

Memorial to David Hale (1862-1913)



This is a relatively small monument made of beaten copper, mounted on wood, which hangs on the west wall of the church in a rather hidden, dark corner. It's one of the more modern monuments in the church, dating back to the second decade of the 20th Century. Its style is Arts and Crafts.

David Hale was a Solicitor in Ashby. He was born in Bath in 1862, the only child of David and Arabella Hale. By the time of the 1871 census, when David was 9 years old, his mother was a widow, living with her son and her widowed mother, Arabella Smith, on Devonshire Place in Bath. The census records that both were living on 'interest of money,' which clearly gave them a comfortable income, as they were employing a lady's maid, a housemaid and a cook.

David attended an independent boys' school, Sydney College, in Bath

and went up to Exeter College, Oxford in 1880. He graduated in 1883 and married Annie Lake at St Giles Church, Reading, on 1st June 1886. At the time of his marriage, he was a Conveyancing Clerk and was living once more on Devonshire Place in Bath.

In 1887, he qualified as a Solicitor. The Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette of 14th July recorded that "Mr David Hale, of No 4 Devonshire buildings in this city, who served his articles with Messrs Stone, King and Co, was one of the successful candidates in the Final Examination held by the Incorporated Law Society in June last." He had set up his own law practice by 1889, when the Somersetshire and Bristol Directory listed 'David Hale, BA, solicitor, 35 Milsom Street, Bath.' This was a smart address in the middle of town.

David Hale was an ambitious man. He arrived in Leicestershire in January 1891, when the Burton Chronicle reported that he had joined the firm of Messrs Smith and Mammatt on South Street as a junior partner. The 1891 census found David and Annie Hale living on Lower Church Street, employing a housemaid and a cook. By 1901 they had moved to 13 South Street, the Regency Terrace, and David's mother, Arabella, was living with them. By 1911 they had gone up in the world still further, having moved to St Helen's House, 89 Market Street, an 18-room house not counting bathrooms! David's mother, now 80 years old, was still with them and they employed 2 maids and a cook. The couple never had children.

David Hale was an industrious man. He first officiated as magistrates' clerk at the Ashby Police Court within a month of his arrival in Ashby in 1891 and in August 1891 he was appointed justices' clerk for the Swadlincote Petty Sessional Division on the death of W E Smith (a partner in the firm and late Churchwarden of St Helen's). He soon became Clerk to the Justices in Coalville and retained all three roles until his death.

Local press reports record that he won prizes in the Ashby Flower Shows for his palms and greenhouse plants and Mrs Hale belonged to the Ladies' Needlework Guild. Sadly, all this came to an abrupt end in April 1913, when he died suddenly and unexpectedly at the age of just 51, whilst on holiday in Devon. His death was attributed to heart disease. A report in the Leicester Daily Post, dated 15th April 1913 described Mr Hale as *"an able adviser, whose counsel carried great weight, and he enjoyed the confidence and respect of the Bench as well as of the public. He was a strong Churchman, and exceedingly popular in the district."* He was buried in St Luke's Churchyard in Simonsbath, West Somerset. He left an estate to the value of just under £15,000 – equivalent to one and three quarter million pounds today.

Annie Hale lost no time in selling up. German and German, Auctioneers, advertised the sale of all the Hales' household furniture and goods at the end of July 1913. She moved first to Surrey and later to St Leonards on Sea, where she died in 1950. Interestingly, Mrs Hale Senior, David's mother, remained in Ashby, living on Leicester Road until her death in April 1917 at the age of 86.

Presumably, Annie Hale commissioned the monument to her husband in St Helen's Church. It's not known how she came across the work of its artist, Agnes Vyse, but it might possibly be via her nephew, John Gascoigne Lake (1903-1975), a painter and museum curator who studied at the Royal College of Art and curated the Towner Art Gallery in Eastbourne, Sussex, for some years. Agnes Vyse moved to Sussex after the First World War.

Agnes Frances Eleanor Vyse (1873-1967) was the elder daughter of John and Rosalie Vyse. She was born in Camden, North London. Her mother died when Agnes was 5 and John Vyse, a leather merchant, married twice more. Agnes was a student at the Royal Academy from 1896-1901 and set up a studio in Carey Street, central London, sometime after that and certainly by 1905, when it is listed under the 'artists' section of the London Trade Directory. In October 1906, she and Henry Ross shared an exhibition of fine art metal work at Bloomsbury Hall in London, the central piece of which was the Bishop Smythe Memorial, 15 panels depicting scenes and characters from the Old Testament, in beaten copper, which were later installed in Zanzibar Cathedral.

Agnes' preferred medium was beaten copper. She was Secretary of the London branch of the Clarion Guild of Handicraft¹ for several years and wrote about 'the influence of the tool on beaten metal work' in 'The Woodworker and Art Metal Worker Allied Crafts Journal' in 1905. The 1911 Census listed her as a 'designer and metal worker,' living with her father and stepmother in Upper Norwood but financially independent. She appears to have been a lively, highly motivated woman, who

¹ **Clarion Guild of Handicraft**

This Guild was established by the socialist writer and theorist Robert Blatchford (1851-1943) in 1901. Unlike other craft guilds, it did have not a single workshop but was a federation consisting of a mass of amateur craftsmen and craftswomen who were co-ordinated through Blatchford's eponymous newspaper 'Clarion'. The Guild held its first exhibition in Liverpool in 1901. (Information from: Artblogs.co.uk). Blatchford was a journalist and socialist and a founder of the Manchester Fabian Society.

worked for the Red Cross during the First World War and spent much of her spare time engaged in amateur dramatics. She moved out of London to live independently in Mayfield, near Uckfield in Sussex and married relatively late in life, in November 1921, to Frederick Cockle, who was pianist to the Mayfield Players, which Agnes had founded and continued to lead after his death in 1928. Her early promise didn't lead to fame and I've been able to find few other examples of her work. She died in Brighton in 1967.

It is a lovely memorial, however, and worth closer inspection despite its location in a dark corner of the church.

Julie Starkey

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