

A History of Chatsworth and the Cavendish Family

Sir William Cavendish and Bess of Hardwick

The first house at Chatsworth was built by 'Bess of Hardwick' and her second husband Sir William Cavendish. They bought the manor of Chatsworth in 1549 and began to build in 1552. The Hunting Tower, created in the 1580s, still stands on the hill behind Chatsworth. Bess had four husbands but only had children by Sir William. Their second son, William, became his mother's heir and bought Chatsworth from his older brother, Henry. William was made Baron Cavendish in 1605 and created Earl of Devonshire in 1618.

Sir William Cavendish came from Cavendish in Suffolk. He prospered as one of King Henry VIII's commissioners for the dissolution of the monasteries. When he married the redoubtable Bess, a native of Derbyshire, she persuaded him to sell the former monastery lands he owned elsewhere and move to her home county. In spite of the physical limitations of the site, which was prone to flooding and difficult of access across the moors to the east, they built a large house on the site of the square block of the present building. Although there is little to tell us what the house was like inside, a painting of the house at this time shows us the exterior, and an inventory of 1601 survives, attached to Bess's will.

After Sir William died in 1557, Bess married Sir William St. Loe (d. 1565) and lastly, in 1567, George Talbot, 6th Earl of Shrewsbury (c. 1528-90). Queen Elizabeth I appointed Shrewsbury custodian of Mary Queen of Scots, who was a prisoner at Chatsworth at various times between 1569 and 1584. Her lodgings were on the east side of the house where the rooms, though changed beyond recognition, are still called the Queen of Scots Apartments. Bess also built Hardwick Hall, near Chesterfield, her surviving masterpiece. It belonged to the Cavendish family until 1957 when it was taken by the government in lieu of death duty and given by them to the National Trust.

William Cavendish, 4th Earl and 1st Duke of Devonshire

Few alterations were made at Chatsworth until the late 17th century. In 1686 the 4th Earl took down the South Front, and built new family rooms and a magnificent suite of State Apartments, intended for the reception of a Royal Visit from William and Mary. In 1694 he was created 1st Duke of Devonshire for his part in bringing William of Orange to the English throne.

The Duke intended to alter only the South Front, but he found building so delightful that once he started he could not stop. The East Front followed, including the Painted Hall and a long gallery, now the Library. George London and Henry Wise designed a formal garden on the grand scale. A Frenchman, Grillet, built the Cascade, and Thomas Archer (1668-1743) designed the house from which it springs.

Artist Leendert Knyff was commissioned to record the changes, but hardly had this been completed when the desire to build again proved irresistible. The Duke rebuilt the West Front (1699-1702) and finally the North Front. The Canal Pond was dug where once there was a hill (1702).

William Talman (1650-1720) was the architect for the South and East Fronts. The West was perhaps designed by the Duke himself, working closely with his masons, and the North, with its bow front, by Thomas Archer. The new Chatsworth was finished just before the Duke died in 1707.

William Cavendish, 2nd Duke of Devonshire

The 2nd Duke made no changes to the house and garden he had watched being created in his youth. He made his mark in a different field, as a collector of paintings, drawings and prints. He also made important collections of coins and carved Greek and Roman gems. The Duke was the grandfather of Henry Cavendish (1731-1810), the distinguished and eccentric scientist, who determined the composition of water, recognised hydrogen as an element and was 'the first man to weigh the world'. Cavendish's library of 12,000 books on science and many other subjects is at Chatsworth.

William Cavendish, 3rd Duke of Devonshire

The 3rd Duke served for seven years as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and was Member of Parliament from 1721 until his father's death sent him to the House of Lords in 1729. The Prime Minister Sir Robert Walpole was a friend of his and his father, and the Van Dyck portrait of Arthur Goodwin which hangs in the Great Dining Room came from Walpole's collection. When Devonshire House in Piccadilly was burnt down in 1733, the Duke commissioned William Kent to rebuild and furnish it. Much of Kent's furniture for Devonshire House is now at Chatsworth.

William Cavendish, 4th Duke of Devonshire

The 4th Duke was a prominent Whig politician like his father, serving as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and Prime Minister of England (November 1756 - May 1757). He made great changes to the park and garden. He decided that the house should be approached from the west, so he pulled down the old stables and offices which interfered with the view on this side, and razed the cottages of Edensor village which were visible from the house. The architect James Paine (c. 1716-89) was commissioned to build new stables up the slope to the north-east (completed in 1763). The course of the river was altered and Paine designed a new bridge

upstream of the house (1762). Land to the west of the river, including what remained of Edensor village was enclosed to become the park as it is today. Lancelot (Capability) Brown (1716-83) was engaged to destroy most of the 1st Duke's formal garden and to give the park the natural, romantic look which he had helped bring into fashion.

The Duke married Lady Charlotte Boyle, only surviving daughter and heiress of the architect and connoisseur 3rd Earl of Burlington. This marriage brought new estates to the Cavendish family, including Lismore Castle in County Waterford, Londesborough Hall and Bolton Abbey in Yorkshire, Burlington House and Chiswick House in London. The inheritance included all of Lord Burlington's architectural books and drawings as well as many paintings and everything else his houses contained.

William Cavendish, 5th Duke of Devonshire

The 5th Duke married Lady Georgiana Spencer, famous for her charm and beloved by all who knew her. She and her great friend Lady Elizabeth Foster were painted several times by Sir Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough. Lady Elizabeth became the mistress of the Duke, and had two children by him. Curiously enough, this did not interfere with her friendship with Georgiana. The *ménage à trois* continued for some years and has been the subject of many books.

The Duke and Georgiana lived mainly in London, but when they did come to Chatsworth they filled it with friends and relations, writers and politicians. The house was open for people to look around and on one day a month dinner was provided for whoever came. John Carr of York (1723-1807) was commissioned by the Duke to redesign the decoration and furnishings of the private drawing rooms of the first floor at Chatsworth and to build the Crescent in Buxton.

There were three children of the marriage. The eldest, Georgiana, married the 6th Earl of Carlisle. Her daughter Lady Blanche Howard married her cousin William, who eventually became the 7th Duke of Devonshire.

William Spencer Cavendish, 6th Duke of Devonshire

The 6th, 'Bachelor', Duke was Duchess Georgiana's only son and succeeded his father at the age of 21. Extravagant and charming, he was a prince of hosts. He never married but loved entertaining his friends and spent 47 years improving his many houses and collecting objects of every kind with which to embellish them. He bought two complete libraries, many paintings and sculptures and a great deal more besides. He engaged the architect Sir Jeffry Wyattville (1766-1840) to build the long North Wing at Chatsworth. Later, Lismore Castle in County Waterford was also rebuilt. Such expenditure taxed even his resources and he was forced to sell property in Yorkshire, including most of the town of Wetherby and his estate at Londesborough.

The Duke became intensely interested in gardening after he met Joseph Paxton (1803-65), a young gardener working in the Horticultural Society's gardens at Chiswick which adjoined the Duke's land there. He appointed Paxton to be head gardener at Chatsworth in 1826 and together they changed the garden into the one you see today. Plant-collecting expeditions were sent to the Americas and the Far East, giant rockeries were introduced and the 'Conservative Wall' glasshouse was built. Paxton designed and constructed the Emperor Fountain, the jet in the Canal Pond which can reach over 280 feet on a calm day. It was an engineering feat which entailed draining the moor into an eight acre man-made reservoir on the high ground above the house (1844). The whole of this ambitious scheme was completed in six months.

The most famous of Paxton's achievements was the building of the Great Conservatory, constructed in wood, iron and glass and covering three-quarters of an acre. It was the forerunner of the Crystal Palace, which he built for the Great Exhibition of 1851 in Hyde Park. The Great Conservatory became derelict during the First World War and was demolished soon after. The maze now grows in its place.

William Cavendish, 7th Duke of Devonshire

William Cavendish, 2nd Earl of Burlington of the second creation, became the 7th Duke in 1858. He was grandson of the 6th Duke's uncle Lord George Cavendish. Scholar, Second Wrangler and Smith's Prizewinner in mathematics, he became Chancellor of London University at the age of 28, and later Chancellor of Cambridge University and founder of the Cavendish Laboratory there.

The Duke married Lady Blanche Howard, granddaughter of Duchess Georgiana. Blanche died aged 29 in 1840 and was mourned by her husband and her uncle, the 6th Duke, for the rest of their lives. Chatsworth was a very quiet place during the thirty years of the Duke's tenure, as its owner decreed strict economies after the extravagance of his predecessor. He is best remembered today as the developer of Eastbourne in Sussex and Barrow-in-Furness in Cumbria.

Spencer Compton Cavendish, 8th Duke of Devonshire

The 8th Duke was a statesman who served in Parliament for over fifty years. A towering figure in the Liberal Party, he played a leading role in the cabinets of Gladstone and later Liberal governments as Marquess of Hartington. Three times he was asked by Queen Victoria to become Prime Minister, but each time he refused. In 1886 he split the Liberal Party over his opposition to Home Rule for Ireland.

In 1892 the Duke married Louise, widow of the Duke of Manchester. He and the 'Double' Duchess entertained lavishly at Chatsworth, usually during the autumn and winter. King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra were regular visitors. The Duke and Duchess had no children. When the Duke died in 1908 he was succeeded by his nephew Victor Cavendish.

Victor Cavendish, 9th Duke of Devonshire

The 9th Duke and his wife Lady Evelyn Fitzmaurice, daughter of the 5th Marquess of Lansdowne (Viceroy of India 1888-1894), had seven children. He was a Member of Parliament from 1891 and like most of his predecessors loved politics and continued to attend the House of Lords after the death of his uncle. He held office as Financial Secretary to the Treasury and from 1916 to 1921 was Governor-General of Canada.

When the Duke and Duchess moved to Chatsworth in 1908 a lot of work had to be done to the house, including the complete renewal of the drainage system. Evelyn Duchess interested herself in the collections and became very knowledgeable about the contents of the various houses, while her husband was an attentive landlord and enjoyed his farming and sporting activities. The Duke was the first to have to pay death duties, which amounted to over half a million pounds. Added to the even greater running debt left by the failure of the 7th Duke's business ventures, this forced some major sales. All the Caxton books in the Library and the John Kemble collection of plays, including many rare first editions of Shakespeare, were sold in 1912 to the Huntington Library in California, and Devonshire House and its three acres in Piccadilly were sold in 1920.

Edward Cavendish, 10th Duke of Devonshire

When Edward Cavendish succeeded his father as 10th Duke in 1938 he and his wife, Lady Mary Cecil, daughter of the 4th Marquess of Salisbury, planned to make many alterations and improvements at Chatsworth. But a year later, war broke out and the girls and staff of Penrhos College arrived. The house was not re-opened to the public until 1949.

In May 1944 the Duke's elder son William, Marquess of Hartington (b. 1917), married Kathleen Kennedy, sister of the late President Kennedy. Four months later he was killed in action in Belgium while serving with his regiment, the Coldstream Guards. Kathleen died in an aeroplane accident in 1948. They had no children, so

the Duke's second son Andrew Cavendish became his father's heir and succeeded to the title in 1950.

Andrew Cavendish, 11th Duke of Devonshire

Andrew Robert Buxton Cavendish, KG, PC, MC. 11th Duke of Devonshire married the Hon. Deborah Mitford, daughter of Lord Redesdale, in 1941. He served in the Coldstream Guards during the war, and was Mayor of Buxton 1952-54. Later he was a minister in the Conservative government 1960-64.

The Duke and Duchess had three children, Emma (b. 1943), Peregrine (b. 1944) and Sophia (b. 1957). Lady Emma married the Hon. Toby Tennant in 1963 and they have three children. Lady Sophia has two children and is married to Will Topley. Peregrine married Amanda Heywood-Lonsdale (b. 1944) in 1967 and they have three children, William, Marquess of Hartington (b.1969), Celina (b. 1971) and Jasmine (b. 1973).

The Duke's death at the age of 55 was sudden and unexpected, and death duties at the maximum rate of 80% had to be paid. Nine of the most important works of art and many rare books, as well as Hardwick Hall and its supporting farms and woods, were surrendered to the Treasury in lieu of cash. Thousands of acres of land and other assets were sold. The negotiations took seventeen years to complete and the final payment was made in 1967. The ownership of all the remaining Derbyshire estates then passed to the Trustees of the Chatsworth Settlement.

The Duke and his family lived at Edensor House in the park from 1947. In 1957 the decision was taken to move back to Chatsworth. Some internal modernisation was done, including a new central heating system and changes of use for some of the rooms. A new kitchen was fitted up nearer the private dining room and six flats made for members of staff and their families. In November 1959 the work was completed and the family moved in. While the house, garden and park were the property of the Trustees of the Chatsworth Settlement the Duke insisted that no application for public funds towards upkeep should be made.

On 31st March 1981, after three years of negotiations with the government, the running of Chatsworth was taken over by the Chatsworth House Trust. This is a charitable foundation set up by the 11th Duke to help ensure for the public benefit the preservation of the house, its essential contents, the garden and the park.

By November 2000, the 11th Duke had held the title for 50 years. On his death in May 2004, he was succeeded by his son.

Peregrine Cavendish, 12th Duke of Devonshire (b. 1944)

Peregrine Cavendish succeeded his father in May 2004.