

MORE THAN A MEMORIAL

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Jackie Wedd

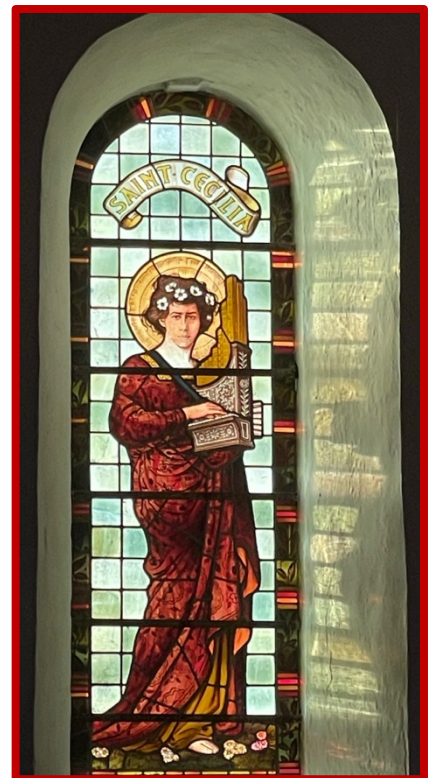
The surprising story of the Blanche Hewetson memorial window in St Oswald's Church, Ravenstonedale was told in this talk. Jackie began by explaining that St Oswald's is planned on what is known as the collegiate system; the pews face each other across the aisle, rather than face the altar. The window in question is just to the left of the pulpit, showing a lady with flowers in her hair and wearing a full-length red gown: a depiction of St Cecilia, the Patron Saint of Musicians. The inscription at the bottom of the window reads 'To the Glory of God and in loving memory of Mary Blanche Hewetson who entered into eternal life sixth day of May AD 1890'.

Who was Mary Blanche Hewetson? Jackie's full answer began with a reference to Keith Lovet Watson's book, *The Hewetsons of Ravenstonedale*, the first book which he produced during 30 years of researching the family. Apparently, there were five brothers who lived at Street Farm in Ravenstonedale parish. The middle brother, John, was born in 1806 and was married twice. He had three children with his second wife Adelaide French. The first child was Harold, born in 1859, then Blanche in 1861 and finally Edith born in 1868. Keith Watson researched through all the family papers which included approximately 1,200 letters.

John moved away from Street Farm to an apprenticeship in London and occasionally wrote to his parents. Dave Wedd then read extracts from John's letters. The first letter, dated 1823, described his journey by stagecoach via Stainmore to York where, on arrival, he was pleased to only pay four pence for a very good supper of mutton and a glass of ale. On the second Sunday following John's arrival in London, he followed a sign which pointed out the way to Berry Street Chapel. A woman who was appointed to look out for strangers showed him to a seat. There were upwards of 500 people in the chapel.

John described his very tiring work in a shop. Having completed his apprenticeship as a linen draper, he then borrowed money from his father and set up his own business in London's Tottenham Court Road, as an upholsterer. He later went into partnership with various people and expanded into furniture retail. By 1861, John's address was 8 St James's Terrace, Regents Park where he lived with his second wife Adelaide; Blanche and Edith were both born there. John eventually retired from his successful London business and returned to Ravenstonedale where in the 1870's he built a grand mansion, 'Hwith House', sadly now demolished. John died in 1876 so Adelaide and the three children continued to live in London and occasionally in Ravenstonedale.

Harold had become involved in music and became Honorary Secretary of The Royal School of Mines Orchestral Society, receiving great reviews following his piano performances. The Royal School of Mines later became part of Imperial College. Blanche too was an accomplished pianist and was in demand to play at many charity events in London for various



good causes, including in 1885 at a concert in aid of the new wing at The London Temperance Hospital. Jackie then showed a photograph of Blanche, Harold and their mother Adelaide which was taken at 'Hwith House' in the late 1880's by which time Blanche's health was in decline. She had frequently played with the Strolling Players Amateur Orchestral Society who often entertained in a room full of men smoking tobacco.

The face of the lady in the stained-glass window in St Oswald's bears a remarkable resemblance to the photograph of Blanche taken by a studio photographer in London for her 21st birthday. Close examination of the bottom of the window reveals a signature 'D Cottier'.

Unfortunately, the church history booklet states that the maker of the window was *David* Cottier but this is an error. The window was designed and made by *Daniel* Cottier, a neighbour of the Hewetson family in St James's Terrace in London. Daniel, born in Glasgow. He was described in the 1851 census as an apprentice stained-glass window painter. In 1862 Daniel was awarded a prize medal at an international exhibition for designing and painting a memorial window. In the following years he produced windows for a variety of churches throughout the country and abroad.

In a Glasgow bookshop Jackie found a copy of *Daniel Cottier: Designer, Decorator, Dealer*, a recent book about Cottier's life and work published by the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, in which was a picture of a stained-glass window, with a figure which looked very familiar. It is entitled, 'Angel Playing on an Organ' and is in St Thomas's Anglican Church in Sydney. It was made by Lyon, Wells, Cottier and Co in 1888. There are several versions of this window throughout the world, all of which are very similar to the Ravenstonedale design which was fitted in 1890.

Cottier's business had expanded from London with premises in both New York and Sydney along with his partners. The Cottiers had previously moved from Scotland to St James's Terrace in London and had become close neighbours of the Hewetson's.

Jackie's next slide showed a copy of the notice of Blanche's death which the family sent to her friends: 'Mary Blanche Hewetson who departed this life on May 6th 1890 aged 28 years. A perfect daughter, a sweet companion, and a true friend.'

Jackie then quoted from a letter written by Daniel Cottier to Blanche's sister Edith about the St Oswald's window she had asked him to make. This is also among the Hewetson papers deposited by the family in Carlisle Archives: 'My dear Edith Hewetson, I got the size and shape all right and I have the dear Blanche's face in the photo. Of course we will not have to make the face too like in a way, only suggest, so that all who know her will know her again in the window. The window will cost about £100 but if the family will raise say £90 of that it will be quite sufficient for our purpose – my meaning in doing this is so that you all may have the feeling that the window is a personal memorial from all that subscribe, tis true and fair to do this.'

Blanche was buried in Ravenstonedale only four days after she died in London. The window is believed to be the last that Daniel Cottier completed before his death in 1891.

Jackie Wedd conveyed her very personal engagement with her subject. She obviously took much pleasure in the letters and was able to link names in meticulous and fascinating detail.

Tricia Jagger