

150_{years} 1849-1999

Worsley Court House



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Worsley Court House



1849 - 1999





Worsley Court House 1849 - 1999

Francis Egerton, the first Earl of Ellesmere, was the godson and great-nephew of Francis Egerton, third Duke of Bridgewater, also known as the Canal Duke. We owe our gratitude for Worsley Court House to both these noblemen in different ways. To the Duke because with his coal, canal and estates he generated the fortune which the younger Francis inherited in 1833 at the age of 33. He was the second son of the Duke of Sutherland and he spent much of his inheritance in ways that still benefit the people of Worsley.

It was in 1837, the year Queen Victoria came to the throne, that Francis brought his wife Harriet and his young family to live at Worsley Old Hall. He need not have moved north to this dirty

industrial village as the Duke of Bridgewater, in his will, had created a trust to manage his Lancashire properties. His heirs needed only to take the profits, but, as Lord Shaftesbury wrote when he came to visit their New Hall after 1846, 'they have done well to plant themselves, despite the unpleasant neighbourhood, in the midst of their duties and responsibilities. Many people of wealth would have fled to brighter spots. May God bless them with years of peace and usefulness.'

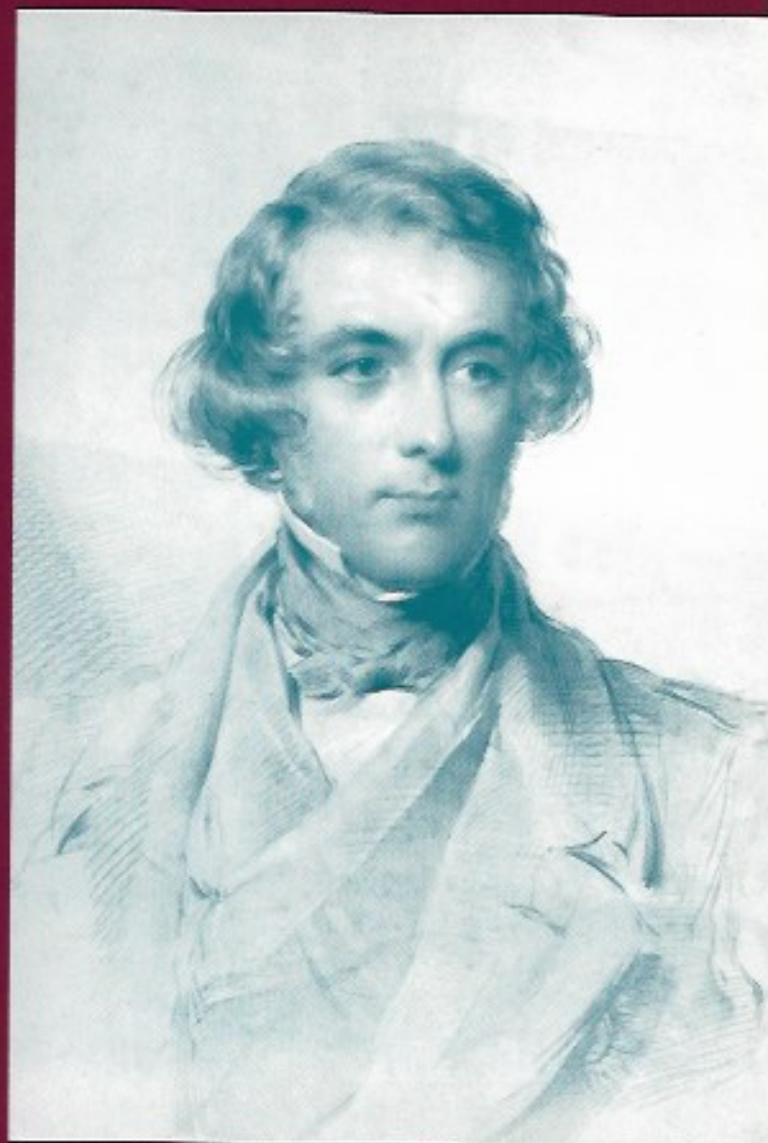
Lord Francis himself said in a public speech in Eccles market place: 'I believe that my possessions impose duties on me as binding as my rights.' He described Worsley as 'a God-forgotten place, much addicted to drink and rude sports, the



manners being deplorably low. The whole place was in a state of religious and educational destitution, there was no one to see to the spiritual wants and the teaching was all but nullity.'

As well as churches at Walkden and Worsley, he built the day schools where evening classes were held for the education of apprentices and the edification of the working men. With these completed and his New hall occupied, he decided that a public building for official meetings was still needed. This would be a venue for cultural and social occasions, even entertainments. It would be a suitably

*Francis Egerton
1st Earl of Ellesmere*



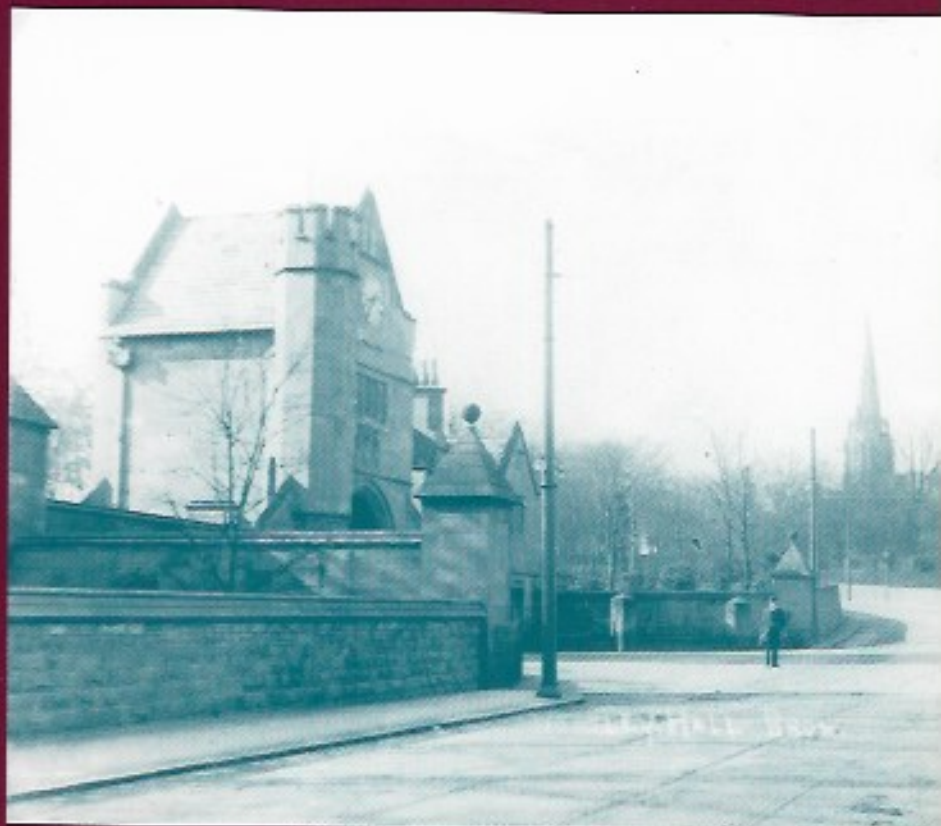


dignified setting for the local magistrates to hold the Petty Sessions, in particular for his Manorial Court, which at this time was held in The Grapes Hotel.

Imagine Worsley village in that time of transition. Between the canal and Barton Road at the far end of the village was the horse tramway carrying coal to the coal staithe. Beyond that stood four

great coke ovens belching smoke. These had replaced two small ovens opposite the top of Moss Lane. John Gilbert's old

The Gate House Lodge to Worsley New Hall was built in 1903 on the site of 'The Grapes'. It stood opposite the Court House until its demolition in 1959 to make way for the motorway. The coat of arms can be seen in the stone work of the motorway bridge nearest the Court House.



*The Court House & the Old Bridgewater Hotel
"The Grapes", demolished in 1903 and replaced
by a gatehouse to the New Hall.*



lime kiln, with steam rising from the slaking lime, stood opposite the Methodist chapel. James Brindley's noisy mortar mills were nearby. These were worked by a water wheel at the end of the Granary, powered by Worsley Brook, which ran open to the sky from the corn mill at the bottom of Mill Brow to where it dipped under the canal and out again by the roadside to flow towards Alderforest.

Where we now see pleasant houses around an open green with fine trees, there was, 150 years ago, an industrial complex providing everything necessary to keep the successful enterprises controlled by the Bridgewater Trust repaired and profitable. Stables for the barge horses stood next to the overnight

accommodation for those who worked the barges, which carried not only coal, but passengers and goods of every kind. The clock that struck 13 at one o'clock towered over the busy scene, warning the apprentices and skilled men of every craft to get back to work on time.

The great forge chimney poured out smoke and so did the chimney of the corn mill, which was no longer powered by water, but by steam. The coal fires of the cottages added their contribution to the pollution, which led to the nick-name 'Smoke Street' being applied to Barton Road. The Illustrated London News two years later described the road as 'the entrance to a series of hamlets in which dilapidated cottages, rude and squalid children and blackened coal works

Worsley Court House as it was originally built. Additions were made in 1896. On the extreme left is Walsh's cottage & Smithy. The Walsh family had been blacksmiths in Worsley for several generations.



formed the principal characteristics and where drunkenness, Sabbath breaking, cockfighting and disregard of all decency prevailed.'

What a contrast to the scene at the western end of the village where an old smithy had been demolished to make way for the Court House to be built opposite The Grapes Hotel. A fine new smithy was built on Worsley Road and just across the road from it, on the hill, was the great Cross Field with its new schools and majestic church, while beyond Walkden Road stood the Old and New Halls with their spacious grounds. The Brick Hall had only recently been demolished.

The third Earl of Ellesmere added further dignity to the scene when, in 1903, he replaced The Grapes Hotel with a fine stone gatehouse, which led into the New Hall grounds. When he demolished the buildings in the old Worsley Yard, he installed, above the gateway, the Duke of Bridgewater's famous clock that struck 13. The arch and the gatekeeper's house were demolished to make way for the motorway. They stood on the site now occupied by the roundabout. To provide a link with the past, the carving of the Ellesmere coat of arms, which had decorated the gatehouse, was set into the stonework of the motorway bridge, where it can still be seen.





The Court Leet & Court Baron of the manor of Worsley

The Court Rolls, which date back to 1581, chart the lives and times of local families whose names are still with us today. The Court Baron was a court of justice permitted to be held in the manor of a noble lord. The Court Leet dealt with administrative matters and misdemeanours committed within the manor. The freeholders of the manor made up the jury, with the lord's steward acting as clerk of the court. From the days of the canal makers they met in the old Bridgewater Hotel, commonly known as The Grapes Hotel, which stood on the site of the present motorway island. For their first meeting in the new Court House they just crossed the road, as recorded in the Court Rolls:

'On Friday twelfth day of October in the twelfth year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lady Victoria, Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and in the year of our Lord one thousand, eight hundred and forty nine held at the House of Mr George Sutcliffe the Bridgewater Hotel at Worsley aforesaid but adjourned to the New Court House'.

After a brief session with only two presentments, Robert Lansdale, foreman of the court, made this statement, which was signed by the 12 jurors:

'The Jurors aforesaid before they separate consider themselves called upon as a matter of Duty to express their admiration of this new and splendid



Court House which appears in every respect as a magnificent Establishment well adapted for the purpose it was intended for. Wherefore the said Jurors on behalf of themselves and the Public crave permission to tender their grateful acknowledgements to the Lords of the Manor.'

Following Queen Victoria's visit to Worsley in 1851, the jurors offered to the Earl and Countess, 'our united and humble Congratulations and Thanks, the former because we rejoice

Walsh's Smithy c1900.

This stood on Worsley Road adjacent to the Court House, visible on the right. The Walsh family had been blacksmiths in Worsley for several generations. Worsley Library now stands on this site.



that the Mansion of our highly esteemed Lord and Lady has been honoured by the August Presence of Royalty, the latter because that eventful visit afforded us and the rest of the inhabitants of this locality the Opportunity for the Display of our Feelings of Loyalty and Attachment to our Beloved Sovereign, her Consort and family.'

There is no evidence of any of the crowned heads of England entering the Court House but they have all driven past it, whether by horse-drawn carriage or luxurious limousine. On each occasion the local residents, and usually the assembled schoolchildren, were organised by the orders of the noble lords of Worsley to give them a royal and loyal welcome. In 1913 when George V came,

'the village was nicely filled in the neighbourhood of the Granary and Court House. The children who had been drawn from all the schools were exceedingly prominent. All proudly sported medals bearing the profiles of their Majesties and tiny Union Jacks. Streamers were fastened to the tramway poles. The bunting was provided by the third Earl of Ellesmere. Men of the Ellesmere Ambulance Corps were stationed at 50 yards with the constables. Their headquarters, with the stretcher, was the Court House.'



Worsley CourtHouse as originally built c1890





Petty Sessions at Worsley

The Manor Court was held only twice yearly, in April and October, and so the fortnightly magistrates' court of Petty Sessions was the first court to meet in the new building. On August 4 1849 The Manchester Guardian reported this first sitting of the Petty Session 'held in the new and handsome court house and town hall at Worsley.' The Earl of Ellesmere was one of the sitting magistrates and the other was Mr John Jackson. Mr H.L. Trafford was the chairman. On that occasion 13 house owners from Union Street in Pendlebury were summonsed under the Nuisance Removal and Prevention of Diseases Act, 'for the want of a sewer to carry off the water, which lay upon the surface and became stagnant.' Two surgeons supported the summons and the order

was granted.

Two local men were accused of fishing in the Bridgewater Canal at Worsley. It seems the Earl allowed fishing in the canal, except between Monton Bridge and Astley Bridge (in other words, anywhere except on his own lands). However, the Earl said he would not punish them if they promised not to do it again, as it would be a warning to others that these men had been summoned to appear in court.

Samuel Valentine was not so lucky. He was charged with fishing in the Earl's private fish ponds. The Earl's park keepers had found night lines and kept watch. At 11 o'clock on the night of July 18 they had seen Valentine throwing in



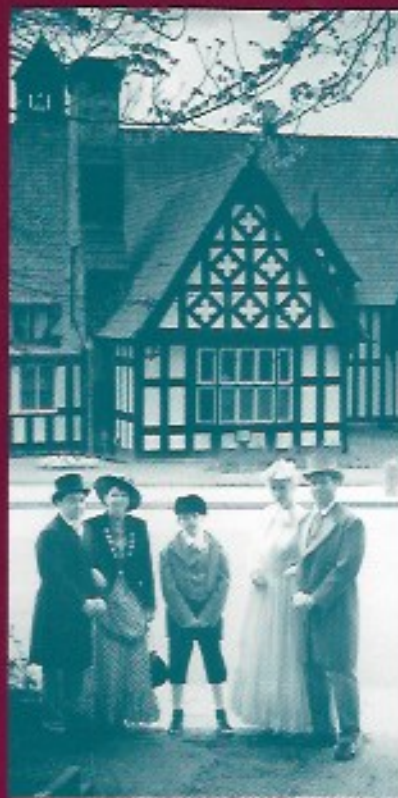
lines with several hooks on them. He had run off when he saw them, but one of the keepers had found a large eel on one line and a 6lb carp on the other. He was fined two pounds.

Members of the noble family visited the court during the sitting that day, including Her Grace the Duchess of Sutherland, mother of the Earl, Harriet Countess of Ellesmere, his wife, and Arthur, his twenty-year-old son.

Sometimes described as Worsley Police Court and evidently covering the area of

the Barton Poor Law Union, from Irlam to Pendlebury, the Petty Sessions dealt with petty crime such as trespass, poaching and drunkenness. James Gorton was

fined five shillings 'for being asleep in his cart at Worsley.' When Samuel Coburn was charged with being drunk in Worsley at 6pm he pleaded that he had 'a peculiar complaint which rendered his walk unsteady' and he brought a friend to witness that he had been with him from 12 o'clock and that they had only had one glass.





Not only a Court House

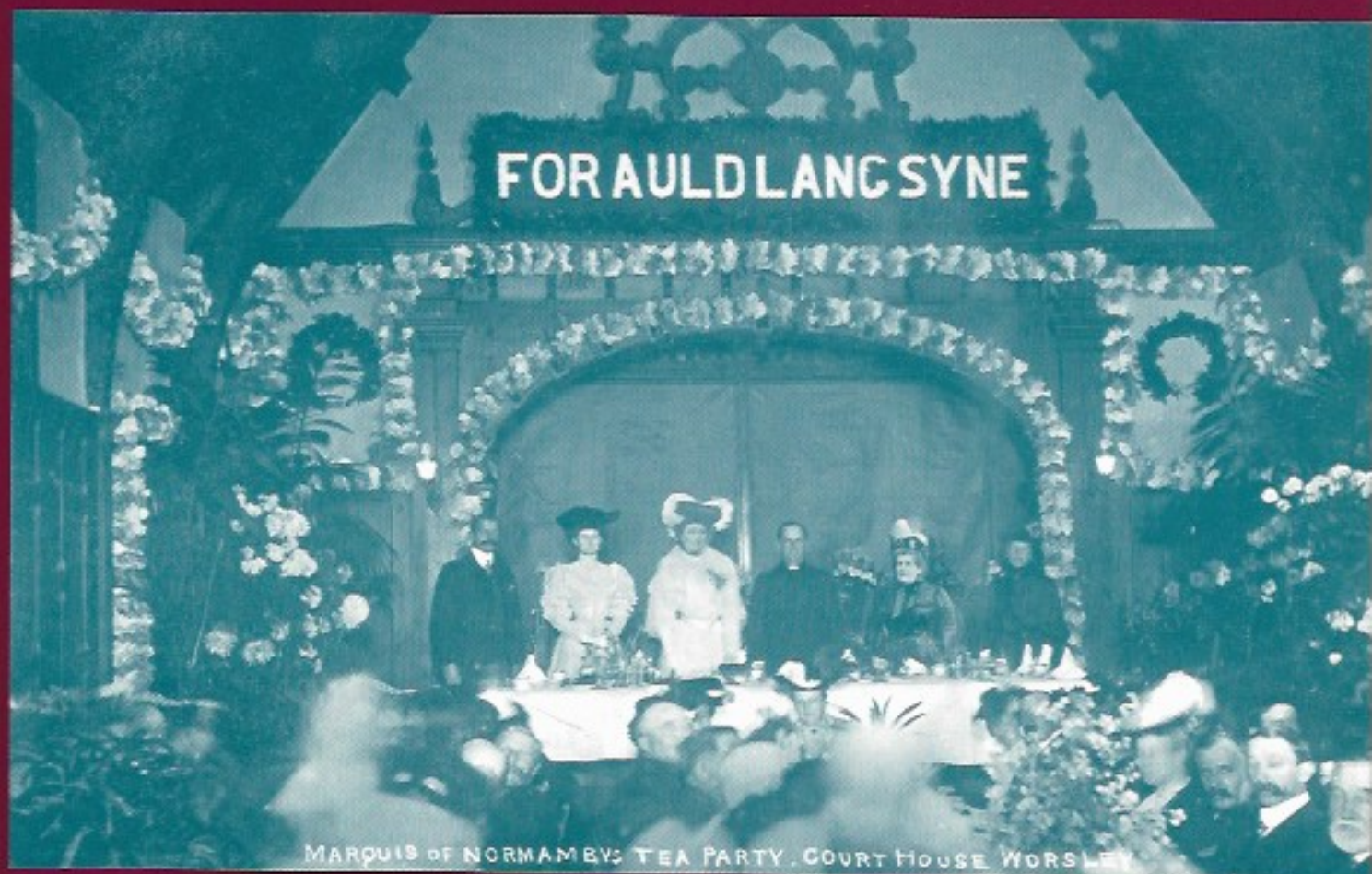
Though called a Court House, the building has been used in many ways over the years. It served as a Town Hall because it was used for meetings of rate payers and other official bodies until the Urban District of Worsley was created in 1894. The annual distribution of blankets and other necessities by the Trustees of the Dame Dorothy Legh Charity was held there, as were the vicar's tea parties and other more splendid social functions. The Worsley Troop of the Duke of Lancaster's Own Yeomanry held a grand ball there on December 27 1873.

'The room was tastefully decorated by Mr Upjohn, head gardener to the Earl of Ellesmere' and 'seventy ladies and gentlemen went through a long programme of dances' which

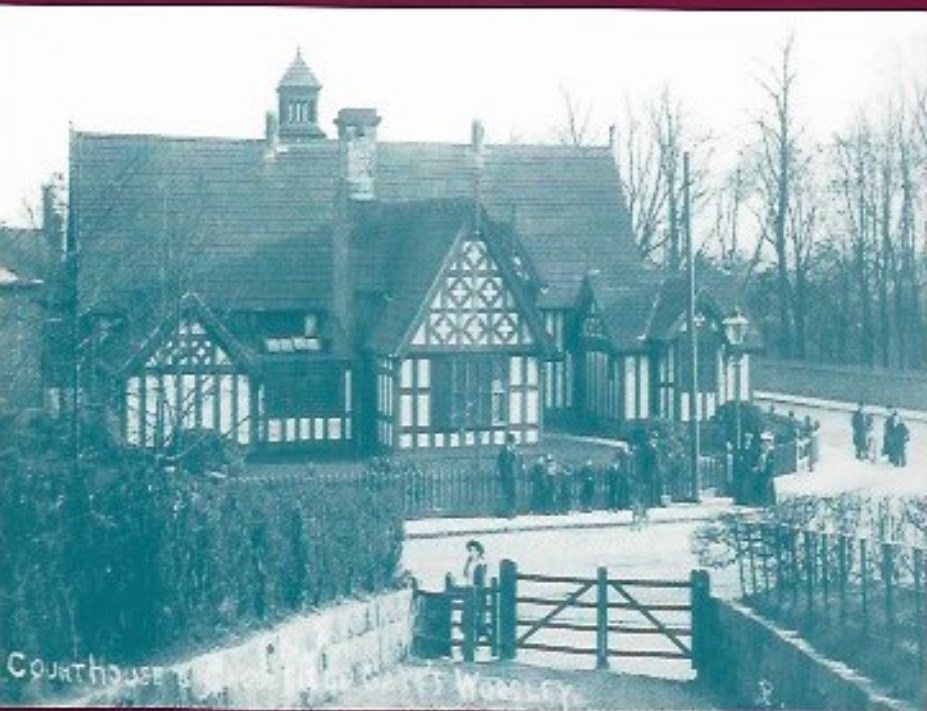
'commenced at nine o'clock and continued with animation until four o'clock in the morning.'

Francis, first Earl of Ellesmere, and his son, Algernon Egerton, were Members of Parliament and used the Court House for election meetings. On the day of the first Earl's funeral, the Court House was the venue for a meeting of Worsley's leading citizens to discuss erecting a suitable public memorial to him. Similarly, after the death of his Countess, Harriet, in 1869, a competition was arranged for leading architects to submit designs for a suitable monument to her and the entries were displayed in the Court House.





MARQUIS OF NORMANBY'S TEA PARTY, COURT HOUSE WORSLEY



Court House c1910

However, the widening democratic outlook of the later nineteenth century meant that, gradually, the building was used for more public functions. As time went on, concerts and dances in aid of local charities and the church were held there, as were meetings of local organisations. Thus the Court House fulfilled something of the function of a village hall.



One hundred and fifty years

The tradition of dramatic performances, musical evenings and instructive lectures arranged by local societies has continued to the present day and such delights have been included in the programme to celebrate the Court House's sesquicentennial in 1999. Refreshments will be provided and, in Court House style, a special luncheon will close the celebrations. Meals for special occasions have long been a feature of the place and today not only wedding breakfasts, but also the actual ceremony, can be held in this historic building.

Despite its timber frame construction and black and white exterior, the Court House is a purely Victorian building. Nikolaus Pevsner describes it as 'a very fanciful half-timbered Court House of

1849, an early date for such a black and white revival'. It is a reminder of the times when the Lord of the Manor had the right and duty to hold a Court Leet to settle matters arising within the manor. When the Earl of Ellesmere decided a more appropriate building than an inn was needed, he arranged for it to be built on the site where the village stocks had stood for centuries.

Frank Mullineux, describing the interior, wrote, 'hard wood panelling gave the right touch of seriousness to the room but a huge fireplace, surmounted by the Royal Coat of Arms and a group of coats of arms associated with the Egerton family, gave a splash of brilliant heraldic colour. The Royal Coat of Arms did more than emphasise the judicial



aspect of the Crown, it was intended to show the rather tenuous connection of the Earl of Ellesmere's family with the royal family.'

The Earl had always intended the building to be used for a variety of functions and Worsley Court House has become a focal point for the community. At first, events such as amateur dramatics and a series of literary and scientific lectures held each winter were the preserve of the Egerton family and the local 'upper classes'. No doubt an invitation to one of those occasions was an eagerly desired sign of acceptance into local 'society'. One such occasion, in August 1904, was a production of Oscar Wilde's fashionable play 'The Importance of being Earnest', when most

of the parts were played by members of the Egerton family, with Lord Ellesmere himself playing the part of the Reverend Canon Chasuble.

The last Court Leet was held in May 1888 but the Police Court continued to be held there until circa 1908. The fourth Earl of Ellesmere sold the Worsley estates in 1923. The Court House, then controlled by Bridgewater Estates Ltd., was used intermittently for private functions. It was bought by Worsley Urban District Council in 1966 for £6,500 and passed to the City of Salford in 1974. Since then it has been in constant use for meetings, meals, public and private occasions, intellectual and artistic performances and celebrations of every kind.



Crowds gathered at the Court House on 23 July 1902 to welcome Viscount Brockley & his brother Wilfred on their return from the Boer War. Note the lack of horses - the brougham was drawn from Worsley station to the Newfall by the gamekeepers employed on the Worsley Estates.







Worsley Court House in brief

- A grade 2 listed building standing at the junction of Worsley Road and Barton Road.
- Built in 1849 by the first Earl of Ellesmere, as a court house, on the site of the old village stocks.
- Based on a stone plinth with vertically studded timber framing and a slate roof, plus decorative square panels on numerous gables.
- Small gabled wings, added by the third Earl of Ellesmere, project forward with a wooden loggia and balustrade between them, which form a porchway to a studded door.
- Note the lion on the main front finial, based on the red lion of the Egerton coat of arms.
- It formerly housed the Manor Court until 1888 and the Police Court until circa 1908.
- Bought by Bridgewater Estates Limited in 1923 from the fourth Earl of Ellesmere.



- Acquired by Worsley Urban District Council from Bridgewater Estates Ltd. in 1966 for £6,500.
- Passed to the City of Salford in 1974.
- Now, in 1999, a distinguished venue for weddings and other public and private functions.

For information about hiring, contact

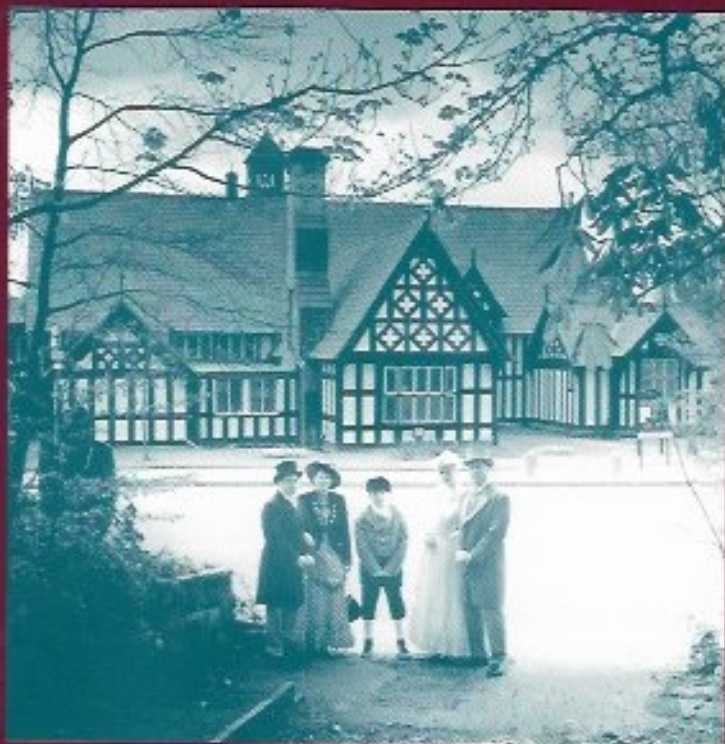
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