

Elizabeth Stanley, Countess of Huntingdon.

Lady Elizabeth was born and baptised on 6 January 1588, in Knowsley, Lancashire, the third and youngest daughter of Ferdinando Stanley, 5th Earl of Derby.

Elizabeth was the great-great-granddaughter of Mary Tudor, Duchess of Suffolk, the younger sister of King Henry VIII. Elizabeth became, after the death of her grandmother, Lady Margaret Clifford in 1596, third in line of succession to the English throne under Henry VIII's final Act of Succession; however, upon the death of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603, Elizabeth and her older sisters, Anne (heir presumptive) and Frances, were passed over in favour of King James VI of Scotland, who was descended from King Henry's elder sister Margaret Tudor.

In 1601, shortly after her 13th birthday, Lady Elizabeth married Henry Hastings, the only son of Francis Hastings, Baron Hastings. On 31 December 1604, upon the death of his grandfather George Hastings, 4th Earl of Huntingdon, he succeeded as the fifth earl. From that date onward, Lady Elizabeth was styled Countess of Huntingdon, as well as Lady Hastings of Hungerford and Lady Botreaux, since her husband also held those titles.

They made their principal home at Ashby de la Zouch Castle, and had four children:

- Lady Alice Hastings
- Ferdinando Hastings, 6th Earl of Huntingdon
- Lord Henry Hastings, 1st Baron Loughborough
- Lady Elizabeth Hastings

Elizabeth was a patron of the arts, as well as a writer. She was the author of five manuscripts, now to be found in the Huntington Library, in America. Forty-six of her letters survive in the Hastings Collection of the Huntington Library. In one of these letters, she described a visit to the royal court where she watched the rehearsals and final production of a masque, at which she was kissed by both King James and Queen Anne.

Elizabeth died in 1633, at the age of 45, at Whitefriars, London. A procession brought her body to St. Helens in Ashby de la Zouch where she was buried in the Hastings Vault on 9 February. The minister praised her in conventional terms, but he also mentioned her literary activities.



*Anne Heaton
September 2021*