

## Scandals in Victorian Woodhouse Eaves

We tend to think of the Victorian era as a time of strict rules governing sexual conduct and marriage, with dire consequences for all who broke them. However, as this talk showed, there were plenty of people prepared to run the risk, and Woodhouse Eaves and surrounding areas had their fair share. Class was no hindrance. Those who flouted the conventions ranged from a framework knitter's daughter to peers of the realm.

### At the bottom of the social ladder

Hannah Wesley was a framework knitter's daughter while Mary Upton's father was an agricultural labourer. Both were born in Mill Road in the early 19<sup>th</sup> C, although 15 years apart, and both had babies out of wedlock (as the old saying goes) when they had not long turned 20. However, dire consequences failed to follow, even though Mary Upton may even have had a second child 14 years later. Both girls and their children were nurtured by their families and both went on to marry.



Mill Road, early 20<sup>th</sup> century.



4 and 6 Main Street today

When Hannah was 26, she married widowed brickmaker Stephen Preston from Woodhouse, and her son Oliver Wesley, grew up to be a well-respected Woodhouse Eaves builder. Mary Upton was around 43 when she married widowed Woodhouse Eaves shoemaker William Foulds and moved with her daughters to his home at number 6 Main Street.

Sadly, there was no happy ending for either woman as both ended their lives in the Leicestershire and Rutland County Asylum (mental hospital).

### The scandal of a vicar's daughter

The mother of Lt Col Francis Arthur Dashwood of Bird Hill House (a large house once situated at the top of Paterson Drive) was Maria Dashwood, the daughter of the vicar of Stanford on Soar who had inherited Stanford Hall. In 1843, aged 31, she married her first cousin, barrister George Arthur Lister. Unfortunately, George was already married to a baker's daughter and had a one-year-old daughter. By the time Francis Dashwood was born a year later, the bigamous marriage was uncovered and the boy was baptised in his mother's maiden name.

Maria lived in genteel seclusion, firstly in the empty Stanford parsonage 1870s, and then from the mid-1870s at The Holt in Woodhouse (the unoccupied vicarage of St Mary-in-the-Elms). She never married, dying in 1894. Her gravestone cross in St Mary's churchyard bears the enigmatic biblical epitaph: 'He is able to save to the uttermost'. Is this an allusion to her sin of bigamy?



The Holt today



Maria's gravestone cross

### **A lady's maid and two peers of the realm**

In 1871 Emily Stenning, a blacksmith's daughter from Godalming in Surrey, was lady's maid to the Honourable Adelaide Clowes, at Long Close in Main Street, Woodhouse Eaves. In 1873 she married Adelaide's brother, Henry Anson Cavendish, 4<sup>th</sup> Baron Waterpark of Doveridge in Derbyshire, whom she may have met when he was visiting, and their daughter Mary was born only two or three months later (say no more!).

It must have been a love match because Emily and Henry went on to have four more children, although the marriage was kept under wraps for possibly a decade or more.

However, in the 1891 census, Emily was accorded her title of Lady Waterpark and was living openly with Henry at Doveridge.



Long Close c.1910

Our second peer is George Harry Grey, the seventh Earl of Stamford, third Earl of Warrington and ninth Baron Grey of Groby, who had inherited his titles and estates (including Bradgate) as an 18-year-old orphan. He was a 'wild child' who, in 1848, as soon as he was 21, eloped with Elizabeth King Billage, a Cambridge shoemaker's daughter. But only ten months after she died prematurely in 1854, George remarried, choosing this time an equestrian bare-back performer from a London circus, Catherine Cox.

Although there was some animosity towards both unconventional marriages, the public and press at large admired both women for their great beauty, their attractive personal attributes and their generosity. There was never a shortage of social invitations for George and both of his wives. As Master of the Quorn Hunt, George Grey built a 52-roomed mansion at Groby which he called Bradgate House (the original being already a ruin), and kept it as his hunting season home until he died there in 1883. Catherine herself died there in 1905, and two decades later the house was demolished.

Evelyn Brown



Portrait of Catherine, Countess of Stamford and Warrington, after her marriage.