

Samuel Swift (1846–1929) – A Life Set in Stone

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Samuel Swift
© Errington

FAMILY ROOTS

BEING BORN INTO a family tradition of stonemasons dating back 200 years might have been quite daunting for a child. Samuel Swift's family trade as stonemasons and builders dated back to the 17th century. Fortunately by the time he was a teenager, Samuel was showing a considerable talent for stone carving. This aptitude turned into his life's work, beautifying England's churches, cathedrals and public buildings.

Samuel's grandparents were George and Sarah Swift of Cawthorne. George was a stonemason and Sarah a schoolmistress. Samuel's father Benjamin was their youngest surviving child. He became a stonemason and ultimately a builder, working on contracts in the Cawthorne area. In 1842 he married Caroline, the daughter of John Puddephatt from Norfolk. John had moved the family to Cawthorne to become an excise man at the malt kilns at the top of Taylor Hill owned by the Clark family. At the time the canal reached Cawthorne Basin and they were able to move their belongings, from Norfolk, entirely by water. The Swift and Puddephatt families were well respected in the village.

Cawthorne is a rural village and then was part of the Cannon Hall estate owned by Walter Spencer Stanhope. It had its own industries such as a saw mill and a tannery, as well as a post office, a village school and both an Anglican church and a Methodist church. The estate was managed from the Spencer Stanhope family home, Cannon Hall, which stands on the hill above the village. They also owned a large percentage of the properties in Cawthorne and employed most of the villagers. These were the servants and agricultural workers and those providing supporting services such as blacksmiths and carpenters. Benjamin, and his father George before him, did most of their work for the Cannon Hall estate.

Samuel and his brothers, also named George and Benjamin, received an education, possibly under the influence of their grandmother Sarah, a schoolmistress. Their grandfather died in 1834 before they were born and Sarah lived with Benjamin Snr and his family. All the brothers served apprenticeships as stonemasons. They were at least the third generation of Swifts as stonemasons in Cawthorne but the family occupation dated back to the 17th century and the Pennine village of Penistone to the south of Barnsley. Samuel's brothers continued to live and work in Cawthorne, with the oldest, George, following

his father into managing building works. Between 1867 and 1869, Benjamin Swift was responsible for the building of a new church, St John the Evangelist at Hoylandswaine. The costs were met by the Spencer Stanhopes and Samuel worked on the stone sculptures. As a young man he won a prize for sculpture in Wakefield.

HIS EARLY WORK

Samuel's talent was recognised whilst he was still a teenager by John Roddam Spencer Stanhope, the Pre-Raphaelite painter and brother of Walter Spencer Stanhope. He arranged for Samuel to go to London with an introduction to William Farmer of Farmer and Brindley, the well-known firm of architectural sculptors. Samuel joined the company but also did some further training at Kensington School of Art. The company of Farmer and Brindley was set up by William Farmer and William Brindley in 1868. They had already established good reputations as stone and wood carvers, working for architects such as George Gilbert Scott, Alfred Waterhouse and Bodley and Garner. When William Farmer died in 1879, William Brindley continued to run the company. Samuel stayed with Farmer and Brindley for many years, working on their prestigious contracts.

By the time he was 25 he was working as an architectural sculptor and had taken lodgings in Weymouth Street off Portland Place in Marylebone. In 1874, he married Margaret Heckle at St Luke's Church, Marylebone. They were both living at 89 Seymour Place, Marylebone at the time. Margaret was one of the four daughters of Robinson Heckle of Great Ayton, a village near the North Yorkshire coast. Robinson was a farm labourer before becoming a coach driver. He died in 1862 when Margaret was only about eight years old. His sister Elizabeth worked at Cannon Hall and perhaps this is how Margaret met Samuel, on trips to visit her aunt. Two of her sisters, Mary and Rachel, had also settled in London so possibly Samuel and Margaret met in London.

In 1875, Walter and Roddam Spencer Stanhope engaged G. F. Bodley, a friend of Roddam's, to refurbish All Saints Church, Cawthorne in memory of their parents. Between 1875 and 1880, Samuel was in charge of the Farmer and Brindley workshop for the contract to provide ornamental stonework. The carving of St Paulinus, first archbishop of York, set in a niche on the outside of the north porch is Samuel's work. So is the magnificent alabaster reredos inside the church.

Also in 1875, Benjamin Swift Snr died. The previous year he had bought the old cottage at the bottom of Taylor Hill from Henry Ibbotson. It was next to the Swift family home and Benjamin had intended to build more houses for the family. Samuel and his brothers eventually pulled down the cottage and built two houses on the site. On these cottages are two heads carved as profiles and an assortment of animal and bird carvings. They are thought to be work by the Swifts.



Reredos, All Saints' Church
© P. Cartwright



RIGHT
St Paulinus
© M. Wilkinson



FAR RIGHT
Reredos detail
© P. Cartwright

These cottages are attached to the Swift family home, known as Lion House. The name originated because of the sculptures of lions, carved by Samuel, in the garden. Unfortunately these statues were stolen. Copies were made but these too were stolen. They have not been replaced.

Opposite the houses is a stone wall that retains a garden. The Swift workshop was on this area of land and a bungalow now stands there. When the shrubbery in front of the wall was cut back, several more relief sculptures were exposed. These are thought to be some of Samuel's apprentice pieces. One of them has an acknowledgement saying that it is copied from a work, 'The Feed', by J. F. Herring who specialised in the painting of horses. Another one is currently obscured by shrubs.

Just inside the gateway to steps leading up into the garden are more sculptures. One is of Sir Godfrey of Bouillon, another of a soldier in uniform, both thought to be by Samuel. Sir Godfrey was one of the leaders of the First Crusade, becoming the first king of Jerusalem

Swift Cottages, Taylor Hill, Cawthorne
© M. Wilkinson



Relief Sculptures, Swift Cottages, Taylor Hill, Cawthorne
© Hugh Polehampton



Lions carved by Samuel Swift formerly in the garden at Lion House
Courtesy Mr and Mrs Tye



'The Feed', after J. F. Herring
© M. Wilkinson





FAR LEFT
Godfrey de Bouillon
© M. Wilkinson

LEFT
Soldier
© M. Wilkinson

Samuel also carved a life-sized statue of Hebe, the cupbearer of the gods from Greek mythology. He gave this to his mother and it originally stood in the hall of Lion House. It now decorates the entrance to the Victoria Jubilee Museum in the village.

FAMILY LIFE

By 1881, Samuel and Margaret had moved to lodgings at 46 Holywell Street, Oxford. Between 1879 and 1882 Farmer and Brindley carried out work during the building of The Examination Rooms, Oxford. The move may have been because Samuel was working on this project. With them was their nephew John, known as Jack. He was the son of Samuel's brother Benjamin and his wife Annie and in the days before formal adoption law, they referred to Jack as their son. Benjamin Jnr died in 1885 and Annie died less than a year later. They left seven orphan children who were fostered within the family. At this time Samuel and Margaret also took in John's younger brother Samuel, who was about four years old when his parents died. They never had any children of their own and always considered the boys to be their sons. The family moved to 118 Lavender Hill, Battersea, a house shared with another family, before finally settling at 5 Forthbridge Road in 1893. They stayed in this house until Samuel finally left Farmer and Brindley and they moved to Kenilworth.

Whilst they were at Forthbridge Road, both sons left home. Jack followed the family tradition and became a stonemason and sculptor. He carved the Cawthorne village War Memorial that stands outside the Victoria Jubilee Museum.

In 1901, he married Isa Winfred Such. She was the daughter of a printer who also lived on Forthbridge Road. They later moved to Kenilworth too and



Hebe, Cawthorne Victoria Jubilee
Museum
© P. Cartwright

Cawthorne Victoria Jubilee Museum
© M. Wilkinson



Cawthorne War Memorial
© M. Wilkinson

Isa died there in 1944. Jack wrote a history of the Swifts that is still held by the family. He died in Bournemouth in 1970. Samuel Jnr joined the Post Office and became a telegraphist and engineer's clerk. In 1923 he married Florence Mary Lawson in Kenilworth. Florence was the daughter of Edward and Isabella Lawson who farmed at Cinder Hill, Cawthorne. Edward was said to brew the best beer in Cawthorne so he was never short of extra labour at harvest time. Samuel's parents Benjamin and Annie had lived in Cinder Hill farm cottage until the new house on Taylor Hill was finished. The families would know each other well and Samuel Jnr and Florence were the same age. Although Samuel left Cawthorne whilst very young, there would be regular visits back to see the family. Samuel and Florence later moved back to Cawthorne and Samuel died there at Croft House on Church Street in 1975.

After their sons left home, Samuel and Margaret took in a boarder, Julienne Comet, a young French woman who was a costumier and a resident in England. We do not know whether this was prompted by a need to supplement the family income. As they were employing a domestic servant this seems unlikely. Perhaps they just liked the company of young people in their home. Margaret's sister Mary also lived in London with her husband Thomas Gibson and her family. Thomas had been in service as a valet in Ashbury, Berkshire and in London before becoming a porter to the Foreign Office and later to a tea merchants. Margaret and Samuel also fostered Margaret's niece Mary Gibson. During this period Mary met and later married George Swift, another of Benjamin's orphaned children. In 1901, their niece Caroline Swift, sister of Jack and Samuel Jnr, was staying with them. It is apparent from this that both Samuel and Margaret felt strong family ties and a need to support and care for family members. They also had a boarder, Florence Parkhouse, a 31 year-old spinster who was a clerk in a mantle factory. The mantles were probably gas mantles.



In this Swift family photo are:

Back row left to right: Samuel Swift with his brother George's daughter Queenie on his knee, Samuel's wife Margaret, George's wife Mary Puddephatt, George Swift

Front row: Caroline and Frederick, the children of their brother Benjamin

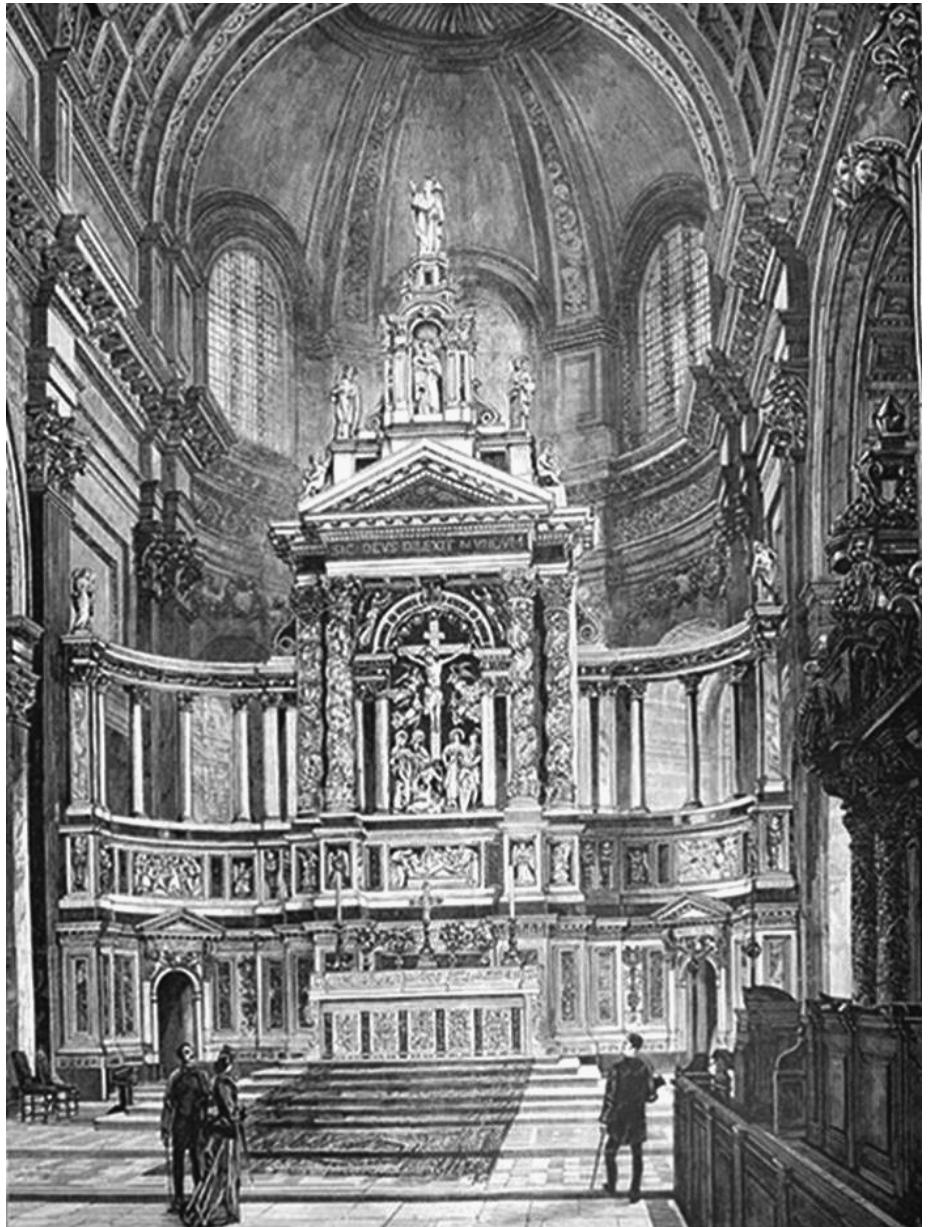
Swift Family
Courtesy of Mr and Mrs Tye

WORK FOR FARMER AND BRINDLEY

It is difficult to establish which Farmer and Brindley contracts Samuel worked on. Not many of their individual sculptors are credited. The company had established a national and international reputation. They worked on many commissions for Bodley and Garner and for Alfred Waterhouse as well as George Gilbert Scott. For Gilbert Scott, their commissions included Glasgow University and the Episcopal Cathedral of St Mary in Glasgow. For Waterhouse they collaborated on more than 100 projects such as the Natural History Museum and Manchester Town Hall. They were responsible for a great deal of the architectural sculpture in Greater Manchester.

One contract that Swift did work on was the marble reredos in St Paul's Cathedral, London. It was designed by Thomas Garner of Bodley and Garner Architects and finished in 1888 but unfortunately it no longer exists.

Reredos St Paul's Cathedral,
London Illustrated London News,
 31st Mar 1888, p. 312



It was mired in controversy from the start with some of the clergy feeling that the design was far too ‘Catholic’ for an Anglican cathedral. It suffered bomb damage during the London Blitz of World War II. Although some people thought the damage was not serious enough to need replacement, in 1958 it was removed and one made of marble and gilded oak was installed. In 2012, Bonhams Auctioneers sold two sections of the original Victorian structure.

As mentioned earlier, there is a great deal of Samuel’s work around Cawthorne covering much of his working life. The final piece he presented to the village was for the new Methodist Church. The money to build the church was raised within the local community. The work is a statue of John Wesley and it stands in a niche high on the exterior wall. It was unveiled by George Swift on August 6th 1896.



John Wesley
© M. Wilkinson

THE MOVE TO KENILWORTH

Sometime between 1911 and 1916, Samuel left Farmer and Brindley and moved with Margaret to Kenilworth in Warwickshire. We do not know why he decided to leave. He would be in his 60s by this time and may have felt less capable of the level of work required. This seems unlikely as he set up in business as a sculptor in Kenilworth. By this time Farmer and Brindley was in decline and perhaps this decided him. It had become a private limited company in 1905 when Brindley was 74 years old. Although he retained a majority of the shares, he handed the management of the company to his nephew Ernest Brindley and son-in-law Henry Barnes. The company advertised as the 'Largest establishment and with greatest variety and stock of choice coloured marble and rare stones in the Kingdom'. Unfortunately the First World War disrupted the markets and demand for wood, stone and marble carving never recovered. The company ceased to trade in 1929, the year of the Wall Street Crash.

The first family home in Kenilworth in 1916 was called Kintail on Warwick Road and they later moved to Henley Villa, Station Road.

Samuel continued as a sculptor well into old age and only stopped when he felt unable to do the work. He was still listed as a sculptor, working from Henley Villa, in the 1924 version of *Kelly's Directory* when he would be 78 years old. Margaret had died in 1921 and Samuel himself died in 1929. They are both buried in Kenilworth.

SAMUEL SWIFT'S ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

It is difficult to say who might have influenced Samuel's work. As he served his apprenticeship in Cawthorne, his father must have been an influence. During his early life in Cawthorne, Samuel would have been aware of other artists living there. The Spencer Stanhopes certainly influenced his life, as Roddam, an accomplished Pre-Raphaelite painter, encouraged him to go to London and provided an introduction to Farmer and Brindley. Samuel also liked to paint and his great-great-niece has two of his paintings and a beautiful box decorated by him. The figures painted on the box have a strong Pre-Raphaelite influence. They are strikingly similar to altar panels painted for All Saints, Cawthorne by Roddam. Perhaps Roddam influenced Samuel artistically, as well as helping to further his career as a sculptor.

The Hold family lived in Brook House, very near to the Swift's home in Taylor Row. Abel Hold was a well-known local artist who painted portraits, landscapes and in particular, live and dead game. Walter Spencer Stanhope was Abel's patron. Three of Abel's children, Tom, Ben and Florence, were also artists who all painted in a similar style to Abel. The Hold family had moved to Cawthorne

Artworks by Samuel Swift
Courtesy of V. and R. Errington



around 1852 and Ben was just a year younger than Samuel whilst Tom was four years older. Perhaps they were at school together. Could Samuel have visited Abel's studio at Brook House? Another, much older, artist was Thomas Witlam Atkinson who also started his career as a Cawthorne stonemason. Around 1860, when he would have been about 60 years old, Atkinson returned to Cawthorne to speak, at the West Yorkshire Geological Society, about his travels in Siberia where he painted many landscapes.

SWIFT THE MAN

In my researching of Samuel Swift, I have gradually formed an impression of the man as well as the artist. Samuel had a strong sense of family and family responsibility as did his wife Margaret. He showed this by helping his brothers to carry out their father's wishes. After their father died, the brothers went ahead and built a pair of family houses at the bottom of Taylor Hill, as he had intended. Samuel and Margaret showed their caring side by informally adopting his brother Benjamin's sons, Jack and Samuel. The remaining five orphans were fostered within the family. They always considered the boys to be their sons and described them as such in census entries. In addition, they fostered a niece, Mary, daughter of Margaret's sister Mary. Samuel's brother George was ill in 1900; he was staying with Samuel when he died. Samuel also returned regularly to Cawthorne. He worked on the restoration of All Saints Church, the village church and donated the statue of John Wesley for the new Methodist Church. He took an interest in the new Victoria Jubilee Museum and sent samples of minerals to be exhibited there.

Samuel Swift was a talented sculptor and artist, a family man who never forgot his roots in the Yorkshire village of Cawthorne.

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