

## Francis Leveson-Gower

I January 1800 to 18 February 1857

1st Earl of Ellesmere



Adjacent to the altar and next to the Ellesmere Memorial chapel stands the memorial tomb to the First Earl of Ellesmere, Lord Francis Egerton, the patron of the church. The tomb was designed by George Gilbert Scott, R.A., sculpted in Caen stone by J. B. Philip of London, and was erected in 1860. The effigy of the late Earl, in his robes as a Knight of the Garter, reposes on a slab of Devonshire marble on the top of the tomb. The inscription reads: **Francis Egerton K.G., Earl of Ellesmere Born Jan<sup>r</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> 1800 Died Feb 18<sup>th</sup> 1857/ To the Founder of this Church/Blessed is that Servant whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing/ This Monument was erected by his Eldest Son**

Born **Francis Leveson-Gower** on 1 January **1800**, the 1st Earl of Ellesmere was the 2nd son of the Duke of Sutherland, and Elizabeth **Gordon**, Countess of Sutherland. Francis was educated at Eton from 1811 to 1814, when he proceeded to Christ Church, Oxford. On 6 August 1819 he became a lieutenant in the Staffordshire regiment of yeomanry, and was promoted to a captaincy on 27 September in the same year.

On 22 June 1822, he married **Harriet Catherine Greville** (1800-1866), grand-daughter of the 3rd Duke of Portland.

They had (reputedly!) eleven children, including:

- George Egerton, 2nd Earl of Ellesmere (1823 - 1862) (had a twin brother Francis; died aged 10mo)
- Hon. Francis Egerton (1824 - 1895) (m. Lady Louisa Caroline Cavendish)
- Hon. Algernon Fulke Egerton (1825 - 1891) (m. Hon. Alice Louisa Cavendish)
- Hon. Arthur Frederick Egerton (1829 - 1866) (m. Helen Smith)
- Lady Alice Harriot Frederica Egerton (1830 - 1928) (m. George Byng)
- Lady Blanche Egerton (1832 - 1894) (m. John Montagu)
- Hon. Granville Egerton (1834-1851), who was killed at sea

**Lord Francis** entered Parliament in 1822 as member for the pocket borough of Bletchingley in Surrey, a seat he held until 1826. He afterwards sat for Sutherland between 1826 and 1831, and for South Lancashire from 1835 to 1846. Appointed a Lord of the Treasury in 1827, he held the post of Chief Secretary for Ireland from June 1828 till July 1830, when he became Secretary at War for a short time. He was a Liberal Conservative and supported the idea of free trade and the founding of the London University. Lord Francis sat as MP for South Lancashire until, on 6 July 1846, he was elevated to a Peerage as Viscount **Brackley** and **Earl of Ellesmere**. He was made a Knight of the Garter in 1855 and served as Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire (1856-1857).

**Lord Francis** inherited Worsley in 1833 under the will of his great uncle and godfather the 3rd Duke of Bridgewater. Under the terms of the will, he changed his name to **Egerton** and this was granted by Royal Licence. In 1846 he was raised to the peerage as **Earl of Ellesmere**, of Ellesmere in the County of Salop, with the subsidiary title **Viscount Brackley**, of Brackley in the County of Northampton. In October 1838, he was named Rector of King's College, Aberdeen.

The Earl brought his wife and family to live at Worsley in 1837. **Lord Francis** and **Lady Harriet** developed the Park and the surrounding area. As well as building the New Hall and gardens, **Lord Francis** commissioned a gardener's cottage to house his gardener, the Aviary, as a shooting and fishing lodge, the Court House and Police Station and added the black and white finish to the Packet House.

Worsley in the 19th century was heavily industrialised, based on cotton manufacture, iron and brick making and coal mining and Lord and Lady **Ellesmere** involved themselves in improving conditions for the local working population. They built and endowed St Mark's Church in Worsley and St Paul's in Walkden with their associated schools. In 1845, **Lady Ellesmere** began a Domestic Servants School and in 1848 Lord Ellesmere established a medical dispensary and Reading Room. They also funded a recreation ground, later St Mary's Park, for colliers and their families. **Lord Ellesmere** banned the employment of women and children underground in his mines and introduced night-school classes for his workers on the estate and a non-contributory pension scheme. In 1846, a cricket club was established, firstly on the Cross Field. Then, in 1868, it was relocated to its current site behind the Cock Hotel. Lord Francis became its first President (1846-1857).

In 1833, he succeeded his father as beneficiary of the Bridgewater Trust and shortly after moved with his family to Worsley. The whole district was in a state of religious and educational destitution and Lord Francis was alarmed at what he saw. He quickly moved to establish a church in the area. **The Foundation Stone** was laid on **15 June 1844** by **Lord Egerton's** eldest son George Granville Francis on the occasion of his 21st birthday. A little over two years later, the new church was consecrated on the commanding site it now occupies, dominating the rural landscape. The architect was George Gilbert Scott, one of the most prolific architects of the Victorian era – 740 new or restored buildings, including 470 churches! Of the many churches Scott designed, St Mark is perhaps the purest in form. Although he barely mentions it in his autobiography, his grandson Sir Giles (the architect of Liverpool Anglican Cathedral) is reported to have said he considered it to be the best of his works of art. St. Mark's is built in the Gothic Revival style and is an early and particularly fine example.

The 1st Earl was interested in art. In 1835 and 1836 he spent over £3,000 on books and paintings. His art collection at Worsley Hall included Edward Landseer's **Return from Hawking** which gave the likeness of the 1st Earl of Ellesmere and his family. To the collection of pictures which he inherited from his great-uncle, the 3rd Duke of Bridgewater, he made numerous additions, and he built a gallery to which the public were allowed free access. He was a trustee of the National Gallery (1856-1857) and also initiated the collection of the National Portrait Gallery, by donating the Chandos portrait of Shakespeare in 1856. It is listed as item one in the collection.

The 1st Earl was well-travelled and visited places in the East, Mediterranean and Holy Land. He provided the illustrations for his wife's **Journal of a Tour to the Holy Land** (1841). Lord Francis also published his own poetry and journalism as well as translations of French and German plays, romances and histories. His impressions of travel were recorded in *Mediterranean Sketches* (1843) and in the notes to a poem entitled *The Pilgrimage*. He published several other works in prose and verse. His literary reputation secured for him the position of rector of the University of Aberdeen in 1841. Lord **Ellesmere** served as president of the Royal Geographical Society. Lord Ellesmere was a member of the Canterbury Association from 27 March 1848. In 1849, the chief surveyor of the Canterbury Association, Joseph Thomas, named Lake Ellesmere in New Zealand after him.

Lord **Ellesmere** died at Bridgewater House in London on 18 February **1857** and was buried in St Mark's Church, Worsley. He was succeeded by his son. He was survived by five sons and two daughters.

