

## Elizabeth Sackville-West, Countess De La Warr and 1<sup>st</sup> Baroness Buckhurst (11<sup>th</sup> August 1795 – 9<sup>th</sup> January 1870)

We know from the history of St John's by Michael Hewens that Elizabeth Sackville-West, Countess De La Warr and 1<sup>st</sup> Baroness Buckhurst founded St John's Church, but what else do we know about her?



She was born Lady Elizabeth Sackville at Knole in Sevenoaks, the Sackville family seat, daughter of the third Duke of Dorset, the youngest of his three children.

John Hoppner's painting (1796) in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York depicts the three children, (left to right): Lady Mary Sackville (1792–1864); the Duke's only son, Lord Middlesex (1793–1815), later fourth Duke of Dorset; and Lady Elizabeth Sackville (1795–1870). The picture was exhibited in 1797 entitled *Portraits of a nobleman's children* and it hung at Knole until the 1920s, when it was sold to pay death duties. Vita Sackville-West was told by her grandfather, the son of Lady Elizabeth, that Hoppner had witnessed the little girls having a tiff and noticed how their brother comforted his baby sister afterwards, and this spontaneous moment became his inspiration for the arrangement of the children in

the painting. [Tara Draper-Stumm, *Antiquarian Eye*. February 28 2019]

Elizabeth's father John Frederick Sackville, (depicted here by Sir Joshua Reynolds, hanging in Knole) was a diplomat in Paris and a notorious womanizer and gambler who loved art and was on friendly terms with many of the leading artists of the day, including Reynolds, Gainsborough and of course Hoppner. However, by the time he married Lady Arabella he was described as having become "irascible" and "fretful", dying at the age of 54 when his son George was only 5 years old. George himself sadly died in a riding accident in 1815 when he was only 21 and therefore the Dukedom passed briefly to a cousin, before finally dying out and the Sackville estates returned to his mother Arabella, Duchess of Dorset.



On her death in 1825 her eldest daughter Mary inherited Knole, and the Buckhurst estate went to the younger daughter Elizabeth. However, Mary died childless in 1864 and so the estate passed to her sister, Elizabeth, now Countess De La Warr. Elizabeth was created Baroness Buckhurst in her own right by Queen Victoria on 27<sup>th</sup> April 1864, who stipulated that the title could only be inherited by second or subsequent sons in order to prevent the barony and earldom being held by the same person.

Baroness Elizabeth married George West, 5<sup>th</sup> Earl De La Warr on 21<sup>st</sup> June 1813. To reflect the great eminence and large estate associated with the Sackville family he took her family name and become George Sackville-West. He served as Lord Chamberlain under Sir Robert Peel and Lord Derby and was a member of the Privy Council. The couple had ten children, nine of whom grew to adulthood. They were:

- George Sackville, Viscount Cantelupe (1814–1850), Member of Parliament for Helston and Lewes, died unmarried.
- Charles Sackville-West, 6<sup>th</sup> Earl De La Warr (1815–1873).
- Reginald Sackville, 7<sup>th</sup> Earl De La Warr (1817–1896), Rector of Withyham (1841-1865)
- Lady Elizabeth Sackville-West, Duchess of Bedford (1818–1897), married Francis Russell, 9<sup>th</sup> Duke of Bedford and had issue.
- Mortimer Sackville-West, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Sackville (1820–1888).
- Lady Mary Catherine (1824–1900), married firstly, James Gascoyne-Cecil, 2<sup>nd</sup> Marquess of Salisbury and had issue. She married secondly, Edward Stanley, 15<sup>th</sup> Earl of Derby.
- Lionel Sackville-West, 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron Sackville (1827–1908).
- Hon. William Sackville-West (1830–1905), married Georgina Dodwell and had issue, including Lionel Sackville-West, 3<sup>rd</sup> Baron Sackville.
- Lady Arabella Diana Sackville-West (1835–1869), married Sir Alexander Bannerman, 9<sup>th</sup> Baronet.

Lady Sackville was a supporter of the early Victorian Catholic revival. Clearly the two local churches, St Michael and All Angels in Withyham and the relatively newly-built All Saints church in Crowborough were not to her liking and so she gave fourteen acres of Ashdown Forest for a new church to be built, officially a 'chapel of ease' for Withyham but clearly built to be her own personal church. St John the Evangelist Church was completed in 1839.

On Elizabeth's death Buckhurst Park went to her elder son, whilst Knole passed to her younger son Mortimer, who was created the 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Sackville thereby splitting the family and Sackville lands into two branches. Today the Earls De La Warr still live at Buckhurst but Knole and many of its treasures passed into the care of the National Trust in the 1940s although Robert Sackville-West, 7<sup>th</sup> Baron Sackville, lives in an apartment at Knole and oversees the estate.

Lady Elizabeth Sackville is buried with her husband in St Michael and All Angels churchyard, Withyham.



*Elizabeth Countess De La Warr and 1<sup>st</sup> Baroness Buckhurst  
Sissinghurst Castle, National Trust*



Monument to  
George and Elizabeth Sackville-West,  
Earl and Countess De La Warr  
in St Michael and All Angels,  
Withyham

