

The Coat of Arms

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THE COAT OF ARMS

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DOM ANSELM BAKER (1833–85) HERALDIC ARTIST

RICHARD C. F. BAKER FHG, AIH & PAUL A. FOX FHS, AIH

With this issue the Coat of Arms begins the serialization of Brother Anselm's drawings of the arms of Cistercian monasteries in the British Isles, with the gracious permission of the Abbot and community of Mount St Bernards Abbey. Anselm's entry in the DNB is necessarily brief, and fails to address how he came to be so interested in medieval heraldry.¹ He was born in Birmingham as William Baker, presumably at his parents' residence in Legge Street, on 23 January 1833. His parents were Thomas Baker, a coach painter, and Susanna née Tompson, who married at the church of St Peter and St Paul in Aston on 10th March 1832. William was baptized at St Philip's Anglican Cathedral in the centre of Birmingham on 18th February 1833.² The family moved just around the corner into Molina Street, but sadly, Susanna died in 1836 at the very young age of 29 years when William was just 3 years old; she was buried at St Paul's, a chapelry in the parish of St Martin, on 19th April 1836. There do not appear to be any more children of the marriage, and in the returns of the census conducted in June 1841, William, now aged 8, is found living with his father, a coach maker, in Upper Tower Street. A year previously Thomas placed an advertisement in the Birmingham Gazette for the sale of a landau and a phaeton, giving his business address (as a painter) in Price Street.³ He was listed in Pigot's Directory of Birmingham 1842 as the proprietor of a wheelwright's shop in Price Street.

It is highly probable that Thomas taught his son how to paint, and that William's first exposure to heraldry was through his father's coach painting business. In 1849 while he was still living with his father at 78 Loveday Street (next door to a public house called the Dog) William was received into the Roman Catholic church as a convert at St Chad's Cathedral, one of very few converts in Birmingham that year.⁴ By 1851 Thomas had remarried and changed his occupation to that of baker, still living at 78 Loveday Street with his wife Frances and his son William, then age 18, who was working as a carver of wooden gun stocks.⁵ William had his own small workshop in

1852–3 at nearby Weaman Street, where various gun makers and finishers had their

¹ Thompson Cooper & Anne Pimlott Baker, 'William Baker (1833–85)' New DNB.

² The baptism register once again gave his father the occupation of coach painter.

³ *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* 6th July 1840.

⁴ St Chad's Registers P1/5/1. In the *1850 Post Office Directory of Birmingham*. Thomas's coach building workshop was at 60 Steelhouse Lane.

⁵ The census shows that Thomas, age 47, was born in Lichfield, and his wife Frances came from Shropshire.

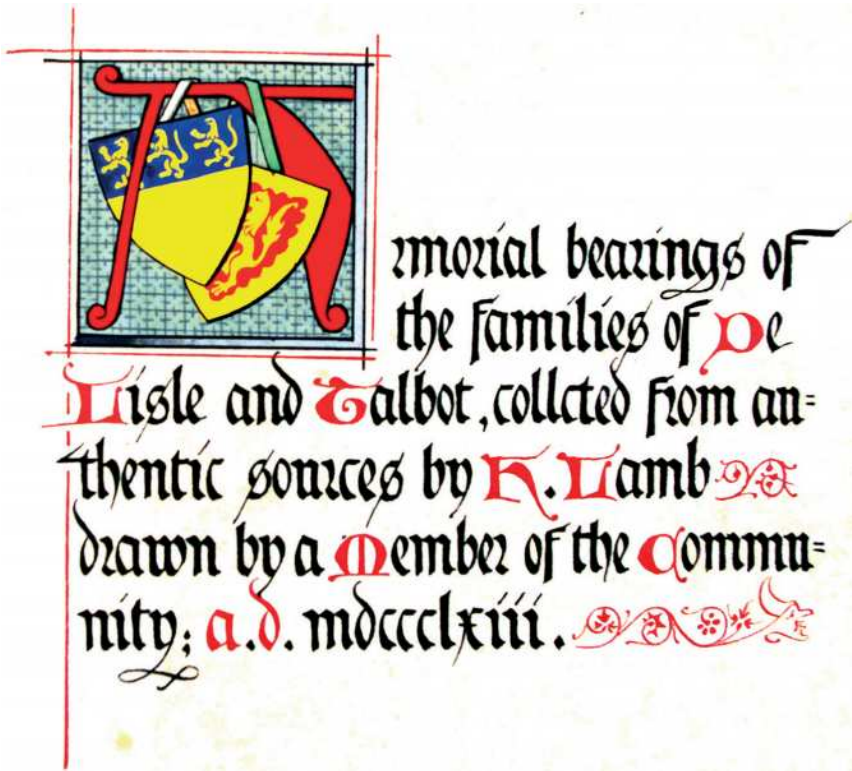


Figure 1: The Colophon of Dom Anselm Baker's unfinished Book of Benefactors.

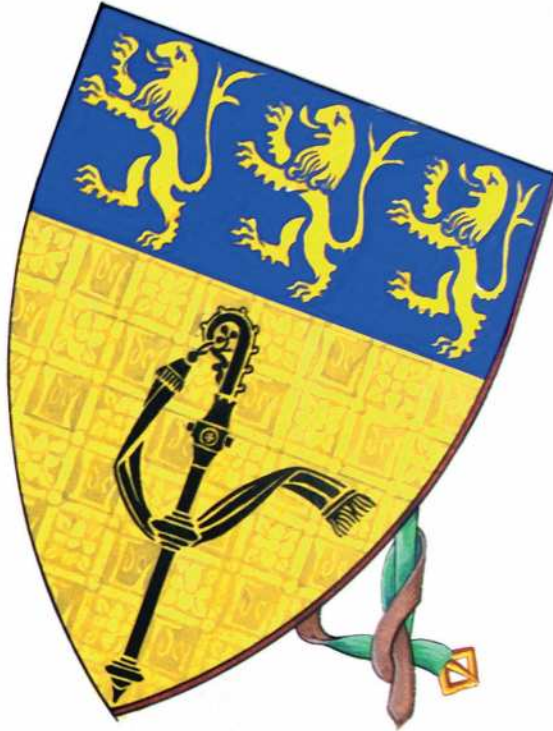
premises.⁶ It was probably in 1853 that he went to work for John Hardman. (d.1867), the man who is known to have developed William's artistic skills.⁷

Hardman was a Roman Catholic button manufacturer born in 1812, who in 1837 met Augustus Pugin (d.1852), probably at Oscott College in Birmingham, where Pugin was teaching architecture. Under Pugin's influence Hardman began to experiment in the production of high quality church metalwork, and after many difficulties he achieved the perfection of workmanship that Pugin required. The two men worked together on St Chad's Cathedral in Birmingham, the first to be built in England since the Reformation. St Chads was consecrated in 1841, and in 1844 Hardman's father was interred there in the Hardman Chantry. From 1845 Hardman began to manufacture stained glass according to Pugin's designs. At the Great Exhibition of 1851 Hardman presented an extensive display, which included a great chandelier designed for Alton Towers. The intended recipient of the chandelier, John

⁶ Slater's Directory of Birmingham 1852-3 p.17

⁷ He was no longer listed in the directories as a gun stocker from 1854 onwards. Hardman's various obituaries all state that Baker worked for Hardman.

Our Lady of Mount S. Bernard in
Charnwood, Leicestershire.



Founded by Ambrose Lisle Marsh
Phillipps de Lisle of Garendon Park co
Leicester a.d. mdcccxxv. colonised with
monks from Mount Mellera in Ireland
who had been expelled from France
during the revolution of mdcccxxv.

Figure 2: Arms of Mount St Bernards Abbey, derived from those of Lisle.

Talbot, sixteenth earl of Shrewsbury, did not have long to enjoy it. He died in 1852, when Hardman collaborated with Edward Pugin on preparations for the splendid obsequies. The year 1853 saw another impressive display of Hardman's wares at a Great Exhibition in Dublin, followed soon afterwards by the opening of a branch of the company at 48 Grafton Street.

Hardman presumably met William Baker in Catholic circles, and employed him after realising that he was a skilled artisan and artist. Hardman assembled a team of craftsmen and artists whom he taught himself. It was said of him that "to those in his employment he was a kind master and friend, parental in his sympathies".⁸ Baker's later murals and other art work show a strong affinity with contemporary stained glass design, of which the principal artist in the production of stained glass cartoons was Pugin's eldest son Edward.

The income brought in by William would have been welcome to his father, whose business ventures continued to falter. In 1854 Thomas was listed as a grocer and baker, in 1855 as a baker and flour dealer.⁹ Disaster struck in October 1856 when Thomas Baker, late of 78 Loveday Street, shopkeeper and coach painter, now lodging at 73 Ashted Row, journeyman coach painter, was listed as an insolvent debtor.¹⁰ That same month, on 15th October, William Baker sought refuge at Mount St Bernards Abbey, and it is difficult to avoid the impression that he was escaping from his father. He could have continued to work for Hardman & Co, living in his own lodgings, but the health of his mentor John Hardman's was crumbling at this very time, and Hardman was removing himself from the business. The building of the Cistercian community at Mount St Bernard in Leicestershire was one of many Pugin–Hardman collaborations. It was consecrated in 1844 on land given by Ambrose de Lisle (d.1878), and with the financial assistance of Lisle's friend John Talbot, earl of Shrewsbury. The founder monks came from Mount Melleray in Ireland.

William took the habit on 8th December 1856, and was professed as a monk on the 2nd February 1859, taking the name Anselm.¹¹ The censuses of 1861 and 1871 find him at Mount St Bernard and described as an artist. He is known to have painted murals at St Scholastica's Priory in Atherstone, where Edward Pugin (d.1875) was working in 1861; and also at Ambrose de Lisle's home of Garendon Park, where Pugin was working 1865–6. It is tempting to speculate that a friendship existed between Anselm and Edward Pugin, the monk being just over a year older than the architect and designer. For his heraldic manuscripts brother Anselm must have been able to draw upon outside scholarship. He had links both to the Society of Antiquaries and to the College of Arms. It was probably Edward Bellasis, Bluemantle Pursuivant (from 1873) who invited him to produce the majority of the coats of arms for Foster's

⁸ John Alfred Langford, *Modern Birmingham and its institutions* (2 vols Birmingham 1877) vol 2 pp.298–9.

⁹ *Kellys Directory of Birmingham* 1854 pp 807, 909; *White's Directory of Birmingham* 1855 p.78.

¹⁰ *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* 6th October 1856; *The Birmingham Journal* 11th October 1856, *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* 17th November 1856.

¹¹ The DNB wrongly states that he made his vows in 1857. The dates here supplied come from the Abbey Register.

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Figure 3: Arms of Lisle from the Book of Benefactors.

Peerage, which was published in 1879. Bellasis was a Roman Catholic, who attended the Oratory School in Birmingham, and also the son of a herald. Bellasis was Joseph Foster's collaborator in the creation of the Peerage. Anselm is also known to have maintained a close friendship with Edwin de Lisle FSA (d.1920) who as the seventh son of Ambrose de Lisle, had studied at Oscott College, and with Everard Green FSA (d.1926) who entered the College of Arms as Rouge Dragon Pursuivant in 1893.¹²

¹² *The Tablet*, 21st February 1885 p.301.

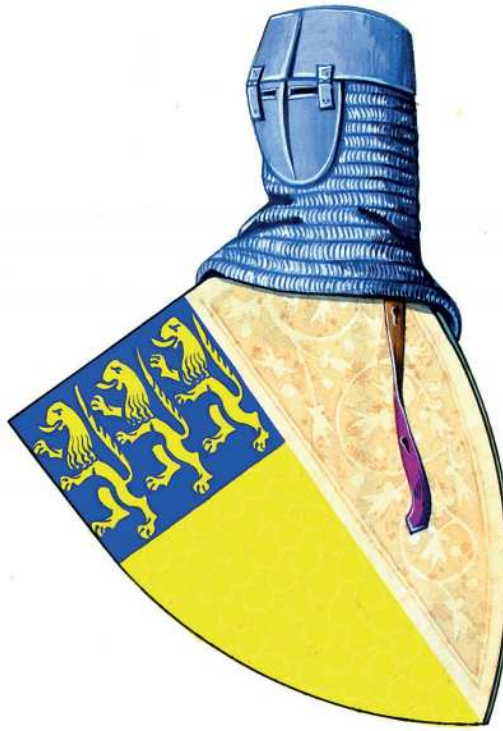


Figure 4: An interesting drawing from the Book of Benefactors for which the caption was never finished.

Anselm is reported to have illustrated at least five catholic religious tracts which were published in London, Tournai and Mechlin. The intended purpose of the three manuscript art works which remained unpublished at the time of his death is unclear. They might have been intended as gifts. They were: *the English cardinals*, part published by Mark Elvins. and presented to the College of Arms by William Weldon, Norroy, in 1900¹³; *the Cistercian monasteries* (see below) and the *Mount St Bernard Benefactors' book*, which is an armorial of the families of Lisle and Talbot. This last work was still unfinished when Anselm died, as it contains towards the end some preparatory pencil sketches.

Anselm made a will on 2nd July 1879 for which his abbot, the Right Reverend John Anderson, was the sole beneficiary. His eventual estate was worth £262 10s, suggesting that he was well rewarded for some of his artistic commissions. It is known that he became seriously ill about five years before he died, and the will probably coincides with the onset of that illness. He was nursed back to health by

¹³ Mark Turnham Elvins, *Cardinals and Heraldry* (London 1988) p.14.

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a lay brother, Aloysius, but remained debilitated.¹⁴ In the 1881 census he was no longer described as an artist, but as a chorister. His friends and pupils would visit him on Sunday afternoons to benefit from his knowledge of art and church liturgy. He died on 11th February 1885, and was buried in the small monks' cemetery at Mount St Bernard, which his outside friends visited the following week. His book of benefactors and his book on abbeys were both brought to London for display, before returning to the abbey for safekeeping, and entering a long period of obscurity. In studying his drawings today we can be transported somewhere close to the epicentre of Augustus Pugin's medieval revival, and his passion for heraldry.

¹⁴ *The Academy* vol 27, 21st Feb 1885 p.133.