

# **The Ancestry of William Davenport of Reading**

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## Introduction

The ancestry of William Davenport of Reading, Berkshire, who married Grace Alloway in 1707 and died in 1723, was researched in detail in the early twentieth century. Several generations of his descendants had firmly believed he was born at Worfield, Shropshire, into a family of gentry that had earlier migrated from Cheshire, with an established pedigree extending back to the twelfth century. One descendant, Canon James Davenport, carried out extensive research to try to prove this, which he published in a booklet in 1923. Although very reluctant to reject the family tradition, he conceded that there was insufficient evidence to prove the link between the Reading family and the supposed ancestors.

The evidence I have found proves that William Davenport of Reading could not possibly have been the individual born in Worfield, as I have found the death of his mother, Elizabeth Davenport, in 1712 in Reading, and the subsequent administration granted to her son at the Berkshire Archdeaconry Court. The mother of William Davenport of Worfield died there in 1709.

I am interested in William Davenport's ancestry because he is my wife Jessica's 6x great grandfather, but his ancestry is now of greater significance for posterity because he is also the 7x great grandfather of Catherine Elizabeth (Kate) Middleton and is now an ancestor of an heir to the throne. The version of the Middleton ancestry containing the unproven link has been published as fact by some recent authors. This document supplements research carried out by Canon Davenport with evidence found as a result of my own research.

In this account two clergymen named James Davenport are mentioned. All mentions of *Canon Davenport* refer to Rev. (later Canon) James Davenport (1857-1930), Rector of Harvington, Worcestershire, who carried out much research on the Davenport family, and all mentions of *James Davenport* or *Rev. Davenport* refer to Rev. James Davenport (1750-1841), Vicar of Stratford-upon-Avon, the great grandfather of Canon Davenport and grandson of William Davenport of Reading.

## Summary of research on William Davenport's ancestry

Canon James Davenport (1857-1930), Rector of Harvington, was a descendant of William Davenport who was very interested in genealogy, researched his own ancestry in great detail and wrote two pamphlets on the Davenport family.

In a pamphlet published (for private circulation) in 1890 entitled *William Davenport, of Reading, and his Descendants*, Canon Davenport stated that William Davenport had been baptised on 16 March 1679/80 at Worfield in Shropshire, the son of Henry Davenport, Esq., whose family had migrated from Cheshire to Shropshire in the early seventeenth century. The pedigree of the Cheshire family has been recorded back to the twelfth century, with many connections to other landed gentry and more distant links to royalty. This account of William Davenport's ancestry had been accepted by several generations of his descendants, from the time of Canon Davenport's great grandfather, another James Davenport, Vicar of Stratford-upon-Avon (1750-1841), grandson of William Davenport. It was believed that

William Davenport had been born in Shropshire, had left home against his father's will, gone abroad, and eventually settled in Reading.

The information in Canon Davenport's pamphlet was incorporated into a book published in 1914 by F.M. Lupton entitled *Descendants of Charles Hobbs*. The author, Francis Martineau Lupton, was a member of a prominent Leeds family, and is Catherine Elizabeth Middleton's great great grandfather.

Canon Davenport carried out extensive research to try to prove William Davenport's ancestry. He identified two adult individuals named William Davenport, of similar age, both with a connection to Reading, and two baptisms that could relate to these individuals. From his somewhat biased perspective that the family tradition must be correct, he presented evidence for the connection between each adult individual and what he believed to be their baptism, but conceded that these connections could not be conclusively proved based on the evidence available. He published this research in his second pamphlet entitled *The Davenport Family of Reading and Welford on Avon* published (for private circulation) in 1923.

Canon Davenport's later pamphlet was published several years after Lupton's book, which has been used in recent years as a source of information on Catherine Elizabeth Middleton's ancestry. She is a descendant of Robert Hobbes, who married Elizabeth Davenport Ashford (daughter of Thomas Ashford and Sarah Davenport, granddaughter of William Davenport of Reading).

Even before I discovered evidence that disproved William Davenport of Reading being the son of Henry Davenport of Worfield, there remained some doubt as to the truth of this relationship, because of lack of sufficient evidence other than family tradition and published pedigrees. Following the surge of interest in Catherine Middleton and her origins, the 'weak link' of William Davenport's unproven ancestry has frequently been ignored by people who have accepted the validity of the published pedigrees without question, and without any further verification, resulting in a proliferation of inaccurate pedigrees including the supposed earlier generations and their connections to the Royal Family. Examples include articles by Christopher Wilson in the *Daily Mail*. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1299794/How-Prince-William-Kate-Middleton-related-thanks-Tudor-tyrant.html> and by Charlotte Eagar in *The Spectator* dated 11 March 2011.

I have followed up Canon Davenport's research (with the benefit of the many indexes, both printed and electronic, that have become available since his day) and found evidence that proves that William Davenport could not possibly have been born at Worfield, but had almost certainly been born in Reading.

The information that is known about the two adult individuals named William Davenport and the two individuals baptised with that name will now be presented. Some of this information has been taken directly from Canon Davenport's later pamphlet, but is verifiable using original sources. This is supplemented by my own findings, together with a discussion of how the incorrect family tradition may have come about.

## **William Davenport and Grace Alloway**

Canon Davenport investigated the family of William and Grace Davenport of Reading and their descendants in great detail.

William Davenport married Grace Alloway at Swallowfield, Berkshire, a parish just south of Reading, on 11 June 1707. They had six children during the period 1709-1722, two of whom died in infancy. William Davenport died in 1723 and was buried at St Laurence, Reading. His widow subsequently married Peter Breach in 1726 and died in 1757 with a recorded age at death of 78, giving a year of birth about 1679. The children of William and Grace, all baptised at St Laurence, were:

- Elizabeth, 1709 (probably buried at St Laurence, Reading on 17 May 1740)
- Anne, 1711, died 1713
- William, 1713-1798 (see below)
- Dinah, 1715, died 1717
- Dinah, 1717 (no further information known)
- John, 1721-1767, married Frances Henderson in 1745 and had issue

William Davenport's son, William Davenport the younger (1713-1798), prospered in Reading as a saddler's ironmonger and was able to send four of his sons to the University of Oxford, all of whom became clergymen. He married Elizabeth Marshall at New Windsor in 1738 and they had 7 children:

- Sarah Davenport (1741-1805), married Thomas Ashford of Stratford-upon-Avon and had one child, Elizabeth Davenport Ashford who is an ancestor of Catherine Elizabeth Middleton
- William Davenport (1743-1801), went into business with his father and remained in Reading until his death
- Elizabeth Davenport (1745-1746), died in infancy
- David Davenport (1747-1815), became Rector of Bardwell in Suffolk
- James Davenport (1750-1841), became Vicar of Stratford-upon-Avon and is an ancestor of my wife Jessica (née Wilkins) whose grandmother was Esma Margaret Davenport
- Charles Davenport (1753-1777), became a curate at Walsall
- Solomon Davenport (1754-1813), became a peripatetic preacher

## **William Davenport and Sarah Kent**

Canon Davenport discovered the existence of a second William Davenport having a somewhat tenuous connection with Reading, of similar age to the William Davenport who married Grace Alloway in 1707. This William Davenport was a naval commander who died in the Mediterranean in 1707. Lieutenants' Certificates show that a Mr William Davenport, aged 22, having served 3 years 2 months and 2 days, was gazetted Lieutenant on 11 February 1701/2.

Canon Davenport established that this William Davenport was married to Sarah Kent, but had not traced the marriage. I found that the marriage took place on 20 April 1706 at St Martin in the Fields, Westminster. Both bride and groom were 'of this parish' and the marriage took place following the issue of a licence by the Bishop of London.

After William Davenport's death, administration was granted to Sarah Davenport at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC) on 17 June 1708. The English translation of the Latin record of the administration is 'To Sarah Davenport widow, relict of William Davenport late Captain of the royal ship The Enterprise who died on the high seas.'

Sarah Davenport's will, made in 1712 and proved at the PCC in 1714, confirms that she was the daughter of Clement Kent of Goring and Reading, but makes no mention of her husband's family. She had been born on 26 December 1680, but not baptised until 23 October 1685 at St Giles, Reading, along with her two brothers. When she made her will she was living in the parish of St James, Westminster. She was buried on 9 October 1714 at St Giles, Reading. There is no evidence of any issue from the marriage.

Apart from the fact that he married a woman who had been born in Reading, no evidence has been found that this William Davenport had any other connection with Reading. His recorded age corresponds to the William Davenport born at Worfield in 1680 and his social status as a commissioned officer in the Royal Navy is consistent with a younger son born into a family of gentry.

### **William Davenport baptised in Reading in 1682**

The baptism took place of William Danport (a variant of the name), son of Laurence and Elizabeth, on 19 October 1682 at St Giles, Reading. As this was the same church at which Sarah Kent had been baptised, Canon Davenport surmised that this baptism related to the William Davenport who married Sarah Kent and that they had probably known each other during childhood. No other individual with surname Davenport was baptised in the three Reading parishes before 1709.

Research at Berkshire Record Office in Reading revealed the burial of Elizabeth Davenport, widow, at St Laurence, Reading, on 29 October 1712, and a grant of administration to her son William at the Berkshire Archdeaconry Court on 12 November of the same year.

The only family known to have been living in Reading in the late seventeenth century with the surname Davenport, based on the single 1682 baptism entry, comprised Laurence and Elizabeth Davenport and their son William. Thirty years later William Davenport and his family were living in the parish of St Laurence at the same time that the widowed Elizabeth Davenport died there. The evidence from the administration bond supports the conclusion that the William Davenport who married Grace Alloway was the son of Laurence and Elizabeth Davenport. Canon Davenport made no mention of this Elizabeth Davenport in his booklet, so was presumably unaware of the existence of the administration bond, which at the time he carried out his research would have been in a collection of Archdeaconry of

Berkshire probate records held at Somerset House in London. If he had been aware of this document he would almost certainly have concluded, reluctantly, that the family tradition must be incorrect.

William Davenport's occupation was recorded in the administration bond as a feltmaker and he signed the bond, so was able to write. The bond is accompanied by an inventory, valuing Elizabeth Davenport's possessions at £17-12-0.

There is no trace of a burial of Laurence Davenport in Reading before 1712, suggesting that either the burial took place in Reading but was not recorded, or that he died and was buried elsewhere.

There is no trace of a marriage of Laurence and Elizabeth Davenport in Reading, but a marriage took place at St Marylebone, Middlesex, on 22 August 1681, between Laurence Davenport and Elizabeth Lewis. No further information was recorded in the marriage register apart from the names of the bride and groom, and I could find no trace of a Faculty Office, Vicar General or Bishop of London marriage licence allegation. There is no trace of baptisms of children at St Marylebone, or in any of the churches in the surrounding area.

### **William Davenport born in Shropshire in 1679/80**

William Davenport born at Worfield, Shropshire on 24 February 1679/80 and baptised on 16 March, was the son of Henry Davenport, Esq., of Hawn (Hallon), who had married Elizabeth Talbot. Henry Davenport's ancestors had migrated to Shropshire from Chorley, in the parish of Wilmslow in Cheshire, in the early seventeenth century.

Canon Davenport found that nothing is known conclusively about this William Davenport following his baptism. He is not mentioned in *Burke's Landed Gentry* or local histories. Nor is he mentioned in the wills of any family members, included his father Henry (1698), his mother Elizabeth (1699), his eldest brother Sharrington (1719), his next brother Henry (1722), or his sister Anne (1711).

Canon Davenport reported that he had found several manuscript pedigrees, in which the following entry appears for William Davenport, son of Henry Davenport of Worfield:

William Davenport = .... daur of .... Kent of .....  
Commander  
Man of War, died at sea  
in Mediterranean 1707  
baptised 16 Mar 1679 [i.e. 1679/80]

From his perspective of believing in the family tradition, Canon Davenport cast doubt on the accuracy of these manuscript pedigrees, speculating as to errors that could have been made in their compilation, and suggesting reasons why this William Davenport is not recorded in wills or printed sources. However, if the pedigree is correct it is not difficult to suggest possible valid reasons for these omissions. The fact that William Davenport was not

mentioned in his father's will could be because some financial arrangement had already been made for him. Most of the relevant printed sources were compiled long after his death and that of his siblings, and as he had no descendants, he could easily have been forgotten.

### **Laurence and Elizabeth Davenport**

There is no trace of the burial of Laurence Davenport in Reading, and no trace of him in any of the surviving Reading parish records or records of Reading Corporation. A grant of administration was issued for an individual named Laurence Davenport at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury on 19 September 1694. He was described as being of St Clement Danes in Middlesex, but had died overseas at Guinea. Administration was granted to his widow Elizabeth Davenport. The name Laurence Davenport is sufficiently distinctive that it is highly likely that the marriage record in 1681, baptism record of William in 1682 and grant of administration in 1694, all of which name his wife as Elizabeth, relate to the same person.

Poor Law records for St Clement Danes in 1682 include two records for Laurence Davenport in what is apparently a list of ratepayers, but no amount is shown against his name. Records of the Royal African Company, held at The National Archives in series T70, include lists of employees, both living and deceased. These indicate that Laurence Davenport was a surgeon in Sierra Leone, who was included in several lists of employees from February 1687 onwards, but was recorded as dead in May 1693. Many surgeons in the London area served apprenticeships with the Barber Surgeons Company at that time. Original records of apprenticeships are still held by the Barbers Company, but microfilm copies are held at the Guildhall Library in London. No record of Lawrence Davenport could be found in these records.

From the information that has been found, the following explanation seems likely: Lawrence Davenport was living in St Clement Danes at the time of his marriage and married Elizabeth Lewis at St Marylebone in 1681. It is possible that he had no previous connection with Reading, and the reason William was born there in 1682 was because it was his mother's home town, as it was common practice for a woman to return to her parents' home for the birth of her first child. Laurence Davenport left England sometime between 1682 and 1687, explaining why no further children were born. Elizabeth may have moved back to Reading while Lawrence was away from home, and is likely to have returned there after his death. William Davenport therefore grew up in Reading and his mother Elizabeth subsequently died there.

Although the above explanation seems highly probable, other explanations are possible, and no information has yet been found on the origins of Laurence Davenport. The baptism of an Elizabeth Lewis took place on 24 February 1655 at St Giles, Reading, and this individual had several siblings. A search for wills of individuals with the surname Lewis in Reading, proved at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, Consistory Court of Sarum and Berkshire Archdeaconry Court was carried out. One will and one administration for the surname were found relating to Reading, but neither indicates any relationship to Elizabeth Davenport.

An individual named Laurence Davenport was apprenticed to a member of the Saddlers' Company in London in 1664. On 5 August 1664, Lawrence Davenport, son of Lawrence Davenport of Wilmslow, Cheshire, yeoman, was apprenticed to George Valley. Most of the early Saddlers' Company records were destroyed in an air raid in 1940, but the Court Minute Book, 1606-65 (held at the Guildhall Library in London, Ms 5385) has survived and from 1658-1665 contains entries for 199 apprenticeships, a small fraction of the total, including that for Laurence Davenport. Men did not always belong to the livery company relating to the occupation they practised, so it is conceivable that George Valley was a surgeon rather than a saddler, but no corroborating evidence has been found. As most other Saddlers' Company records for the period have not survived, it is impossible to determine whether this Laurence Davenport completed his apprenticeship. Men who were admitted to membership of London livery companies usually also became freemen of the City of London, but there are no surviving freedom admission papers for the appropriate period.

### **The origin of the family tradition**

Canon Davenport stated in his later pamphlet published in 1923:

The Welfordians [Canon Davenport's grandfather, Rev. Charles Davenport, son of Rev. James Davenport, was Rector of Welford-on-Avon in Warwickshire] confidently claim that the Worfield family have unintentionally got hold of the wrong William in their Rolls, and that the Commander of "The Enterprise" who lost his life in 1707 and was husband of Sarah Kent, was probably the William, son of Laurence and Elizabeth, baptized at S. Giles', Reading, in 1682.

The lengthy obituary of Rev. James Davenport, D.D., (1750-1841), Vicar of Stratford-upon-Avon, grandson of William and Grace Davenport and great grandfather of Canon James Davenport, which appeared in the *Leamington Spa Courier and Warwickshire Standard* on 18 September 1841 (as quoted by Canon Davenport) stated:

The Rev. James Davenport was born at Reading in Berkshire on August 14, 1750 and is a branch of an ancient Shropshire family of that name. William Davenport (the ancestor of the family so far as I deem it necessary to trace back the pedigree) married about 1682 [evidently a printer's error for 1602] Jane, daughter and heiress of Francis Bromley, a son of Sir George Bromley, Chief Justice of Chester, by which union he acquired possession of Hallon Hall, and the family became from thenceforth known as the Davenports of Davenport and Hallon.

The obituary had been written by Mr Leigh Cliffe who was a close friend of Rev. Davenport in the closing years of his life. According to Canon Davenport, Rev. Davenport had often talked about his ancestry with Mr Cliffe, who was a local antiquary, and he further stated that Rev. Davenport was known to be using the Davenport arms as early as 1773 when an undergraduate at Oxford. The Davenport arms were borne by Rev. Davenport from then onwards and appear on his tablet in the chancel of the parish church of Stratford-upon-Avon.



The arms, as borne by Rev. Davenport were: Argent a chevron between three cross-crosslets fitchée sable, with crest: a felon's head couped proper, round the neck a halter Or, and motto: Fortes adjuvat ipse Deus.

In *Burke's General Armory* (1842 and 1851) four Davenport families are recorded. The first is the main Cheshire line, the second the Shropshire family and the third the supposed branch that includes Rev. James Davenport. It should be noted that publications such as these were based on information supplied by the families themselves, are known to contain numerous errors, and many individuals bore coats of arms without having the right to do so. The right to bear arms is limited to individuals who have either received a grant of arms themselves or are descended from an individual to whom arms were granted in the past. The College of Arms have confirmed that no grant of arms was made to James Davenport.

Canon Davenport was very reluctant to reject the family tradition because he assumed that Rev. Davenport must have known about his grandfather's ancestry, but in reality he probably knew very little. It was, and is, quite common for people who have not previously taken any interest in their family history to know little about their grandparents, particularly if they had never known them. James Davenport's father, William Davenport the younger, had been only nine years old when his father, William Davenport the elder, had died in 1723, after which Grace Davenport married Peter Breach, so she may have been less likely to talk about her first husband than if she had remained a widow. William Davenport the younger would have had no memory of his paternal grandparents, as his grandmother Elizabeth Davenport had died the year before he was born, and he may not have known their names. James Davenport's grandmother, Grace Breach, would have known the name of her first husband's mother and probably that of his father, but it is likely that she had been dead for several years by the time members the family started to become curious about their ancestry. Following Grace's death, what was known about William Davenport's origins was probably very sketchy. However, since the descendants of William Davenport the elder were the only family of that surname in Reading, and it was not particularly common in the south of England at that time, no doubt later generations became curious about the family's origins.

When he went up to Oxford, James Davenport, or possibly his elder brother David before him, may have encountered sons of the landed gentry from the Cheshire and Shropshire areas who asked if they were related to the Davenport gentry families of those areas. This was probably the first time they had heard any mention of other families with their surname. This discovery may have prompted an enquiry to the College of Arms (the official body responsible for granting coats of arms, usually to members of the landed gentry, and recording pedigrees), which may have held a copy of the pedigree of the Worfield family, including William Davenport born in 1680, but possibly with no further information recorded about him. The Reading family may therefore have jumped to the conclusion that the appearance of William Davenport in Reading following the apparent disappearance of William Davenport from Worfield must imply that they were one and the same person.

As the son of an ironmonger, rubbing shoulders with the sons of the aristocracy and gentry at Oxford, James Davenport would have been pleased to have discovered in William Davenport, son of Henry Davenport, Esq. of Worfield, Shropshire, a potential grandfather

from a family with a pedigree befitting an Oxford-educated gentleman. The family tradition that Canon Davenport was so convinced must be true would seem to have arisen because James Davenport adopted William Davenport of Worfield as his grandfather based on information that seemed to fit, and perhaps some wishful thinking, rather than hard evidence, an error frequently made by people researching their ancestry, both then and now. The erroneous ancestry of William Davenport of Reading was literally set in stone in the coat of arms on Rev. James Davenport's tablet in Holy Trinity, Stratford-upon-Avon, and was perpetuated as fact through several subsequent generations.

### **Conclusion**

I have found no evidence in any original documents to support the family tradition that William Davenport of Reading was the son of Henry Davenport of Worfield.

Based on the available evidence it cannot be absolutely proved that the William Davenport who married Sarah Kent and died at sea in 1707 was the William Davenport born at Worfield in 1680, but this seems highly likely, as it was common for younger sons from gentry families to become naval officers.

The most likely explanation of William Davenport of Reading's ancestry is that he was born in Reading, and baptised there in 1682, the son of Laurence Davenport and Elizabeth Lewis. Laurence Davenport was a surgeon who was employed by the Royal African Company and spent several years in Sierra Leone, where he died about 1693, and his widow Elizabeth died in Reading in 1712.