Henry VII, founder of the Tudor dynasty, unified the warring factions of the Wars of the Roses. In 1486 he married Elizabeth of York, uniting the Houses of York and Lancaster. A shrewd administrator, when he died in 1509 he passed on a full Treasury to his son, Henry VIII.

Francis Hatton, 1st Earl of Huntingdon, advanced to the title of 1st Earl of Huntingdon in 1529 and was one of the peers who subscribed the letter to Pope Clement VII, intimating to him that if he did not comply with King Henry in the business of the divorce between the King and Catherine of Spain, he must expect that they would shake off his supremacy. George was also one of the 36 peers whose judgement condemned Anne Bolyen to the block in 1536. George married Anne, daughter of Henry, Duke of Buckingham, and they had five children, Francis (who succeeded him to his honours), Edward, Thomas, Henry and William. On his death in 1535 he was buried in the chancel of St Giles church.

Francis Hatton, 2nd Earl of Huntingdon, became General and Commander-in-Chief of the King’s Army in 1543. After retiring from the army he spent a considerable time improving the Stoke Park estate. He rebuilt the Stoke Park manor house in 1555. He also built a chapel adjoining St Giles’ church, where his mother and father lay buried, with images of them in stone. He placed a vaulx in the chapel for his brother William, and when he died in 1566 he was buried there with a plate of copper representing his image, in harness, with the garter and a memorial in writing to him in his arms. Francis left the estate to his son Henry.

Henry Hastings, the 3rd Earl, fell upon hard times and had to sell the property in 1581 to the Crown. He was the last person to inherit Stoke Park in a line of descent that had continued for 515 years since 1066, when his ancestors had forced the Saxon prince Siret from his lands.
Queen Elizabeth I and Sir Christopher Hatton

The estate was let out to two of Elizabeth’s favourites. The first was Sir Christopher Hatton, from 1581 to 1591, and he was followed by Sir Edward Coke from 1598. Thanks to an American author, Alice Gilmore Vines, we can learn a great deal about Sir Christopher Hatton from her book, *Neither Fire nor Steel*. She points out that Queen Elizabeth’s Court was the centre of patronage and promotion and that Elizabeth, as an unmarried woman, added an extra, exciting dimension. She cultivated an attitude of devotion, inspired by the old ideals of chivalry and symbolised by the phrase ‘Virgin Queen’, which was often used in the later years of her reign. Annually, on her Accession Day in November, a jousting tournament was held and the champions would receive a prize from her.

The men who surrounded her at Court needed to display several qualities, whether athletic or more cerebral (many had been to Oxford and Cambridge), as well as being able to engage with her in music or the reading of poetry. It was a competitive environment. Christopher Hatton, who spent a lifetime at Court, said that the Queen ‘did fish for men’s souls, and had so sweet a bait that no one could escape her network … she caught many poor fish who little knew what snare was laid for them’.

Keeping up appearances at Court was an expensive business, and Hatton, in spite of a lifetime of royal favour, died owing the government £45,000 (about £4.5 million in today’s money). Hatton suffered turbulent, as well as happy, periods in his relationship with Elizabeth. On one occasion after they had fallen out, Hatton’s friend and rival Edward Dyer wrote to him advising caution:

> For though in the beginning when Her Majesty sought you … she did bear with rugged dealing of yours, until she had what she fancied, yet now, after satiety and fullness, it will rather hurt than help you.

Elizabeth I, one of England’s most successful and glamorous monarchs, ruled the country for most of the second half of the 16th century with great flair. A secure Church of England was established following the 39 Articles of 1563, a compromise between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. There were many brave voyages of discovery under great leaders such as Francis Drake, Walter Raleigh and Humphrey Gilbert, and the East India Company was established in 1600.

The arts flourished and some magnificent country houses, such as Longleat and Hardwick Hall, were built. William Shakespeare came to the fore and Elizabeth attended the first performance of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Nevertheless there were serious external dangers, as the Spaniards threatened to invade through Ireland and the French through Scotland. Mary, Queen of Scots, was finally executed after a long period of captivity and Elizabeth was finally freed from her successors in 1587.
This certainly suggests that the Queen and Hatton were lovers. The Queen’s anger subsided when she learnt that he was seriously ill in 1573, and on 5 June of that year he wrote to her:

Would God I were with you but for one hour … Passion overcomes me. I can write no more. Love me, for I love you.

And he signed himself her ‘bondsman everlastingly tied’.

By 1577 honours were coming to Hatton thick and fast. He was appointed Vice-Chamberlain of the Queen’s Household, given a seat on the Privy Council and knighted by the Queen at Windsor. His primary role by this time was to act as the Queen’s spokesman in the House of Commons, as well as implementing her policy of religious moderation. The pinnacle of his career came in 1587 when he was appointed Lord Chancellor. It was normal to appoint an eminent lawyer to the post, and there was some grumbling in the legal fraternity. According to a contemporary, Thomas Fuller, the lawyers considered Hatton’s ‘advancement their injury, that one not thoroughly bred to the laws, should be preferred to the place’. As it happened, Hatton was not completely ignorant of legal affairs, as in his capacity as a Privy Councillor he had sat for more than ten years in Star Chamber cases.

In the event, Hatton proved to be a very competent Lord Chancellor. Another historian said:

He executed the place with the greatest style and splendour of any that ever we saw; and what he wanted in knowledge of the law he laboured to make good by equity and justice.

Sir Christopher Hatton was Lord Chancellor of England and, rumour had it, the lover of Queen Elizabeth I. He was a lawyer and, as such, a member of the commission who heard Mary, Queen of Scots, guilty of treason. As well as living at Stoke Park, he enjoyed the freehold of Ely Palace, Holborn. (His name is perpetuated in nearby Hatton Garden.) With his own wealth he built the magnificent Holdenby House in Northamptonshire. However, this proved more expensive than he expected and he died childless, at the age of 51, and impoverished.

By today’s standards, Hatton died young, at the age of 51, and still unmarried, in 1591. He was buried in the upper part of St Paul’s Cathedral.

The next tenant of Stoke Park was Sir Edward Coke. Born in the village of Mileham in Norfolk on 1 February 1552, his family belonged to what could be termed ‘minor gentry’. His father, Richard Coke, was a lawyer attached to Lincoln’s Inn. In 1567, at the age of fifteen, Coke enrolled at Trinity College, Cambridge, leaving three years later without taking a degree. On 12 January 1571 he enrolled at Clifford’s Inn in London, and the next year he moved on to the Inner Temple and began attending the courts in Westminster. He was called to the bar in April 1578.

The next year he argued his first case in the King’s Bench and won, apparently, by carrying out more research than his opposing lawyer. Lord Cromwell had sued a parson for defamation but Coke showed that the plaintiff’s case was based not on the Latin text of the statute, but on a badly translated Low French abridgement. His next victory, Shelley’s Case in 1581, brought him more fame and he took...
the opportunity to circulate manuscript copies of his arguments. This was the first example of his published case reports.

During the next twenty years Coke became one of the most prominent lawyers in England. His success led to many appointments: as Recorder of Coventry in 1585, of Norwich in 1586, and of London in 1592. He was made Solicitor General in June 1588 and Attorney General in April 1594. He also entertained political ambitions and served as Speaker in the House of Commons in 1595. As a government prosecutor, Coke was involved in the treason prosecutions of Queen Elizabeth’s last decade up to her death in 1603. For example, in 1601 he presented the case that sent the Earl of Essex to the scaffold. When King James I succeeded to the throne he knighted Coke, who continued to serve as Attorney General and prosecuted Sir Walter Raleigh, reckoned to be the bitternest case of his career. Coke said that Raleigh had an English face but a Spanish heart. As a result of the case, Raleigh spent thirteen years in the Tower of London.

And, of course, in 1605 and 1606, he was involved in the prosecution of the perpetrators of the Gunpowder Plot, when a group of Catholics placed twenty barrels of gunpowder under the Houses of Parliament in an attempt to kill the King and Members of Parliament.

Coke’s legal career thereafter hit some turbulence, as he crossed swords with not only two Archbishops of Canterbury, Richard Bancroft and George Abbot, but also with the King, during his period as Chief Justice to the Court of Common Pleas and to the King’s Bench. He was finally dismissed from the bench in November 1616, when King James became fretted at Coke’s chastising him for interfering in the courts. In 1621 the King dissolved Parliament, and Coke was removed from the Privy Council and arrested. He spent time in the Tower of London before being released to be kept under house arrest.

Coke’s finest moment was still to come, though, as it was well explained by Allen D. Boyer in the Introduction to Law, Liberty and Parliament:

The Parliament of 1628 was Coke’s most memorable. The Duke of Buckingham — once James’s favourite — was Charles’s bitterest enemy. He rode straight into wars with both France and Spain. This led, in turn, to new crises at home: fears of taxation without parliamentary consent, the institution of martial law, and the royal power to imprison without cause shown. Coke was not the crown’s most prominent critic. Other

Highly educated and deeply revered, Charles I fell first. First of the Scots and then of the English parliamentarians who were beginning to think the need to impose deep subsidies every year was more important than the threat of the Duke of Buckingham. The Duke of Buckingham ruled France without a war and the King. Dissolved Parliament in 1629 and ruled as a dictator for the next eleven years. His attempt to arrest five Members precipitated the Civil War which ended in his execution in January 1649. Before then he was imprisoned at Stoke Park in 1647 after being handed over to his English enemies by the Scots in return for £400,000 (about £48 million today).
During his lifetime, Coke had published no fewer than eleven volumes of judicial decisions, known to lawyers as 'the Reports', and his massive Book of Entries. Sir Francis Bacon wrote:

Had it not been for Sir Edward Coke's reports (which, though they may have errors, and some peremptory and extra-judicial resolutions more than are warranted, yet contain infinite good decisions and rulings over cases), the law by this time, had been almost like a ship without ballast.

Allen Boyer concluded:

He is the earliest judge whose decisions are still routinely cited by practicing lawyers, the jurisprudent to whose writings one turns for a statement of what the common law held on any given topic. His discussion of a phrase from Magna Carta, nisi legem terrae, is one of the earliest commentaries to give a deeply constitutional resonance to the phrase ‘due process of law.’ For his defence of liberties and property rights, for his assertion of judicial independence, for his active careful role in adjusting law to the demands of litigants and the interests of society, few figures have deserved more honor.

Coke led the Commons in opposing compromise. ‘I know that sovereignty is in part the law’, Coke continued, ‘but sovereignty is not a parliamentary word: in my opinion, it words Magna Carta – Magna Carta is such a fellow that he will have no sovereignty. When Charles moved to the Commons that he would veto any bill that did not more conform Magna Carta, Coke responded by suggesting that the Commons possess exactly such a sovereignty – the Privy of Right, asserting more than a list of guarantees, of less than an armed hall of rights. In June 1648, when the King returned an estate answer and announced his intention to persuade Parliament, Coke placed a final, personal role. On June 3, in highly dramatic circumstances, he named Buckingham in the commons and the cause of all our grievances. With the faction under attack, Charles backed down. On June 7, 1648, the King asserted in the Privy.

This proved to be Coke’s last venture in public life, and he retired to the manor in Stoke Park which he had originally rented from Queen Elizabeth in 1598 and then bought from the Crown on her death in 1603. In 1601 he had entertained the Queen at Stoke Park, presenting her with ‘jewels and other gifts to the amount of twelve hundred pounds’ (about £130,000 in today’s money). At the christening of one of his children, the Queen had given the child a piece of gold plate.

Once retired at Stoke Park, Coke worked to complete his Institutes. He died on 3 September 1634, at the ripe old age, for these days, of 87, but in the last days of his life, the King’s men ransacked both his study at Stoke Park and his files at the Inner Temple. They took all his papers, which were only returned seven years later when Cromwell’s Long Parliament voted for them to be returned to Coke’s heir and published.

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London. His ownership that King Charles I was imprisoned in the Manor House on his way to Lady Hatton left Stoke Park to Sir John Villiers when she died in 1644, and it was during accusations by saying that she had taken only what was her own. It belonged to My Lord of Huntingdon. And she promptly replied to his on a mortgage Lady Hatton held upon the property, which had formerly rumoured that Sir Edward Coke came by Stoke Poges through foreclosing and silver plate and vessel, and instead thereof foisted alkumy of the same finished his house at Holborn and at Stoke Poges, and carried away all the Among the accusations he brought against his lady was that she ‘disfur- rather enticingly named Coke – was someone who would be described today as ‘feisty’. of Sir Christopher Hatton, the tenant of Stoke Park before it. Lady Elizabeth Hatton – her first husband was the nephew Sir Edward Coke’s life as a lawyer may have been turbulent, but if he sought solace in a quiet family life, he did not find it. Laura Norsworthy wrote of their relationship in her book, rather unusually naming The Lady of Bleeding Heart Yard. Among the accusations he brought against his lady was that she ’disfur- marked his house at Holborn and at Stoke Poges, and caused even all the vessels and plate she could carry by. And that she embarked all his gift and to hold on any longer. Then without ceremony the ex-judge carried them with scant courtesy. He dragged Frances out of the closet – hardly daring to breathe – they listened in agony of suspense for sounds of the enemy’s approach. They were found at last, clinging to each other. Sir Edward Coke tortured them with most cruelty. He dragged Frances out of the closet – she ran by the same name formerly – and there began a tussle of force between the parents which ended only when Lady Hatton was too exhausted to hold on any longer. Then without ceremony she or judge carried off her daughter, and she was examined on her back with one of her step- brothers, and covered over under the eyes of her appointed guard. Lady Hatton lost no time in considering what to do. She ordered her credos to be harnessed as rapidly as she could be done and followed on the wake of the party. For some unaccountable reason her coach did not get very far. Whether it was really held up by mud in the middle of July is not now to be ascertained. Perhaps the coachman had his doubts about the expedition of coming too close to Sir Edward Coke in his present mood. Perhaps he had already been routed by him before his masters gave him orders. Anyone she had to give up the chase, and was left freezing and fuming in the roadway.

Sir Edward Coke arrived, unshaven, without any underpinnings present behind him at Stoke Poges, and everything Frances to an upper chamber, locked the door and put the key in his pocket. It all happened more than three hundred years ago, and there is noth- ing now to tell whether the ‘upper chamber’ – charged with the memory of all that pester – is still standing on whether it was pulled by Mr Penn.

Sir Edward Coke did not keep his daughter long in confinement. He handed her over to Lady Compton and no doubt hoped that he had done with the affair. But Lady Hatton had no sooner done with it as soon as she could get her coach going again she hurried to London. It impertinent was she that she travelled too fast for the roads and the vehicle, with the result that the coach overturned with her ladyship in it. This caused some little delay, but it did not stop her resolution. She continued her jour- ney to London as soon as she might, and went straight to the residence of Sir Francis Bacon – the Lord Keeper.

He was asleep in bed with orders not to be disturbed. The lady was ushered into a sitting-room next to his bedchamber. He might be the first to speak with him after he was stirring. But she had no patience to wait for him to set, and unable to converse herself a moment longer ‘bounced upon my Lord Keeper’s door’ and to her considerable alarm awake him from his slumber. There was commotion in an instant. My Lord Keeper awoke him; his servants chambered. And as soon as the door was opened Lady Hatton ‘shoved’ into the room, and in a perfectly tranquil of words equaled him with what had befallen her.
Northumberland, Essex and Warwick, the Lords Holland, Saye and Sele,
and Digby, Sir Walter Erle, Sir Harry Vane, Sir John Danvers, Denzil Holles, Bulstrode Whitelock, John Hampden and Mr Pym. She was
early in her support of their principles. She really believed that the
emancipation of a people was of more importance than the aspirations of
a Stuart King.

Lady Hatton left the house to Sir John Villiers, Viscount Purbeck, when she died in 1644 and it was in 1647, during
his ownership, that King Charles I was imprisoned in the
Manor House when he was being taken to London. In January
1647 Charles had surrendered to the Scots, who handed him
over to the English Parliament commissioners in return for
£400,000 army back pay (about £45 million in today’s
money). On 14 August the King was moved from Stoke Park
to Hampton Court as a prisoner in the custody of his own
subjects. He escaped in 1648, but, after a final defeat of the
Royalists, was captured again and tried in London in 1649.

Arraigned before a tribunal of 135 judges, he was found
guilty by just one vote, 68 to 67. It was enough. He was
beheaded.

Sir John Villiers died in 1656 and Stoke Park was sold to
John Gayer for £8,564 (about £1 million in today’s money).

There then ensued a relatively tranquil period for about
100 years, although there was some excitement in 1688 when
King William III, shortly after he ascended the throne, was
travelling in the area and, passing the Manor House, decided
he would like to see it. However, Sir Robert Gayer, brother
of John, who had died in 1657, refused him admission in
spite of the pleas of his wife (she was to be able to say over
coffee with her friends, ‘We had that new King, William III,
round for tea last week’). Sir Robert was adamant, saying:
‘He has got possession of another man’s house and shall not
enter mine.’

The King, standing outside the gate, was forced to depart.

Sir Robert died in 1702 (quite lucky not to be in the
Tower, in view of the above) and was succeeded by his son,
also called Robert. He sold Stoke Park in 1727 to Edmund
Halsey for £12,000 (about £1.3 million in today’s money).

Halsey’s daughter had married Sir Richard Temple, who had
been created Viscount Cobham in 1718. The Cobhams owned
Stowe, another beautiful estate in north Buckinghamshire.

When Viscount Cobham died in 1739, Lady Cobham moved
from Stowe and returned to Stoke Park.