

# Ellesmere Town

## Background

Modern Ellesmere is a small market town of about 3,200 people. It is located in the countryside in North Shropshire, close to the Welsh border and about 25kms northwest of the county town of Shrewsbury, home of Charles Darwin. The market started in 1221 and it still takes place on Tuesday of each week. There is evidence of an 11<sup>th</sup>-Century castle, and when in 1205 the Welsh prince Llywelyn married Joan, Lady of Wales, the illegitimate daughter of King John, they were given Ellesmere as a wedding present. The Church of St Mary was built by the Knights of St John in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and has a beautiful 15<sup>th</sup>-century carved roof and the grave of a man who outlived 7 kings!

The Old English word 'mere', meaning 'a wide, shallow lake' is the name of the feature that gives the town its name. The Mere is the largest of nine glacial lakes in the area and covers over 78 hectares. It is about 19m deep, and is the result of a glacier melting at the end of the last ice age. The lake contains an artificial island, known as Moscow Island because it was constructed in 1812, the year Napoleon was forced to retreat from his attack on Russia. The lake is very popular with birdwatchers, who come particularly to see the Grey Herons that nest there. The cold water of the Mere is also the venue of the swimming section of the annual Ellesmere triathlon.

The town is next to a branch of the Llangollen Canal which terminates at the Pontcysyllte after crossing the aqueduct which is a World Heritage site built by the famous engineer Thomas Telford. The canal was originally called the Ellesmere canal and was intended to reach the sea at Ellesmere Port (about 10kms north of Chester) but rising costs and the development of the railways caused the plan to be cancelled. Telford lived in a house in Ellesmere during the construction of the canal, from 1793-1805.