

The Mure Family Monuments in St Albans Cathedral

by Roger Shepherd

On the East wall of the North transept is a neo-classical monument to Frederica Sophia Mure. She is depicted kneeling before a draped sarcophagus. The inscription reads:

To the Memory of
Frederica Sophia
The wife of James Mure of Cecil Lodge in
this County Esquire
And daughter of Christopher Metcalfe of
Hawsted
In the County of Suffolk Esquire
Where she was born on the thirteenth day of
November 1763.
She died at Oneglia in Italy
On the fifth day of April 1834
Her remains were brought to England
And deposited in a vault in this Abbey

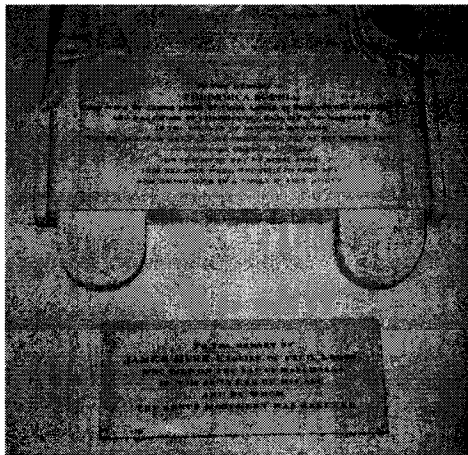


Photo: A Ashby

Underneath this monument is a plain stone tablet inscribed:

To the Memory of
James Mure Esquire, of Cecil Lodge:
Who died on the 24th March 1848,
In the 88th year of his age,
And by whom
The above Monument was erected

The monument to Frederica Sophia Mure is signed by Chantrey and is said to be representative of his best work.

Sir Francis Legatt Chantrey (1781–1841) was a sculptor renowned for his portrait busts. Born near Sheffield, he began his career in 1797 as an apprentice woodcarver and then turned to portrait painting. He had little

formal training as a sculptor. After his style matured he visited Paris and the continent in 1814 and 1815 and went to Italy in 1819. A financially advantageous marriage enabled him to set up a studio, which became the centre of his large practice and set up his own bronze foundry (c1830).

His first bronze statue was the equestrian statue of George IV, now in Trafalgar Square. He was also popular for his church monuments, especially the Robinson children (1817) in Lichfield Cathedral.

He was created RA in 1818 and knighted in 1832. The large fortune which he left to the Royal Academy at his death created the Chantrey Bequest.

Questions arise: James Mure was no doubt a wealthy man. To commission a monument from Chantrey would have been a costly

venture. Perhaps Mure knew the sculptor personally? It is to be wondered why they had a vault in St Albans Cathedral instead of Abbots Langley Church?

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Chantrey was born and grew up in the village of Norton, near Sheffield. His grave can be found at the parish church of St James, where he is buried near the church tower. Outside the church gate is a monument to him in the form of an obelisk marked 'Chantrey'. Ed.

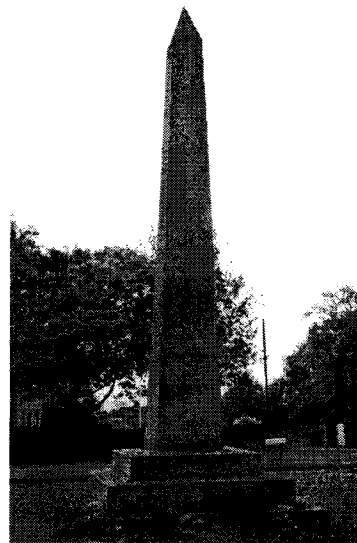


Photo: A Ashby

daughters, the eldest being Frederica Sophia who had married Major Horatio George Broke, of Broke Hall, Suffolk. Katherine, his second daughter, along with her father, in the 1840s helped to apply for a grant from the National Society to build a National School for the girls in Abbots Langley parish. His third daughter, Eleanor, was an author of children's books and wrote the story of 'The Three Bears'. This was possibly written for her nephew, Horatio. (The book was re-issued in original format in 1967.)

James Mure played his part in Vestry affairs at St Lawrence Church, Abbots Langley and was no doubt a prominent voice among the many gentry of the large houses there.

After his death in March 1848, aged 88 years, his daughters continued to live at Cecil Lodge, although it is not certain how long they were residents at Abbots Langley. It is known that Eleanor Mure, who had inherited Cecil Lodge from her father, did live there during the 1850s because during that time she went to see the Great Exhibition of 1851. She was so taken with the idea of the 'Model Cottages' – which had been built by command of Prince Albert, President of the Society for Improving the Condition of Labourer Classes – that she eventually had the block of four cottages built in Jacketts Field, Trowley Bottom (now Tibbs Hill) at a cost of about £500. She rejected the going rate of 4/- per week rent, taking instead only 2/- per week, which she felt was more in keeping with her labourers' means.

Presumably she lived at Cecil Lodge until 1864 when the new owner, the Right Honourable W H Smith, a leading Hertfordshire magistrate, took over the property, where he stayed until 1870. It was his father who had founded W H Smith's, the Stationers and Booksellers.

Eleanor Mure died in 1885, aged 86 years.

Ed.

From Clive Clark's book *Abbots Langley Then 1760–1960:*

James Mure was the son of William Mure of Caldwell, a Baron of the Scottish Exchequer, married in 1790 and had practised as a barrister at Westminster for 40 years. James Mure and his family moved to Cecil Lodge, Abbots Langley about 1827. He had three