SUMMARY: The document below is a letter from Oxford's daughter, Elizabeth (nee de Vere) Stanley (1575-1627), Countess of Derby, to her 'sweet brother' with respect to a legal matter concerning her husband, William Stanley (bap. 1561, d. 1642), 6th Earl of Derby. According to the *Calendar of State Papers Domestic 1603-10*, p. 359, the letter dates from May 1607, and was written by the Countess to her stepbrother, Henry de Vere (1593-1625), 18th Earl of Oxford. This seems unlikely, as Henry de Vere would have been only 14 years of age in 1607. It thus seems that the letter was written by the Countess to one of her brothers-in-law, either Philip Herbert (1584-1650), 1st Earl of Montgomery, or Francis Norris (1579-1622), Earl of Berkshire.

The legal matter in question was likely part of the 'great lawsuit' between Derby and his sister-in-law, Alice (nee Spencer) Stanley, Countess of Derby. From the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, available online:

On 25 September 1593 [Henry Stanley, 4th Earl of Derby] died; then, on 16 April 1594 his successor, Ferdinando, William's older brother, died of a sudden, violent illness—which, because of his youth and robust health, was widely suspected as poisoning. William immediately became sixth earl of Derby, although his title was briefly thrown into doubt by the false rumour that Ferdinando's widow, Countess Alice, had given birth prematurely to a male heir who might possibly survive. But getting the inheritance proved altogether another matter, as Ferdinando's will, made on his deathbed the previous 11 April and manifesting both this ill-feeling and concern for the dower of his three young daughters, awarded everything to the widow and the daughters. In a letter of 22 April Sir George Carey conveyed the consoling news to his wife, sister to Ferdinando's widow, that the estate had thus been saved from this 'nidicock'—that is, 'fool' (Glos. RO, MF 1161, letter-book 2). Thus began the 'great lawsuit', a complex and infamous affair, financially draining on Derby (already burdened by the excesses of the two previous Derby earls), which would all but consume him for the next five years and not reach final settlement until 1610, by which time he had finally won or bought back most of the estate.

On 26 January 1595, he married Elizabeth de Vere (1575–1627) in the royal palace at Greenwich, with the queen attending. The early years of the marriage were stormy, particularly during the stressful period of the lawsuit, marked by rumours of Elizabeth's infidelity with both Essex and Ralegh, Elizabeth's alarming bouts of sickness, much bitter quarrelling, and periods of separation.

Probably in 1601, although possibly as early as October 1600, John Egerton (1579-1649), 1st Earl of Bridgewater, married Lady Frances Stanley 1583–1636), second daughter of his stepmother, Alice Spencer (1559-1637), Dowager Countess of Derby, and her first husband, Ferdinando Stanley (1559?–1594), 5th Earl of Derby.

Sir Roger Wilbraham (4 November 1553 – 31 July 1616) served as Solicitor-General for Ireland under Queen Elizabeth and was Master of Requests and Surveyor of the Court of Wards and Liveries under King James.

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Sweet brother, I received a message from you that Sir Roger Wilbraham was appointed to move the King concerning my Lord's petition, which course I think now will take no effect. Therefore I must entreat you to move his Majesty that a letter be written for direction of the petition to his learned counsel at law to be present in the Court of Chancery at the day of hearing, which is upon the 27 of this month, to answer this cause according to justice, for Sir John Egerton hath taken all the King's counsel on his part against my Lord. I pray let me hear from you when you have his Majesty's answer of(?) direction, &(?) for the particulars set down in the petition, you need not doubt to inform the King, for my Lord hath all ready contained in it. Thus desiring you to excuse my troubling you, I remain,

Your most loving sister-in-law,

Elizabeth Derby