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SAMUEL TABORER OF BRAILSFORD

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Rural churches of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are a rarity, because most villages already possessed mediaeval places of worship. But, in south Derbyshire, All Saints at Trusley and St Chad's at Barton Blount, only three miles apart and built in two consecutive years, are exceptions. This article will also suggest that they were built by the same architect, and identifies him as a mason who lived very sparingly in a nearby village. His simple life is reflected in his architectural style – classical, but naïve. What little is known of his obscure life is a reminder that classical architecture was a language that was still spoken in the deep countryside, although in an accent far removed from that of court and city.

The earlier of the two churches is All Saints, Trusley, built in 1713 at the expense of William Coke of Trusley Hall.¹ The entry in the Parish Register reads

Mem. 1713: sixth of August was the opening of the new church, when we had both vocall and instrumental music, the service read as at cathedrals, an anthem very well performed, Mr Coke being one of the performers. A sermon preached by ye Rector.²

William Coke, who was famous for his pack of harriers, always attended morning prayers read by the Rector of Trusley before hunting, and evening prayers on his return.³ Unfortunately the Coke papers contain but one reference to the building of the church, a payment to Edward Farnsworth, presumably a joiner, of £6 8s. 10d. for the three-deck pulpit, accounting for 92 days of Farnsworth's time, which works out at 1s. 5d. a day.⁴

However, the similarity of the main (south) doorway at Trusley (Fig. 1) to that at Barton Blount (Fig. 2), noted by Elizabeth Williamson in 1978, suggests that both churches were designed by the same man.⁵ Both doors have a round arch with moulded architraves, imposts and keystones, and are framed by Doric pilasters which take an entablature with a carved frieze, surmounted by a swan's neck pediment, which holds a carved achievement of arms (at Trusley) and a round-arched tabernacle with a disproportionate cornice (at Barton Blount). The differences are only those of detail, but they include the *bucrania* in the metopes at Trusley, which look less like ox skulls than the faces of the cattle grazing in the field by the church.

Barton Blount church was built in 1714, and its builder (and presumably designer) was Samuel Taborer.⁶ It was therefore probably Taborer who also designed Trusley church. He was doubtless the Samuel Taborer, mason, whose gravestone in Brailsford churchyard, less than five miles north of Trusley, is inscribed

To the memory of Samuel Taborer, Mason, who died 1 August 1743 aged 72. Also Elizabeth his wife, who died 12 February 1754 aged 80. And Samuel & Thomas Taborer their sons. Samuel died 12 February 1753 aged 39. Thomas died 2 November 1750 aged 45.

Taborer's will confirms that he was a mason, and of Brailsford. It appointed his wife Elizabeth as his executrix, and suggests that his sons were also masons, as his worldly goods, bequeathed to them in equal shares, included his stock of marble.



Fig. 1. All Saints' Church, Trusley, Derbyshire:
south door. *Edward Saunders*.



Fig. 2. St Chad's Church, Barton Blount, Derbyshire:
south door. *Edward Saunders*.

The possession of this expensive material suggests that Taborer worked as a carver or monumental mason, doubtless making chimneypieces and memorial tablets. No monuments signed by him have been identified yet, but it is to be hoped that this article will stimulate their discovery. The total value of Taborer's wealth, including his wearing apparel, valued at £1, was only £15 15s. 4d.⁷ The scale of his operation, in a remote Midland village far from Hyde Park Corner, was evidently very small.

However, Taborer left a thin trail through his locality. In January 1722 he was paid by Rowland Cotton of Etwall Hall, less than five miles south of Trusley. He was not evidently paid as an architect,

but both for walling and for carving, and for bringing stone from Hulland, five miles on the other side of Brailsford, at the southern edge of the Pennines,

By repairs 177ft. of coping upon the court wall £2 12s.
Four capitals and six scrolls £5 7s. 6d.
Carriage of three loads of stone From Hulland £1 os. od.
in all £8 19s 6d.⁸

This was not the main period of building at Etwall Hall, which had been rebuilt by Francis Smith in 1713–14, but Smith returned in 1724, at which time Samuel Taborer was paid again, this time for laying the hall floor.⁹ What Taborer did on the first occasion is difficult to tell, as the house was demolished in

1954 to make way for a school, and nothing remains of it today except Robert Bakewell's gate, re-erected in the church yard in front of the Sir John Port Almshouses.¹⁰

In 1725 he was paid by Edward Coke of Longford Hall, three miles south of Brailsford, and midway between there and Barton Blount.¹¹ It is not known what this payment was for, but, assuming that it was for mason's work, and assuming it was for work at Longford, it may have been for the main gate piers which hold the gates attributed to Robert Bakewell.¹² The piers are constructed from the same sandstone as the church doorways at Trusley and Barton Blount.

Edward Coke was the younger brother of Thomas Coke, the builder of Holkham Hall, where, soon afterwards, the future leading Derby architect, Joseph Pickford, was to work under Matthew Brettingham, after serving his apprenticeship with his uncle, the carver Joseph Pickford, at Hyde Park Corner, the centre of the luxury London carving trade.¹³ Samuel Taborer's bucolic career, in contrast to Pickford's elegant one, is a reminder of the variety as well as the omnipresence of classical culture in eighteenth-century England.

Sir Howard Colvin has decided to include Taborer in the forthcoming edition of his *Biographical Dictionary of British Architects*. What a surprise that would have been to his neighbours in Brailsford.

NOTES

- 1 J. C. Cox, *Notes on the Churches of Derbyshire*, Derby, 1873–79, III, 338–39.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 338.
- 3 This, at least, is the family tradition, for which I am indebted to Mr David Coke-Steel.
- 4 Rev. D.H. Buckley, *Trusley Church*, leaflet.
- 5 Nikolaus Pevsner (revised by Elizabeth Williamson), *The Buildings of England Derbyshire*, Harmondsworth, 1978, 345.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 85. Ms. Williamson was given this information, but not the source for it, by the Rev. Derek Buckley, who has since died.
- 7 Lichfield, Lichfield Record Office, B/C/11, Samuel Taborer of Brailsford, prob. 4 October 1743.
- 8 Matlock, Derbyshire Record Office, D286 (Cotton Papers), M/E2 (Account Book 1722–25). I am indebted to Mr Philip Heath, who brought this payment to my attention.
- 9 Andor Gomme, *Smith of Warwick*, Stamford, 2000, 224.
- 10 Edward Saunders, 'Biographical dictionary of English wrought iron smiths of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', *Walpole Society*, LXVII, 2005, 261.
- 11 I am indebted to Mr Maxwell Craven for this information, who in turn had it from the late Brig. Arthur Trevor, then the agent at Longford. It has not been possible to locate the exact reference, as Edward Coke's papers are now at Holkham Hall, Norfolk.
- 12 Saunders, *loc. cit.*
- 13 Edward Saunders. *Joseph Pickford of Derby*, Stroud, 1993, 12, 11 and 14.