

The Petits of Ettingshall and Lichfield.

The monument commemorating Louis Hayes Petit is very prominent at the front of the nave in St Michael's, and recently a display board commemorating the life and work of his nephew, John Louis Petit has been erected in the graveyard close to the tomb of him and his siblings. But who were the Petit's? In this short article I will give a brief history of the family from the time they first left France up to the death of John Louis and his siblings in the late nineteenth century.

The first of the Petit family to arrive in England was Lewis Petit (1665-1720), a member of the ancient Norman family of Petit des Etans, who, with many other Huguenots, fled to England from Caen on the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. He served in the British army as an engineer, rose to the rank of brigadier-general and was appointed lieutenant-governor of Minorca from 1708 to 1713. He was later involved in the suppression of a revolt by Highland clans. He had two sons, John Peter Petit and Captain Peter Petit. The former married Sarah, daughter of John Hayes of Wolverhampton, the owner of the Ettingshall Estate near Sedgley, and they occupied the manor of Little Aston from 1743 to the early 1760s. John Hayes died in 1736, and left Ettingshall to his son, another John Hayes. This John himself died in 1745 and the estate went to Sarah and her sister, and thus ultimately to John Peter Petit. Ettingshall was a large, originally arable estate, that even at that stage was beginning to be exploited for its coal and ironstone reserves. It is from that estate that much of the Petit wealth derived.

John Peter and Sarah's only son, John Lewis Petit (1736-1780) qualified as a doctor in 1767 and was physician to St. George's Hospital from 1770 to 1774, and to St. Bartholomew's from 1774 until his death. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society from 1759 and was clearly regarded as a leader in his profession. He and his wife Katherine had three sons John Hayes Petit (1771-1822), Peter Hayes Petit (1773-1809) and Louis Hayes Petit (1774-1849), but clearly lacked imagination in the giving of names. Peter Hayes was a lieutenant-colonel of the 35th Foot and died of a wound received at Flushing in Holland during the Napoleonic war. Louis Hayes (he of the monument) became a barrister and, from 1827 to 1832, was MP for Ripon. He bought property at Yeading, Middlesex, and a house in Tamworth Street, Lichfield. After ceasing to be an MP, his remaining years were largely devoted to literary and philanthropic pursuits.



The eldest of the three brothers, John Hayes Petit (1771-1822) inherited the Ettingshall estate, but also followed an ecclesiastical career. He was ordained priest in Chester in 1798 and served a curacy at Ashton under Lyme near Stalybridge in Cheshire. During his time there he married Harriet Astley of the nearby town of Dukinfield. Harriet was born in 1779 to the painter John Astley (1724-1787) and his third wife Mary Wagstaffe (1760-1832). John Astley had a colourful life, painting portraits of many 18th century notables, arousing strong passions of admiration (mainly in women) or distaste (mainly in men). His first wife was an unknown Irish lady who died in 1749. The second was Penelope Dukinfield Daniel (1722-1762) widow of Sir William Dukinfield Daniel, 3rd baronet, and a daughter of Henry Vernon, former High Sheriff of Staffordshire. John and Penelope were married with some rapidity after she intimated that the original of the portrait he was painting of her would be available if he wished. On Penelope's death, and the death of his stepdaughter, Astley inherited the substantial Dukinfield and Daniel estates in Cheshire and was able to lead a life of some luxury and idleness thereafter. Harriett was one of three sisters, known as the Manchester beauties, and her

marriage to John Hayes would have brought him both a beautiful wife and a substantial supplement to his already considerable income.

In 1811 John Hayes Petit was appointed Curate of Donnington, and then in February of that year he was also appointed as a Perpetual Curate at Shareshill, to the north-east of Wolverhampton. Around 1817 he leased Coton Hall at Alveley in Shropshire from Harry Lancelot Lee, which was a very substantial property that once belonged to the Lee family. In 1636, Richard Henry Lee had emigrated to the US, and the family became rich through the ownership of tobacco plantations with a large slave population, and from whom the US Confederate General Robert E Lee was descended. It would not have been a cheap place to lease. After John Hayes Petit's death in 1822, Coton Hall was bought by James Foster (1786 -1853), the very successful and wealthy ironmaster and coalmaster of Stourbridge. After his death his wife Harriet and her unmarried daughters moved to the house in the house in Tamworth St, Lichfield that was owned by her brother-in-law Louis Hayes Petit.

John Louis Petit, the artist, born in 1802, was the eldest of John and Harriet's nine children. He inherited the Ettingshall estate on the death of his father in 1822, and also inherited the bulk of the estate of his uncle Louis Hayes Petit when the latter died in 1849. In total they formed a very



substantial estate in the Wolverhampton area, that was being heavily exploited for coal, iron ore and limestone. He and his sisters also had a less tangible inheritance from his mother and his grandfather – the passion and the ability for painting and sketching. After he graduated from Trinity College in Cambridge in 1825, John Louis Petit firstly pursued an ecclesiastical career being curate at St Michael's in Lichfield from 1825 to 1828, under the Perpetual Curate Edward Remington, and then curate at Bradfield and Mistley in Essex from 1828 to 1834. During his time at St. Michael's, the registers tell us he carried out 61 baptisms, 35 weddings and 163 funerals, as well as presumably leading the Sunday worship – a not inconsiderable load. He married Louisa Reid, the daughter of George Reid of Trelawny in Jamaica in 1828. The Reid family derived much of their wealth from slave

plantations in Jamaica and the family received considerable compensation for their lost income when slavery was abolished in the 1830s. He gave up his post in Essex in 1834 and from the mid-1830s onwards he devoted his time to his painting and architectural criticism, and his story is told elsewhere. His artistic career is well described on the website of the Petit Society - <http://revpetit.com/>.

The Petit tomb in the churchyard hold the remain of John Louis and his siblings. The inscription reads

LOUISA PETIT sixth daughter of the Rev. HAYES PETIT deceased and HARRIET his wife. From a life of almost uninterrupted suffering which she bore with true Christian patience and cheerfulness she was released by a merciful providence on the 30 day of November in the Year of our Lord 1842 aged 30. Also of LOUIS PETER PETIT of Lincolns Inn, Barrister at Law, third and youngest son of the Rev. JOHN HAYES PETIT, and HARRIET his wife. He died on 28th May 1848 aged 32 years. PETER JOHN PETIT Lieutenant Colonel of Her Majesty's 50th Regiment died February 15th 1852 aged 46 years. ELIZABETH HAIG daughter of JOHN HAYES PETIT born September 11th 1810 died July 5th 1895. Hic J acet quod mortal e est viri Reverendi JOHANN LS LUDOVICI PETIT AM, died 2 Dec. 1868 aet suae 67. EMMA GENTILE PETIT born August 7 1808 died January 30 1893. SUSANNA PETIT died February 12 1897 aged 83.



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