

# Bishop Richard Trevor (1707 – 1771)



Bishop Richard Trevor (1707 – 1771) was enthroned as Bishop of Durham on 29th December 1752, just seven years after the invasion of England in 1745 by the second Jacobite Rebellion. Trevor was from the nobility being the fourth and youngest son of Baron Thomas Trevor of Bronham, and was educated at Westminster School before gaining a Fellowship of All Souls College, Oxford.

He was raised to the Episcopal Bench in 1744 when he was presented the see of St David's before moving to Durham.

Historians have hardly been effusive about or fair to the far-sighted Trevor. Indeed William Fordyce in his book 'The History and Antiquities of the County Palatine of Durham' reports, "Of Trevor there is nothing remarkable to report," hardly a glowing testimony especially when compared with Fordyce's description of Trevor's immediate predecessor, Bishop Joseph Butler as being 'excellent and amiable'. Indeed Fordyce goes on to damn Trevor by faint praise when he states, "In short he seems to have been one of those persons whose qualifications enable them to go through life respectably without being eminent or remarkable in any way." P. Fair writing in 1820 in his book '**A Description of Bishop Auckland**' is somewhat kinder remarking, "There was a singular dignity in his Lordship's person; he was tall, well proportioned, and of a carriage erect and stately. The Episcopal robe was never worn more gracefully. His Features were regular, manly and expressive; his complexion florid, and over his countenance was diffused an air of benignity, though accompanied with that presence, which, whilst it inspired esteem, commanded reverence and distant respect." Fair does acknowledge the improvements that Trevor made to the fabric of Auckland Castle and Park in a single sentence before giving a Tour page graphic account of the Bishop's lingering death from 'putrid mortification'! Historian Matthew Richley sums up Richard Trevor's incumbency by stating, "He answered in everything to Saint Paul's description of a Christian bishop."



It seems that Bishop Trevor was anything but a man of whom "there is nothing remarkable to report." He undertook major building and refurbishment work in the palace and the Bishop's Park at Bishop Auckland. These works included the building of the Neo-Gothic gatehouse to the design of Sir Thomas Robinson of Rokeby and of

the cloister-like deer house in the park. He also commissioned local self-taught mathematician Jeremiah Dixon (later to gain lasting fame when, in 1763, he surveyed the boundary between Maryland and Pennsylvania — The Mason-Dixon Line — separating the American slave states from the free states) to revitalize the park itself with the planting of many of the trees that exist to this day.



**Bishop Trevor and his coat of arms on a ceiling boss at Auckland Castles**

It was Bishop Trevor who brought the paintings of Jacob and his 12 sons to his residence at Auckland Castle – a battle is being fought to stop the Church of England selling the paintings off and breaking up the collection.

## **Zurbaran at Auckland Castle**

It has frequently been suggested that the scenes were painted purely speculatively for sale in the New World to where, it was traditionally believed, the Twelve Tribes of Israel had been scattered (2 Kings 17) following the Assyrian King Shalmaneser's invasion of Israel. Legend has it



that the canvases were captured by licensed pirates - corsairs - during their Atlantic voyage and returned to Europe as bounty. Considering the potential hazards of both the domestic religious climate and of the hostility of the suggested journey, it seems almost inconceivable that an artist of Zurbarán's status should take such risks.

Although not previously postulated, it would seem much more likely that Zurbarán had a powerful Jewish patron who commissioned these pictures and that they never left Europe. Would an artist risk persecution or even death at the hands of the Chief Inquisitor or the loss of such meticulous and valuable pictures to the Atlantic elements or to piracy at a time, the 1640s, when his work was still in great demand for the churches and monasteries of Spain? Certainly there were commissioned works of fine quality being exported. In 1665 Sevillian master-painter Juan Lopez Carrasco is recorded as receiving a commission for 'twenty-four Patriarchs of high quality' for the colonial market. Similarly, if the Bishop Auckland series of Patriarchs had gone to the New World, it would be reasonable to assume that some documentation of their export or re-import would exist. The 'corsair theory', of course, neatly sidesteps this weakness in the 'export argument' for its proponents as the theft of the paintings whilst at sea would preclude any 'paperwork'. This piracy theory, of course, does not explain the absence of any record of the original commission. Much, but by no means all, of the documentation for Zurbarán's commissioned works still exists and the most likely explanation for the absence of formal documentation of the origin of the Bishop Auckland series is simply that it has been lost.

The history of the paintings and their whereabouts for the first one hundred or so years of their existence is not known and it would seem that this void has been filled by imaginative speculation and there is no evidence to substantiate the romantic notion of piracy. (This notion first appeared in writing as late as 1948 when the pictures were documented in The Inventory of See Houses produced for the newly formed Church Commissioners). The pictures were probably commissioned, by and destined for a Spanish client but history does not tell us and probably never will.

This 'disappearance' of Zurbarán's work was not confined to the Bishop Auckland series of Patriarchs. Whilst acknowledged as a master in his lifetime, in his later life Zurbarán slipped into artistic obscurity and,

following his death, into almost total oblivion, his works being hidden in the churches and monasteries that had commissioned them. This was largely because of changing artistic taste and a move away from the severe Mannerist Baroque style of Zurbarán to the rounder, softer Rococo of the late 17th century. Zurbarán was to pay for his stylistic rigidity and die penniless.