

Francis Crossley

1817 - 1872

The youngest of the three brothers, Francis - or Frank - Crossley was born on the 26th October 1817. Educated at Heath Grammar School, young Frank's pocket money was made dependent on his own work, for, at Dean Clough, his father set up a loom for him, where he was expected to spend his time when not at school. Francis was a far-sighted visionary, and made determined efforts to mechanize carpet manufacture. During the 1840s he was credited with the development of the tapestry carpeting technique. In 1850, with the help of the talented and inventive George Collier, he succeeded in achieving the steam-powered revolution in carpet-making, a world first. Together with patents allied to the process, this made the family's fortune.

Following the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace in 1851, where Crossleys exhibited, the company went from strength to strength. More and more mills were built at Dean Clough, and eventually 5,000 people were employed in what became the largest carpet-factory in the world. Francis was a great philanthropist, and he it was who had the Margaret Street almshouses built in 1855, to the south east of Lister Lane Cemetery, a similar development to Joseph's later Arden Road scheme. Following a visit to the United States, Francis was inspired to provide a public park to the people of Halifax. At his own expense, he had this park created to the design of Sir Joseph Paxton and his assistants, the men who had designed Crystal Palace and its grounds. People's Park, Halifax, was opened to the public at a great celebration in August 1857; and three years later a statue of the donor was placed in the park's pavilion, to more public rejoicing.

In public life, from 1852 to 1859 Francis served as a Liberal M.P. for Halifax, following which he represented parts of the West Riding. Francis paid for the fine spire of the Square Congregational Church, his own place of worship, which was completed in 1857. He also gave generously towards the cost of Park Congregational Church, just to the south-west of this cemetery.

He had a splendid Louis Quinze French-style mansion, Belle Vue, erected just to the south of the cemetery, to the design of George Henry Stokes, who also worked for the Rothschilds. Created a baronet by Queen Victoria in 1862, the previous year Sir Francis had bought a country estate at Somerleyton in Suffolk, where he lived for part of the time thereafter. In the late 1860s he began to suffer from heart problems, and went to the Continent to relax, intending to proceed to Palestine.

Due to further illness, he was unable to proceed further than Italy, at length returning to England. He lived quietly thereafter, dying on the 5th January 1872 at Belle Vue. His funeral followed on the 12th, on which occasion it was said that every Halifax tradesman closed his shop for the morning of the funeral; the mills stopped work, and even the pubs were shut.

The whole population of Halifax and its neighbourhood appeared to have gathered around Hopwood and Lister Lanes, we are told, "without distinction as to sect, party, or station in life. Each person there wished to honour the memory of Sir Francis, and to express sympathy with his family". Francis Street nearby was named after Sir Francis.

Although his widow Lady Crossley is mentioned on the family memorial in this cemetery, she is not buried here; she left Halifax soon after her husband's death, dying in 1891, and being buried in Suffolk. The couple had just one son.