

The 17th Century Hales of Old Mansion, Cottesmore Lane

Ewelme News, Dec 2002, April 2003, Oct-Nov 2005

From December 2002 for several years, we had a long running investigation into the Hale family as requested by a descendent, David Hale, living in Adelaide, Australia. He had enquired of the archive for a positive connection to Edward Hale, fourth son of Sir Mathew Hale Bt. who was Lord Chief Justice of England in the reign of Charles II, and therefore one of the most influential men of his time. [There is still a Hale Law in America].

Apparently, Sir Mathew settled land at Ewelme and Benson – (Hale Farm still holds the name) - on two of his sons, Edward and Thomas. In 1675 Sir Mathew is recorded as settling ‘*mills at Ewelme*’ on Thomas. Edward and his wife Mary are recorded as living at the Old Mansion which dates back to 1558 and we believe there are copies of old Deeds still in existence. There is no record that Sir Mathew lived in Ewelme, and we can only presume that the Ewelme properties and lands were gifts from the sovereign he served in his high office, King Charles II.

To establish positively that The Old Mansion was the Hale home, David Hale provided further information from old sources of a marriage in 1773 between Mary Read, daughter of William Read (a wealthy yeoman farmer of Ewelme), and Richard Greenwood. William Read provided a house and farm in Ewelme for the newly-weds which had ‘*once belonged to the grandchildren of the famous English lawyer Sir [Michael sic] Hale*’. It was hoped that the Church records would note an address for the baptism of their son John Read Greenwood in 1774, but unfortunately the entries for the critical periods were kept by a meagre hand, and only the bare bones of names, ages and dates are there.

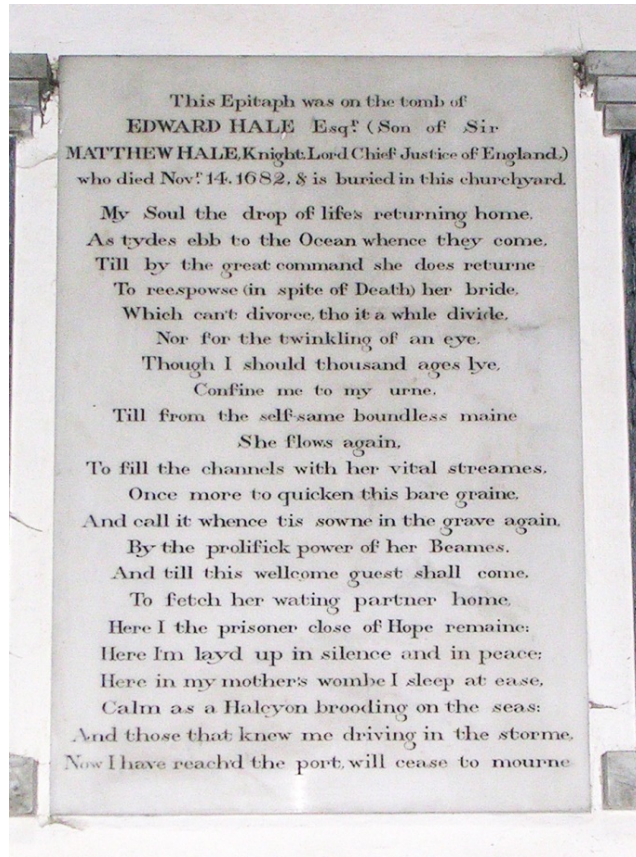
The church records show burials for the wealthy Hale family (and Goodyere connections by marriage) spanning almost 100 years from 1656 to 1748 (see below).

The Will of 1697 made by Magdelin [Magdalene] Goodere, the sister of Edward’s wife Mary gave more information. Magdelin (also recorded as Goodyere) and her sibling Mary came from Heythrop, Oxon. Magdelin died in 1698 and was interred in Ewelme churchyard on May 14th in their mother’s grave - Mary Goodyer [sic] who had died in 1683. Judging by her effects bequeathed to family members and others, the Will shows that Magdelin was a woman of substance and intelligence. She mentions “*ye Books written by My Lord Hale yet are in my possession.*” which are bequeathed to another sister, Mrs Elizabeth Forster. It is recorded that Sir Mathew Hale (who died in 1676) wrote many legal books which were lodged at Lincoln’s Inn, and also a collection of *Letters of Advice to his Children and Grandchildren*, so we assume the reference is to copies of his works.

David Hale obtained copies of letters sent in June and December 1887 to a Hale relative’s grandfather. The two letters were from a Rector of Ewelme Church, Henry Walford (Rector 1884-1889). The grandfather had obviously corresponded with Rector Walford who had inspected the Burial Register on his behalf. Rector Walford recounts all the seven Hale names buried in the churchyard and two Goodyere’s (Magdelin and her mother Mary). The tombstones in the churchyard had by this time disappeared as the only extant Hale Memorial was the plaque to Edward on the north side of the chancel.

However, another positive clue regarding the family home came from the Rector’s letters. This opened a fresh avenue of investigation involving the Heath family, prominent wealthy yeoman landowners in Ewelme. The Rector quoted from an MSS Book in his possession written in 1785 by Dr John Randolph, (Rector from 1783-1807 – copied for the archive but now deposited in

Oxford). Dr Randolph stated that in 1785 Mr John Heath occupied the house once owned by Edward Hale, and also the farm adjoining which was also Heath's property. Persons then living could remember the Hale's resident there especially Mr Thomas Hale (died 1729) *'who lived in splendour and was much esteemed by the Gentlemen of the County.'* Rector Walford reckoned the farm was sold in 1740 but Dr Randolph said villagers still living (in 1785) remembered the Hale sisters, the last of whom died in 1748.



Memorial plaque to Edward Hale on the north side of the chancel.

Although the tombstone(s) were missing by Rector Walford's time more clues were provided by David Hale who gave the archive a copy of a letter dated 12th March 1829 and held in the Gloucester Records Office. It was written by a young man, Robert Blagden Hale to his father in Melksham, Wilts. It seems he was at Oxford University, as he made the '13 mile' journey to Ewelme to inspect the Hale family tombs and, in accord with student custom, he began his letter by asking his father for money. But his letter is useful, as he records the names on two tombstones existing at that time.

Letter of Robert Blagden Hale

*To R H B Hale Esq
Cottles
Melksham
Wilts*

From Mr Robert Blagden Hale Wednesday, 11th March 1829

*My dear Father,
I shall feel very much obliged to you for £50 to enable me to pay my Buttles which are due the beginning of next week. I went over to Ewelme yesterday, it is about 13 miles from hence on the Henley road. I will give you a sketch of the tombs and all the inscriptions. The large tomb as it*

appears in my sketch seems to be a number of tombs built contiguous in succession. The number before the inscriptions have reference as you will see to the numbers on the panels of the tombs. On the top of the smaller tomb is what appeared to be an epitaph almost entirely obliterated. I don't think there was any date or name there.

- 1 *Edward Hale Esq son of Sir Matt. Hale Kt. Ld. Chief Justice of England ob Nov 14 1682*
- 2 *P.M.S Mario Goodere quondam de Heythrop in Coun Oxon viduo, non tam inani Domus fulgore (satic licet antique Overburiorum scelt celeberrimo orto familia) quam solidi virtutis Pictatis radius ornao onima Deo expiraoit die Dominice vicepimo terio Semtembur anon MDCLXXXIII atat Lit perenne Sabbatum Deo*
- 3 *Magdalene Goodere ob May ye 14th 1698*
- 4 *Mrs Eliz. Hale ob Sept ye 19th 1748*
- 5 *Mrs Mary Hale ob Dec ye 18 1708*
- 6 *Mrs Anna Hale ob July 4th 1723*
- 7 *Mrs Mary Hale Relict of Edward Hale Esq ob January ye 6th 1724*
- 8 *Thomas Hale Esq ob July ye 3rd 1729*
- 9 *Mr Overbury Hale Citizen & Druggist of London ob June 8th 1730*

On the opposite end of the tomb to No 2 is a coat of arms which is much obliterated ... [page torn] ... could make it out.

John is very well he heard from Matthew this morning who is quite well. I received a hare the other day from Bodnum[?] and yesterday a spotted woodpecker like the one you shot.

*With our united love and duty to my mother and yourself, believe me,
My Dear Father,
Your affectionate son R B Hale*

Robert sketched two Hale monuments in the churchyard, one a very large oblong tombstone recording seven Hales on one long side, and the other was smaller, recording two, although he omits to indicate the location of the monuments. (There is an inscription from 1708 for Mary Hale which is useful, as the Burial Record from 1705-1711 is missing). The last Hale inscription for Mrs Elisabeth Hale buried on 21st September 1748 seems to be missing. The tombstones were not obvious on the line drawings of the churchyard in Napier's History circa 1857, so presumably were demolished in the intervening 28 years. The mystery of the missing tombstone(s) was finally solved in the summer of 2020, when the writer found one low oblong monument to the left and slightly below to the path edge of Jerome K Jerome's stone – it had been hidden under ivy and tree roots which had recently been cleared. As it had been protected from the elements it was not too weathered, and some of the names as recorded by young Robert Hale could be read. Unfortunately, the second monument he mentioned, which was probably adjacent, has disappeared. It could have been removed when the large Victorian monument to the Rudge family was erected. This monument is of interest, as it is the oldest still preserved in the churchyard.

The Hale family records continued to produce interesting stories. An unexpected link opened up into an infamous Jacobean murder. This was from the 1697 Will of Magdelin Goodyere, the sister of Edward's wife Mary. In her Will, Magdelin mentions 'grandfather Overbury'. David Hale found that this referred to Walter Overbury, brother of Sir Thomas Overbury who was murdered in September 1613 whilst a prisoner in the Tower of London. Sir Thomas had fallen foul of the beautiful, scheming Frances Howard, Countess of Essex and her second husband Robert Carr (a favourite courtier of James I). During the five months Sir Thomas was unjustly held in the Tower, his food was systematically poisoned by persons employed by Frances. When the suspicious circumstances surrounding Sir Thomas' death could no longer be suppressed, the accomplices involved, including James Franklin, the apothecary who obtained the poisons, were brought to trial and executed. However, due to their high station at Court, Frances, and Robert Carr, (now titled the

Earl and Countess of Somerset), escaped the death penalty. They were confined by King James I to Greys Court at Rotherfield Greys near Henley where Frances died of cancer, but Robert was eventually released and returned to Court. [A novel by Jean Plaidy called *'The Murder in the Tower'* is about this foul deed].



The missing Hale tombstone in Ewelme Cemetery

To perpetuate this family connection, Edward Hale named one of his sons Overbury – his body brought from London and buried in Ewelme churchyard on January 11th 1730.

1656 Feb 10 widdow Hale

1675 Dec 1 Edward Hale son of Mr Edward

1682 Nov 14th Edward Hale Esq son of Sir Matthew Hale

1683 Sept 25th Goodyer Mrs Mary (brought from London) – mother of Mary and Magdelene

1698 May 14th Mrs Magdalene Goodere [sic]

1708 Dec 18th Mrs Mary Hale – (Missing from burial register which was lost 1705-11)

1723 July 4th Mrs Anne Hale

1729 Thomas Hale gent

1730 June 11th Overbury Hale gent, London

1748 Sept 21st Mrs Elisabeth Hale

Ewelme Village Archive