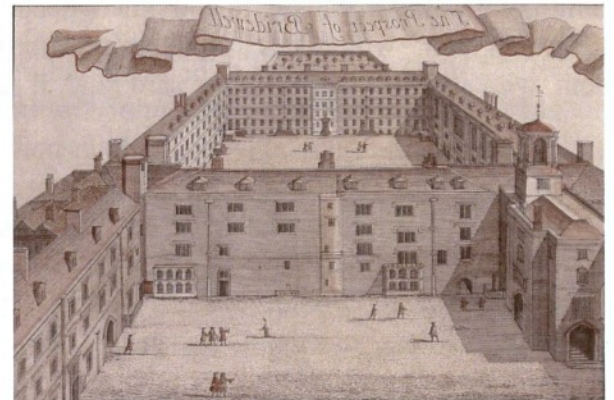


A TRAGIC TALE

Samuel Pulham graduated from Cambridge University and became rector of Tunstall in 1688. Nine years later he also became rector of Boyton and was buried in Tunstall when he died in 1721. He and his wife Bridget had several children in both parishes, and the first-born girl and boy were named after their parents, Bridget in 1689 and Samuel in 1693. There is confusion about Samuel in that two baptisms are recorded in the Tunstall records, in May 1693 and December 1696, although the latter is on a page with other baptisms in 1693. Edmund, who had a family and lived for many years in Boyton, keeping school at the parsonage, was the next to be baptised in Tunstall. Two of the first burials recorded by Samuel Pulham in Boyton were those of Deborah and Samuel in 1698. Deborah was only a few days old and Samuel was, presumably, one of those children of the same name baptised at Tunstall. Perhaps the first Samuel was 'weak' and another child was given the same name, thus the deceased child was likely to be the one baptised in 1693. The next child was John, baptised in 1699, followed by Elizabeth and Daniell. David Elisha Davy, in his notes for a history of Suffolk, written a hundred years later, said that John 'proved a Lunatick' and was confined in a moveable cage in Tunstall in the care of the Overseers there. However, documents at the time named him as Samuel and there is no mention of a cage.

Whatever way he was confined appears barbaric today, but it must have been better for him than being in an asylum which would have meant Bethlem Hospital, popularly known as Bedlam, at that time situated at Moorfields. This place represented the worst excesses in the era of lunacy reform. Friends and relatives could visit and were expected to bring food and other requisites for inmates, but scandalously the public was also allowed to witness the insane. Cesar de Saussure wrote during his 1725 tour of London that 'on the second floor are cells reserved for dangerous maniacs, most of them being chained and terrible to behold. On holidays numerous persons visit the hospital and amuse themselves watching these unfortunate wretches'. However in Tunstall a tragic tale ensued. Samuel is named in the Tunstall records under the burial of John Dammant, 'a married man', who was killed by Samuel Pulham, 'a man out of his senses', on 21 October 1726. The Ipswich Journal of 25 March 1727 reported Samuel's trial for murder at the Assizes held at Bury St. Edmunds, where he was acquitted 'being a Lunatick'. Dammant was the constable, elected for a year in 1726, and succeeded by William Cooper until the next Whit Sunday.

Following Samuel's trial and acquittal an application was made to the Quarter Sessions, held in Woodbridge, that he be confined by a chain in a convenient house and provided with 'a slender diet' by the inhabitants of Tunstall. It is likely that his family intervened to make sure he was treated better than that, and his allowance of two shillings and sixpence a week was more than that provided for others in Tunstall who required support in the parish. The inhabitants continued to pay for Samuel's maintenance, and in 1756 it was agreed to increase his allowance to three shillings a week, and he was to be confined 'in his cote', presumably a kind of strait-jacket, for five years in the house of Thomas Gater. Four years later Gater was told to allow his charge to go no further than his house and yards 'for ease'. For another six years Samuel was cared for in Tunstall where he was buried on 9 March 1766, with a note in the register that he had been 'confined ever since the March Assizes in the year 1727 for the killing of John Dammant, Constable of this parish on 21st October 1726'.



Vic Harrup

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