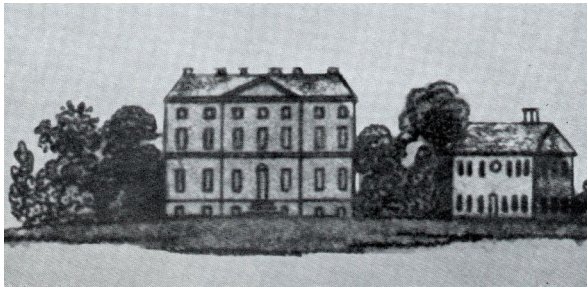
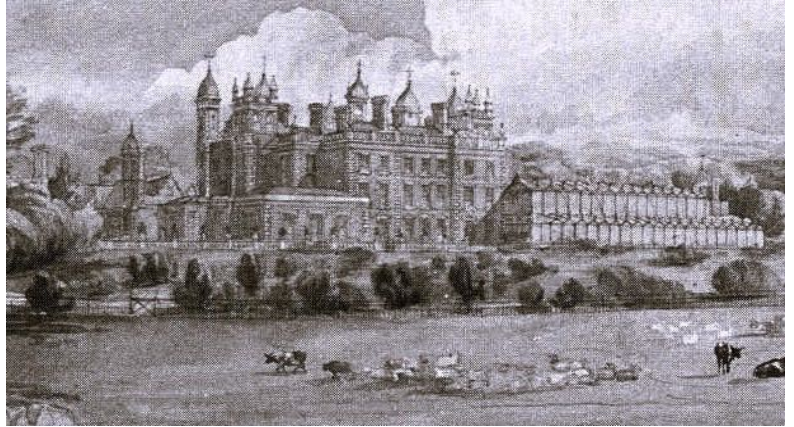


# Gaskell Society: A Visit to Capesthorne Hall

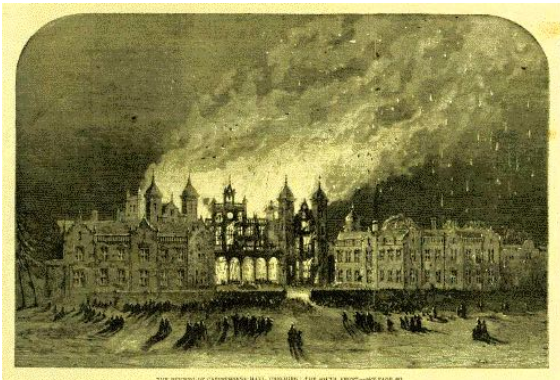
The first important point is that Capesthorne Hall changed over the years. The local Davenport family go back to Domesday Book times. Their residence started out as an 18th century house, which was replaced in 1837-42 by a pseudo-Elizabethan mansion designed by Edward Blore. This was the house Elizabeth Gaskell would have visited when her friend Caroline Davenport lived there. It was later destroyed by fire in 1861 and rebuilt in a rather similar style by Anthony Salvin. Since Caroline Davenport no longer lived there, EG was probably not familiar with this house, which is what survives in the present. But the present house would probably strike her as pretty similar to what she knew.



Capesthorne Hall in 1722



Rebuilt by Edward Blore, 1837-42: garden front with conservatory



Destroyed by fire, 1861



Rebuilt by Anthony Salvin in 1860s after the fire: main front

## Caroline Davenport

Caroline Anne Davenport's maiden name was Hurt. She was born on 1 April 1809 (and so was just a little older than Elizabeth Gaskell) to the Hurt family of Alderwasley Hall, Wirksworth, Derbyshire. The Hurts were regarded as among the chief gentry of Derbyshire. They were wealthy, as landowners, timber suppliers, lead merchants, and iron manufacturers; and were connected by marriage with some of the best known local families, including the Strutts, Gells, Arkwrights and Harpurs. Caroline is said to have received a good education, but further details of this are lacking.



On 20 December 1830 she married Edward Davies Davenport (27 April 1778 – 9 Sep 1847): she was twenty-one, he was fifty-two. Perhaps it may be surmised that he had reached a point in a somewhat turbulent life-style when he realised he needed an heir, and found a young wife within his social circle. Davenport eventually had a short political career as a Member of Parliament for Shaftesbury, but the *History of Parliament* sums up his earlier life thus: "Davenport, who had the sensibility of an aspiring man of literature and the conscience of an ambitious social reformer, for many years endured an unhappy relationship with his father. Once in trouble for



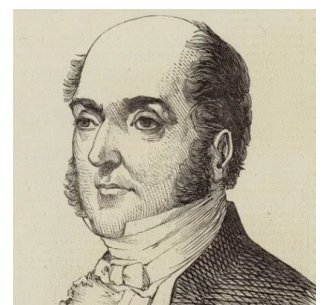
his behaviour at school, the exaggerated gratitude which he expressed for being allowed to spend some time at Oxford suggests that he had difficulty getting his own way. Obligated to enter the army in 1799, he soon transferred to the Guards, in which he obtained a captaincy on the death of another officer in 1804, and with whom he served in southern Italy in 1806. Lack of intellectual conversation and poor health were the reasons which he gave his father for wanting to leave the army, but he had to promise not to incur any further gambling debts before being allowed to resign his commission. ... Apart from spells in England, Davenport thereafter travelled widely in southern Europe... He despaired of clearing his debts, but his financial problems were largely relieved, ... by his father's decision to transfer the Calveley part of his Cheshire estates to him. ... Plagued by gout, he lived in some seclusion and devoted himself to literary pursuits. ... Although Sydney Smith praised his good qualities of 'wit, literature and polished manners', the darker side of his character was emphasized by Henry Gally Knight's complaint about 'the splenetic nature' of his 'gloomy soul'. Having joined Brooks's in 1816, Davenport evidently moved increasingly in Whig circles." He had a taste for art, and on his travels in Italy bought artifacts and antiquities, some of which survive at Capesthorne.

Life at his home, Calveley Hall near Tattenhall in Cheshire (a rather plain Georgian house, still standing but very decrepit *below right*), must have been something of a mixed blessing for his young wife, but there were evidently some compensations.



It had a library containing illuminated manuscripts, and Caroline copied some of these in an album which survives in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Edward and Caroline had one child, a son Arthur Henry, born on 9 June 1832. Edward's father died on 8 February 1837 and Edward inherited the various Davenport estates, including Capesthorne. He promptly set about rebuilding the existing house at Capesthorne into something grander, employing Edward Blore, an architect with antiquarian tastes. Between 1837 and 1842 Blore transformed Capesthorne into an extravagantly turreted pseudo-Elizabethan mansion. Edward and Caroline probably continued to live at Calveley while Capesthorne was a building site, but may have later moved to the larger house since Edward is recorded as having died at Capesthorne on 9 September 1847, aged 69. His son Arthur (1832-67) was heir to the Davenport estates, but he was still a schoolboy. Caroline continued to live at Capesthorne from 1847 until she re-married in 1852.

Her second husband was another politician, more successful and slightly younger than Edward Davenport. He was Edward John Littleton (1791-1863), who became Lord Hatherton in 1835. He inherited a Parliamentary seat from his uncle and started out as a Tory. In 1827 he crossed the floor to the Whigs and supported various progressive measures. He attained ministerial rank as Chief Secretary for Ireland, 1833-4, but, as he then took his seat in the Lords, that was more or less the end of his Parliamentary career. He then reverted to his more local concerns as a landowner who possessed a considerable part of Staffordshire, living at



Teddesley Hall near Penkridge (demolished 1954). His first wife had died in 1849, so he and Caroline were in a similar position, hoping to establish a second household.

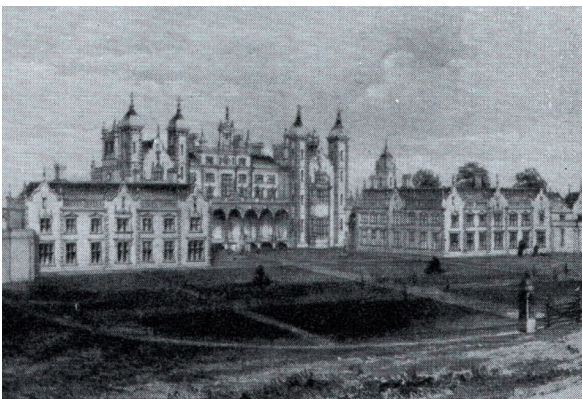
Hatherton died on 4 May 1863, and thereafter Caroline, having presided over two stately homes, had a somewhat melancholy retirement in smaller accommodation in the Isle of Wight, Cornwall, and ultimately Worthing, dying on 6 May 1897.

A curious coincidence may be of interest to Gaskell students. Hatherton had children by his first wife, and employed (1821-5) as a nursemaid Anna Brownell Jameson, then in her twenties and trying to establish her independence in the world. She went on to contract a marriage but it proved unsatisfactory and both parties went their own way. She then devoted herself to scholarship, living mostly with her mother and sisters in Ealing. She eventually emerged as one of Britain's first serious art historians, her five-volume work on Christian iconography, *Sacred and Legendary Art* (1848-64), still being a useful resource. Philosophically she was a feminist, and as such revered by Elizabeth Gaskell, who became her friend in 1849, and later told her "You don't know the good you have done me in your life-time".

## Elizabeth Gaskell and Caroline Davenport

[In what follows references to the published volumes of *Letters* and *Further Letters* cite **page numbers**.]

EG had quite a long friendship with Caroline Davenport, which we can to some extent reconstruct from her letters. The first mention seems to come in May 1836 when EG reports that she "lunched at Mr Davenport's at Capesthorne – such a beautiful place, not the house which is rather shabby; but the views from the Park" [Letters p.6]. If the editors have dated this letter correctly, the Mr Davenport here referred to must be Edward's father, who would have been still alive then, inhabiting the 18th-century house. And Caroline would probably have not been present since she would still be living at Calveley. The next reference is in a letter tentatively dated to 1847. EG is staying with the Samuel Gregs at Bollington, and they are "going to lunch with Mrs Davenport" at Capesthorne [L53]. By this time, the house will have been remodelled by Edward, who must still be alive. When visiting the Gregs EG often also called at Capesthorne, which was only seven miles away [L178, *Further Letters* p.47].



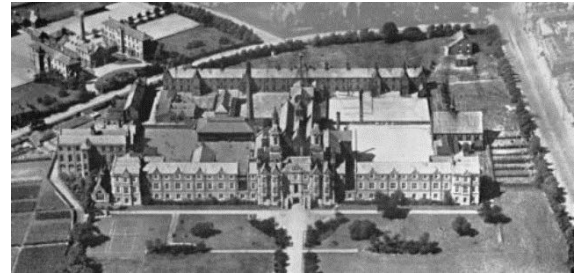
Writing in November 1849, EG finds the new Capesthorne (*left*) impressive: "a place and person for an artist to be in – old hall, galleries, old paintings, &c. and such a *dama* of a lady to grace them" [L91]. On another occasion, EG remarks that "I admire Mrs Davenport the more the more I see of her. She is such a queenly woman, is not she..." [L168]. In the early 1850s there are quite frequent references to visiting or staying at Capesthorne, or to Caroline visiting the Gaskells [L833, 147, 149, 177, 181]. As well as such encounters, it seems that Caroline would

give larger house parties, such as one in October 1851: "We were ... a very large party; and yet the life was very independent, and everybody might be as much alone as they liked.... I went a long drive with Mrs Davenport one day" [L165]. At this party EG met the Swedish novelist and feminist, Fredrika Bremer, "a quaint droll little lady" [L167].

As well as thus bringing together formidable liberal ladies, Caroline engaged in various sorts of social work. In 1850 she arranged a charitable fete at Capesthorne to which EG contributed by getting two of her stories, "The Sexton's Hero" and "Christmas Storms and Sunshine" reprinted as a pamphlet to be sold for the cause promoted by the fete, "for the Benefit of Macclesfield Public Baths and Wash-houses".



In April 1851 EG was invited to participate in an inspection of Swinton Industrial Schools (*right*), a school set up by the local Poor Law Guardians to train pauper children, and housed in a lavish building not unlike Capesthorpe. She took Caroline along, and was pleased that "Mrs Davenport understood so much of what questions to ask &c. that she called out the best part of both teachers and scholars; she was so sweet in many ways..." [L149]. The next day they went together to visit the Deaf and Dumb Asylum [L150].



As already noted, Caroline Davenport, a widow, found a new husband, the widower, Lord Hatherton. EG first encountered him by chance in February 1852 as she was making her way to Capesthorpe from the railway station in a fly. "On the way I met another fly, and out jumped a nice-looking elderlyish gentleman, & introduced himself to me as Lord H. He had come down from London by the express train to see Mrs D unexpectedly as she had said she was not quite well, staid 3 hours at Capesthorpe, & was going back by the evening express" [FL63]. EG obviously got on well with him, since she later wrote several gossip letters to him about her doings [L190, 480, 485]. A couple of days before this encounter, EG had been at Capesthorpe to look at Caroline's wedding trousseau. To a friend she wrote a particularly lively letter describing Caroline's festal garments, deploying the expertise in fashion and dressmaking technique that she usually applied to advising her daughters on their clothes [FL62-3]. Caroline, after her marriage, departed from Capesthorpe to live with her new husband. So we find EG visiting them at Teddesley, their Staffordshire home [L849, 354, 490] or their house in London [L186, FL158]. At Teddesley she met their head gardener, who had spent several years in Teheran: she noted his reminiscences and published them in an article in *Household Words*, "The Shah's English Gardener".

Many aspects of EG's life slipped into her writings, in transmuted form. J. G. Sharps records a suggestion that Caroline Davenport was the "original" of Lady Ludlow – but there are several other candidates. A more plausible suggestion is that the display of a wedding trousseau in chapter 1 of *North and South* may have been influenced by the Davenport trousseau which so impressed EG.

Elizabeth Gaskell had such a wide range of contacts that tracing and interpreting them is a complex task. It may be suggested that she belonged to a group of brainy, progressive-minded women in the North-West (some shown *below*), who, going beyond the traditional wife/mother mode, made significant contributions to the culture of their time; and that she and Caroline Davenport fit in here. Janet Kay-Shuttleworth was a cousin of Caroline Davenport, and EG met her (perhaps for the first time) at Capesthorpe in 1850 (L116). But this circle of progressive women must await further investigation. Left to right: Caroline Davenport; Janet Kay-Shuttleworth; Mary Priscilla (Mrs Samuel) Greg (in old age); Catherine Winkworth; Mrs Julie Schwabe; Mrs Edward Stanley.

