

Notes on the portrait of John Hales at St Mary's Guildhall

The 'Holbein' Portrait

- Gentleman's Magazine article June 1854 introduces fine Holbein portrait of John Hales, bearing the date 1554, in the collection of Henry Butterworth, purchased at a sale at Ashby Lodge from the collection of George Arnold FSA. Same article refers to the portrait hanging at St Mary's Guildhall as "an indifferent copy"
- Henry Butterworth was born in Coventry, the son of a wealthy timber merchant, and attended the Free School. He continued his education in Bristol, then moved to London where he became a successful and wealthy law-publisher. He gave generously to the building and extension of several churches, including in his native Coventry.
- Gentleman's Magazine article July 1854 on same topic dismisses the St Mary's version as an inferior, later portrait which "differs in every particular"
- Obituary of Henry Butterworth, Esq. FSA (1786-1860) reprinted in Gentleman's Magazine of February 1861, reports that "Two fine portraits from Mr. Butterworth's collection become the property of public institutions by bequest...a fine original, by Hans Holbein, of John Hales, founder of the Public Grammar School at Coventry...has been left, appropriately enough, to the Trustees of the School.."
- Letter to Gentleman's Magazine in April 1861 edition argues that Holbein attribution doubtful, given that he died in 1543. Moreover, same correspondent refers to a letter by William Reader, son of esteemed Coventry antiquarian of the same name, to the magazine in August 1854, which indicated that Dugdale had seen the St Mary's Hall portrait in the possession of the Hales family in 1650. Asserts that not only is the Holbein attribution of the Butterworth portrait doubtful, but also that it may not be of the same John Hales.
- The portrait remained in the school to which it had been bequeathed, moving to the new site on Warwick Road in 1885, but was destroyed when the school was badly damaged during the Blitz of April 1941

The St Mary's Hall portrait

- Seemingly by family descent – noted by William Reader that Dugdale had observed the work in the family's possession in 1650
- Presented to the Free School in Coventry in 1704 by Anne, widow of Sir John Hales, the first baronet. It was still in the Free School in 1792 when it was copied there by Henry Jeayes. It was placed in St. Mary's Hall in 1834 on the instructions of George Eld, Mayor. It was transferred to the Mayoress's Parlour before 1880, when noted in this location by Scharf

Other known John Hales portraits

- St Mary's Hall portrait copied by Henry Jeayes 1792 while still in the Free School (the original, or a copy of this, survives in the Aylesford Collection in Birmingham)
- The St Mary's Hall portrait was engraved before 1825 by Mary Dawson Turner, labelling the work as by an 'Unknown artist'. Prints of this engraving held by several institutions including Herbert Art Gallery (VA.1982.20.4), and National Portrait Gallery (NPG D22574)
- 'The New British Traveller' Vol II (1819) by James Dugdale, notes a portrait of 'John Hales of Whitefriars' in the collection of the de la Bere family at Southam House, Glocs., together with portraits of three of his daughters (Mary, Joan and Dorothy) and one of their sons, John, these latter four portraits noted as being by Sir Peter Lely. It is almost certain that this John Hales is the nephew (died 1608) of the St Mary's Guildhall sitter, who inherited his uncle's properties including his former residence at Whitefriars. William Reader, in 1846, refers to the children of this John Hales as John, Mary, Jane and Bethany (and as John, Mary, Jane and Bethana in his 1830 guide to the monuments of St Michael's) which must be the same as those portraits observed by James Dugdale with an allowance for misinterpretation.