

THE WHITE FRONTAL

A regional magazine, of unknown date or origin, printed a series of 10 articles entitled '*The History of Worsley Church.*' From certain aspects and comments taken from the articles, it is thought that this probably appeared around 1942. In the 'third instalment,' there is a brief mention of the altar frontals. The article states:

The first altar frontal was embroidered by the first Lady Ellesmere, but is not now in the church. There is a full set of five frontals, the white one being the work of the second Countess of Ellesmere. On Christmas Day, 1898, another beautiful altar frontal was used for the first time. It was designed by the Reverend Ernest Geldart, rector of Little Braxted, Essex, and was worked by some ladies of the parish, under the direction of Miss Harvey, of Kensington. The design springs from a golden pot, and bears upon its branches, besides leaves and conventional clusters of grapes crowned with golden crowns, shields displaying the emblems of the Passion or the Sacred Monogram. The whole is laid upon a white silk ground, and has a most rich effect. There is only one other church in England which has the same design, and this is much smaller. The frontal is used today on the Greater Festivals only. Mr. Hodgkinson, writing about this frontal in 1899, said: "I am sure that you will be glad that such a splendid addition has been made to your parish church for glory and for beauty."



[Detail of the *Golden Pot* taken from the white frontal at St. Mark's Church, Worsley.]

The **Reverend Ernest Geldart** (1842 - 1929) was a prolific and gifted 'priest-architect,' one of many who flourished in the 19th century. A High Churchman, he combined his clerical career with that of architect, mostly but not exclusively of ecclesiastical buildings, and was particularly

known as an expert on church furnishing and decoration. He was born in Holloway, north London, and his father was a Missionary Scripture Reader, who moved to Manchester in 1856. There, Ernest became a pupil in the architect's firm of Waterhouse & Co. In 1871, he left the firm and enrolled at King's College, London, to read Theology. He was ordained deacon in 1873 and priest in 1875. Eventually, he was the author of *A Manual of Church Decoration and Symbolism* (1899) and *The Art of Garnishing Churches at Christmas and Other Times* (1882). He later became rector of St. Nicholas, Little Braxted, Essex (1881 - 1900). [Courtesy of Dr. James Bettley: A MONTH IN THE COUNTRY; Rev. ERNEST GELDART AT KELSEALE, 1881]

However, in 1876 he became a curate at Hatchford, Surrey - the location of one of the country homes of the first Earl of Ellesmere!



[Detail of a *Golden Coronet* surmounting a cluster of grapes, taken from the white frontal at St. Mark's Church, Worsley.]

In the nineteenth century, it became the home of Francis Egerton, 1st Earl of Ellesmere, who rebuilt the house in the 1850s. Lord Ellesmere started an arboretum in the grounds in 1845, while Lady Ellesmere laid out the garden.



Two questions arise: Who was Miss Harvey, and was there any connection between the Egertons and the Rev. Ernest Geldart? Miss Harvey was Hanna Rebecca Harvey, born in Ireland, in about 1855. At some point, she came over to England, and settled in the Kensington area of London towards the end of the nineteenth century. She eventually appeared in the 1911 census living at 8 Warwick Mansions, Kensington, SW5, and her trade was 'embroidress of church needlework.' She lived near the church of St. Cuthbert, Philbeach Gardens, and worked several articles designed by Ernest Geldart. The St. Cuthbert's Parish Magazine, July 1893, reports that Miss Harvey has been 'acquired' as lady superintendent of the Embroidery School. The account of the church in the Survey of London tells us that the members of the congregation took part in the furnishing and decorating of the church. They enthusiastically organised themselves into teams which they called Guilds. The Guild of St. Margaret "under the direction of Miss Harvey," according to one caption, were responsible for vestments, banners and other drapery within the church. It seems most probable that the '*ladies of the parish*' referred to were members of the London church, rather than from Worsley - but this is unclear. Other guilds at the church cared for the stonework and the joinery. It would appear that she died in Bath in 1942, aged 87.

Dr. James Bettley has provided an insight into the connection between Geldart and the Egertons. Ernest was curate of St. Matthew's, Hatchford, from 1876 to 1880, where one of his duties as curate was teaching at the school run by the vicar (Rev. L. H. W. Wesley). In Geldart's diaries, he wrote: '18 April 1878 (while at Hatchford): *Went to Sandhurst in the afternoon riding with Egerton to Weybridge & from Wellington College to his father's house.*' And later: '15 Jan. 1884: *Up to town. At 6.0 Arthur Egerton dined with me at the Club.*' And even later: '3 Jun. 1912 *'...Egerton & I trained to Guildford then cycled over to the Hut where we lunched.*' Bettley says this would have been Arthur Frederick Egerton, son of Lt. Col. Arthur Frederick, who was himself the fourth son of the first Earl, thus making the younger Arthur the first Earl's grandson.



As an architect, Geldart designed a bungalow for Arthur Frederick Egerton in Scotland. The drawing is now at The MET in New York, and is one of 66 pieces of work at the museum by Ernest Geldart. It is dated 25 January 1918 and is entitled **Colonel A. F. Egerton Cottage at Kenmore, Perthshire.**



Length: 8 feet
Height: 3' 2"

Superfrontal: 8 feet
10½ inches

which the Book rests. The first altar frontal was embroidered by the first Lady Ellesmere, but is not now in the church. There is a full set of five frontals, the white one being the work of the second Countess of Ellesmere. On Christmas Day, 1898, another beautiful altar frontal was used for the first time. It was designed by the Reverend Ernest Geldart, Rector of Little Braxted, Essex, and was worked by some ladies of the parish under the direction of Miss Harvey, of Kensington. The design springs from a golden pot, and bears upon its branches, besides leaves

and conventional clusters of grapes crowned with golden crowns, shields displaying the emblems of the Passion or the Sacred Monogram. The whole is laid upon a white silk ground, and has a most rich effect. There is only one other church in England which has the same design, and this is much smaller. This frontal is used to-day on the Greater Festivals only. Its value at the present time would be well over £200. Mr. Hodgkinson, writing about this frontal in 1899, said: "I am sure that you will be glad that such a splendid addition has been made to your parish church 'for glory and for beauty.'" The very handsome piece of altar lace used on the greater festivals is interesting from the fact that it was taken from an altar in Sebastopol in the Crimea by a British sailor when the looting was going on after the siege. It was purchased from him on the spot by Captain Heaton, and finally was restored to the Church, not in Sebastopol, but in Worsley. There is a fund for the repair of the fabric of the church, which was left by the second Lord Ellesmere, and to which was added, in 1893, the sum which the Bridgewater Trustees annually paid to the Vicar of Eccles in respect of certain sittings in Eccles Church. On the death of Canon Pitcairn the payment was diverted.