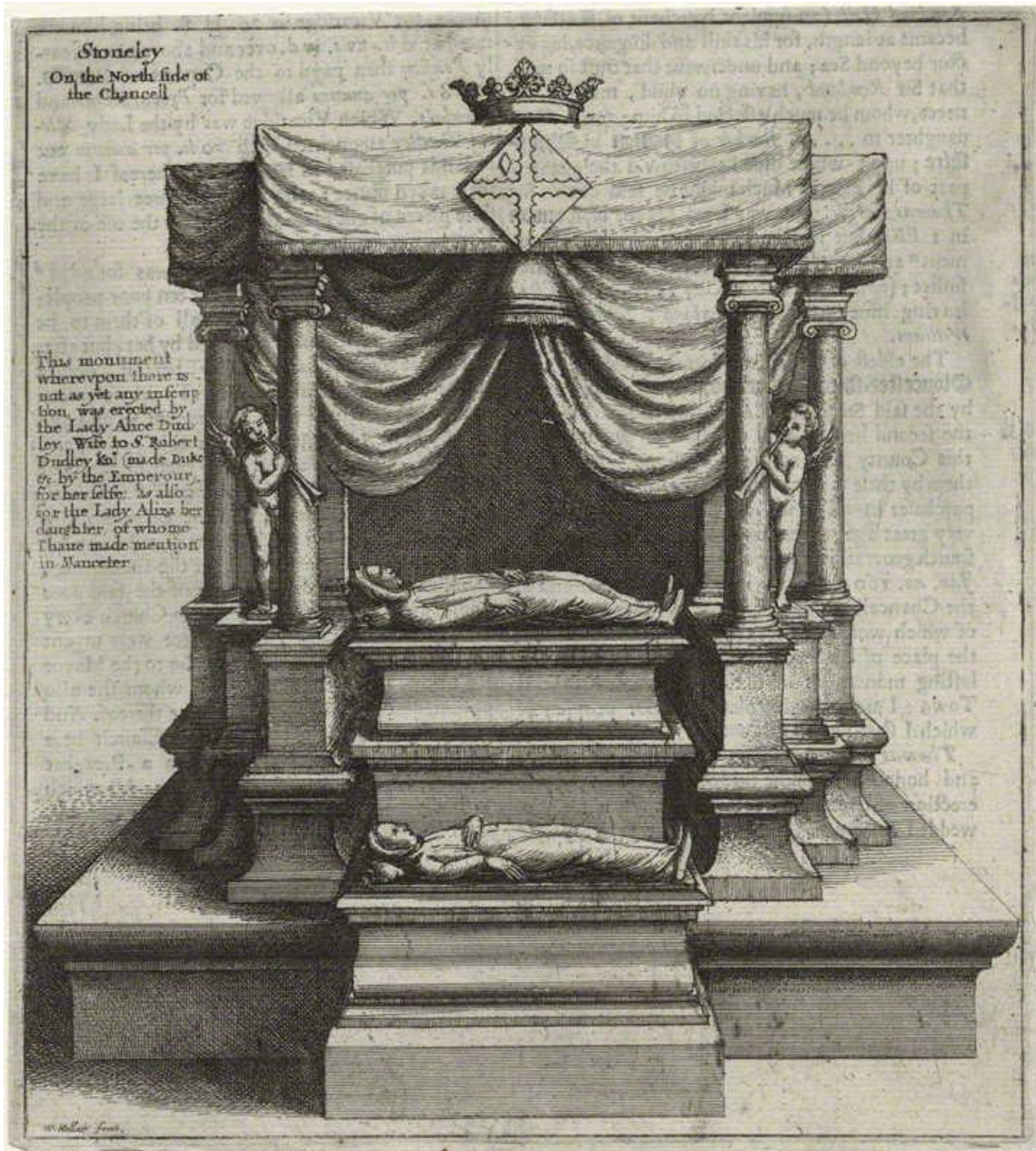
In the meantime, Alice was not living in Warwickshire at all, but in St Giles in the Fields in London. She had certainly been living there before 1621, since her eldest daughter, Alice, died unmarried there. Her daughter Frances died in 1640 and had a splendid tomb in the church.



*The tomb of Alice's daughter Frances, looking remarkably similar in style to the sculptures at Stoneleigh*

Why was Alice in London? The parish of St Giles in the Fields was, as its name suggests, quite rural at the time, although it was effectively a gateway to London itself. By the nineteenth century it had become a byword for crime and poverty, a slum immortalised by Dickens as the Rookery. The parish stretched from Lincolns Inn Fields to present-day Charing Cross Road, and included all of Bloomsbury. In contrast to its later reputation, from about 1600 it began to be developed as a wealthy suburb and its church, St Giles, was rebuilt between 1623 and 1630. Its major benefactor in this was Alice; the rector at the time was a chaplain to Charles I. Was Alice giving thanks? Sadly, some of the fixtures which she paid for were later destroyed as being too much associated with high church practices. By the mid-1660s the parish became synonymous with plague, thousands of Great Plague victims being buried in pits in the graveyard there.

Alice survived the disease, astonishingly, despite being of a great age by then. Her affection for her London home became clear in her will, but it was Stoneleigh which she evidently regarded as her home, since she had ordered a monument to be erected in the church there some years before she died. The identity of its sculptor is disputed, but is now thought to be either Marshall or Wright; it had cost something over £300 and is illustrated in Dugdale's *Antiquities of Warwickshire* although, publishing in 1656, he includes the comment "whereupon there is not as yet any inscription."



Alice died in her ninetieth year at her house near the church of St Giles on January 22 1669. Stoneleigh's register records "Lady Alice Dutchesse Duddeley was buried March 20." She had outlived Robert by twenty years. She had seen some of the most turbulent years in English history and had also outlived all of her daughters but one.

Stoneleigh Bnt. 28: 8.  
Lady Alice Dutchesse Duddeley  
was Bnt: march 20.

It is only with Alice's death that we begin to see something of her character, via the bequests in her lengthy will. She had, it is true, had sufficient vanity to commission a grand monument at Stoneleigh, but perhaps had also wished it to record the death of her unmarried daughter Alicia. When her daughter Frances had died in 1640, an effigy of her was made for the church of St Giles, and the design is very similar to the one which commemorates Alice and Alicia in Warwickshire. Perhaps at this time she employed the same sculptor for her own. Despite this, her determination to help the poor, not just at the time of her death but for years in the future, is made clear in her will.

State papers record that in her lifetime she had given £20 a year "for ever" "for the augmentation of six vicarages in the county of Warwick." These were Stoneleigh, Ashow, Leek Wootton, Kenilworth, Mancetter and Monks Kirby. She gave a great deal of church plate to each of these churches as well as to Bidford, and Acton in Middlesex, St Albans and Patshill in Northamptonshire. She gave money for the repair of Lichfield Cathedral and the rebuilding of St Sepulchres in London. As previously mentioned, she had been largely responsible for the refurbishment of the church of St Giles, some forty years before her death. She had also bought a house and garden for the vicar of that church, and allowed a yearly stipend for the sexton to toll the bell when prisoners condemned to die were passing by, and after their execution.

Her will went further still: as for St Giles, she gave £400 to the hospital nearby, and £20 a year for ever. She gave £200 to buy land for placing out poor children there, and £50 to be spent on the day of her funeral for the poor of St Giles and adjoining parishes. The same sum was to go on the same day to the poor of Stoneleigh, and £100 a year was given to the poor there as well as to the poor of Ashow, Kenilworth, Leek Wootton and Bidford. Smaller sums were to be distributed to the poor of other parishes.

Perhaps rather more curiously, Alice gave £100 for the redemption of Christian captives from infidels – "taken by the Turks." As for her funeral itself, she wished that "for as many old women as my years of age" there should be given a gown and "a fair white handkerchief", and a mourning suit and cloak "for as many servants as attend the funeral". One shilling apiece was to be given them for the dinner afterwards. But before the Stoneleigh burial, her body would have to be transported from St Giles, and so she decreed that £5 should be given to each place where her corpse rested along the way, and sixpence to "each poor body that should meet her corpse on the road." She wished to be buried in the chancel at Stoneleigh church (both her parents, her brother John and her grandmother Alice were buried in the chancel, and it would be several more years before her nephew, the 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Leigh, would create a mausoleum for the family on the south side of the church), her body to be wrapped in lead with a black hearse cloth. Ten shillings a year went towards the repair of the church, and twenty-two shillings and eight

pence “to a preacher for the preaching of four sermons there yearly.” There followed, in the will, several monetary bequests to members of the Leigh family.

Evidently her legacy was to be associated with “good works”. It is no surprise that the rector of St Giles preached a sermon entitled “A Mirror of Christianity and a miracle of Charity, a True and Exact Narrative of the Life and Death of the most virtuous Lady Alice, Duchess Dudley.” It is possible that the same preacher, Dr Robert Boreman, was responsible for the lengthy Latin inscription on the Stoneleigh tomb, which rehearses the legacies described above. It includes reference to Alice’s daughter “who dying before marriage on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1621, left to her mother aforesaid or to the cause of charity a handsome patrimony to be at the disposal of her mother and to be laid out by her on works of piety.” The only surprising thing about the inscription is that the wrong date has been given – 1668!



*The Dudley Monument, showing (a) inscription and (b) both effigies*







*Lower section: Alicia the daughter- the inscription*

Of Alice and Robert's other daughters only Katherine survived her parents. Frances had married Sir Gilbert Kniveton, Anne had married Sir Robert Holbourne. Katherine had married Sir Richard Leveson of Lilleshall and Trentham in Shropshire, and from her are descended the Leveson Gower family, who appear much later in the nineteenth century story of the Leigh family. The portrait of Alice which hangs at Stoneleigh Abbey was painted by the prolific Dutch artist Cornelis Janssen van Ceulen, among whose patrons were, in fact, the Leveson family. Presumably this is why Alice chose him to do her likeness. The painting is very typical of his style, with a faint oval shape within the rectangular frame; among his many sitters were Elizabeth of Bohemia and Kings Charles I and II, and James I.



Finally it is worth noting that like their mother, Anne Holbourne and Katherine Leveson played a significant role in charitable giving. They had inherited the manor of Temple Balsall from their father and grandfather the Earl of Leicester, and after Anne's death Katherine bought her sister's share. When she died, her will left instructions for the erection of "an hospital or almshouse" there, and as codicil asked that the minister should "teach and instruct in learning twenty of the poorest boys of the inhabitants of Balsall parish." Her endowment continues to this day as The Lady Katherine Housing and Care, the Lady Katherine Leveson C of E Primary School and the parish church. Just as the name of Duchess Dudley is well-known in Stoneleigh, so is that of her daughter Katherine in Temple Balsall.



**Lady Katherine Leveson**

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Thus the two sisters, Alice Dudley and Katherine Catesby, daughters of Sir Thomas Leigh and Katherine Spencer, form the basis of our story, together with their husbands. The name of Robert Catesby has lived on in infamy, although he was fervent in his faith; Robert Dudley is most often remembered, if he is at all, as a wife-deserter and bigamist, though this is to undervalue his remarkable skills in other respects. We know a great deal more about the younger of the two sisters, Alice, because as a wealthy woman she was able to ensure that her name lived on via her charitable legacies. Of Katherine we know frustratingly little, and in this she shares the fate of thousands like her, known only as names in marriage contracts and burial registers. Ultimately, however, the inter-linked stories of these influential Warwickshire families provide us with fascinating glimpses into turbulent times in English history.

**Thanks:** Jackie West, churchwarden of Ladbroke Church, for pointing me towards much material, and who hopes to initiate a Duchess Dudley Trail of places associated with Alice; David Eaves of Stoneleigh Abbey for permission to use portraits hanging at the abbey.

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And, inevitably, Wikipedia

[NB on names: all Katherines are sometimes given as Catherine in old documents; Alice is often Alicia]