

Dr Gill White: Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester (1532 - 1588).



Dr Gill White made a welcome return to talk to the History Group about Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. This followed a recent visit by the Group to Kenilworth Castle, the home of Robert Dudley, and the scene of his most extravagant celebrations in honour of his queen, Elizabeth I.

Gill maintained that history has diminished Dudley and that there is more to him than his romance with the Queen. Through her lively, well illustrated PowerPoint presentation, which used contemporary sources and quotes, Gill presented him as an educated, intelligent, accomplished and well-connected courtier, with his own ancestral pedigree. She showed that Dudley's complicated heraldry reflected his own illustrious ancestors.

Gill took the Group through the plots, counter-plots and intrigue at the Tudor Court, starting with Henry VII and continuing through Henry VIII to Elizabeth's Court and the involvement of the Dudley family in those years. There was mention of imprisonments in the Tower of London, treason, power struggles and beheadings.

Using contemporary portraits, original sources and interesting details, Gill explained the complicated Dudley family backgrounds.



Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester.



Queen Elizabeth I

Gill also made mention of the wider national and European view and Dudley's involvement with Philip II of Spain.

An important element of the Dudley story is the unsolved cause of death of Dudley's first wife, Amy Robsart. Gill posed a number of questions: Was it murder? Suicide? Did it clear the way for a deeper relationship with Elizabeth I? The verdict - death by misadventure. Dudley now a marked man, used propaganda and advertising to restore his tarnished reputation.

Gill, with saucy asides and innuendo, talked the group through the 'on-off' romance of the courtier and his Queen. Throughout his life he was held in high esteem by his sovereign, attaining the coveted position of Master of the Horses. Gill suggested that the 'Kenilworth Entertainment' lasting 3 weeks was a last enjoyment of Dudley and his queen and that Dudley was in fact saying: Let me go. There are other things I want to achieve.

Dudley later married Lettice Knollys, Elizabeth's cousin and confidante and, some say, a younger version of Elizabeth I. Gill suggested that we came to our own conclusions about this!



Lettice Knollys, second wife of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester.

Martin, in his vote of thanks, spoke for the group when he said the presentation was fascinating, intriguing, and we were all thoroughly entertained.

Heidy Hague

