

SOUTHWELL MINSTER – THE COMPANION GUIDE [edit]

1 The Nave

In his book *Cathedral*, Jon Cannon (2007) describes the nave of the Minster: *'Romanesque Southwell is a spirited exercise in the energetic power of the **semicircular** arch, by a man well informed enough to have built rib vaults (in the nave aisles), within a decade or so of their invention.'* Archbishop Thomas (1108-1114) of York authorized the rebuilding of the Saxon Minster to be a kind of 'sub' cathedral for York Minster together with Beverley and Ripon. In doing so he instigated a change of style that reflected the new Norman regime.

Beginning in 1108 it took some fifty to seventy years to complete and is remarkable for its solidity, for the size of its broad second storey, or triforium, and its **clerestory** above with circular windows ensuring sufficient light.

The barrel vaulted ceiling dates only from 1880 when it replaced a flat ceiling built after the fire of 5th November 1711 when the south west tower was struck by lightning. Under the barrel vaulting and above the great arch at the east end of the nave is the **Christus Rex**, a sculpture made of elm and oak overlaid with burnished copper and gold leaf. It was created by **Peter Ball in 1987**. To many the outstretched arms of the risen Christ serve as a powerful symbol of the welcoming love of God offering sanctuary, strength and inspiration.

On the south side of the nave is the '**new**' font, installed in **1661**, following the restoration of the monarchy the previous year. The original font disappeared during the civil war.

Directly behind the font is a **Victorian stained glass window**. It depicts the baptism of Christ in the Jordan beneath which is the robed figure of St Paulinus baptising in the Trent and holding a model of the Minster in his hand. The model has no spires or 'pepperpots' as they are known locally. They had not been replaced after 1801 when they were deemed too heavy: the present pepperpots date from c.1880. There is some evidence that **Paulinus** baptised nearby **c.627** and it was sufficient for the legend to grow that he baptised at Southwell itself. This may well have heightened the perception of the Minster's status as a sub cathedral and in medieval times water from Southwell and chrism oil blessed by the Archbishop were used at baptisms and eucharists throughout the county [**window by O'Connor 1851**].

The **pulpit** shows figures carved on its panels all of which are linked with early tradition. From right to left are St Paulinus, who became the first Bishop of York, the Virgin and child, St Augustine, first Archbishop of Canterbury and the one responsible for bringing Paulinus to Britain, Queen Ethelburga who travelled with Paulinus on their journey north, and finally, King Edwin of Northumbria, whom Ethelburga married and Paulinus later baptised. Whatever the historical veracity of the tradition, Paulinus is a reminder that this is the place for the preaching of God's word. The pulpit designed by G.F.Bodley in 1896

Turning westwards, before moving to the Crossing, gives opportunity to view the **Great West Window**. The original windows were replaced in the first half of

the 15th century by a huge Perpendicular window which let in more light. The present glass was designed and painted by **Patrick Reyntiens** and based on an initial concept of **Martin Stancliffe**, then cathedral architect. Made in the Barley studios in York it was installed in 1996 and described by the artist as 'a great gathering of angels enjoying being with God; just all joy and worship'

2 The Crossing

The Crossing represents the heart of the cruciform shape of the cathedral. Above is the Minster's central tower supported by the four massive Norman pillars decorated by typical 'rope' or 'cable' moulding carved around the arches. Within the tower is the ringing chamber, the floor of which can be seen from below. The Southwell 'ring' is unusual in that its **12 bells** are rung in an **anticlockwise** direction. They chime each day at noon and 4.00pm. One of three tunes is played – *Bedford*, *Southwell*, or the *National Anthem*.

The monumental space framed by the arches is a reminder that this is, in the phrase of the poet Philip Larkin, 'a serious place on serious earth', but it is not without its humour. The **Pulpitum** was built around **1340**. It is richly decorated with delicate carvings and comic caricatures. Labourers and monarchs all find their place.

The crossing marks the transition from the Romanesque style of the Nave to the early English architecture of the Quire and the decorative Pulpitum. Note the contrast with the very earliest carvings. They are not easy to see but are found on the capitals of the Crossing and include **The Entry into Jerusalem** and an **Annunciation scene**. They are thought to have been carved around **1110** and the stylised flat relief suggests the Normans may have been using local masons of Danish origin.

The Pulpitum was made broad enough to allow for the reading of the gospel and to accommodate a choir upon it. It now houses a splendid **Nicholson organ** installed in 1996 within a 1934 case by W.D.Carøe.

The numerous carved figures of the **Pulpitum**, from solemn kings and queens to humble and sometimes comic workmen, together with the natural history of the stalls, serve as reminders of the whole of God's created order.

The dedication of the Cathedral Church is to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the empty space of the Crossing is a place of expectation for those preparing for daily worship. The figure of **Mary will be seen again on the Quire side** of the Pulpitum screen.

3 The Quire

Less than one hundred years after the Norman Quire was completed it was deemed too small for the growing number of canons. It was demolished in **1240** and swiftly rebuilt twice the size and in the markedly different style of early English Gothic. The columns are slender and fluted and the soaring arches are sharply pointed. The triforium and clerestory are not separate storeys at all but are compressed under twin lancet arches.

The four blocks of **choir stalls** nearest the Pulpitum are the inspired work of Charles Henry Simpson, put in place in **1886**. The bench heads have particularly fine wood carvings of foliage and animals in profusion reminiscent of the stone leaves of the Chapter House. Under the Pulpitum are **six stalls** for 'senior' clergy including '**Wolsey's stall**', so called because Thomas Wolsey, Archbishop of York (1514-30), spent some five months in Southwell during the last year of his life. The stalls have some outstanding 14th century **misericords**, designed not only to assist weary clergy, who can lean on them whilst standing, but also to display intricately worked biblical scenes.

The brass eagle **lectern** indicates the centrality of the word of God in Christian worship. It was originally the property of Newstead abbey. At the dissolution of the monasteries, it was hidden in a lake and only rediscovered some 250 years later when the lake was drained. It was auctioned by the 5th Lord Byron, great uncle of the poet, and acquired for the Minster in 1805 by Sir Richard Kaye, then Dean of Lincoln. The lectern, made at **Tournai** in the Low Countries in **1503**

The unusual five seater **Sedilia** are contemporary with the Pulpitum (1340). Both were restored in the 19th century by the **Bernasconi** brothers, two Italian artists.

The **altar rails** and much of the furniture are from the workshop of **Robert Thompson** of Kilburn, North Yorkshire. They were installed in **1949** and carry his famous trademark, the carved mouse.

The four upper East windows depict the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John with their emblems below and were made by Clayton and Bell in 1876. The **four lower** windows are the work of the Parisian glass painter **Jean Chastellain** and made in **1528 for the Temple church in Paris**. After the French Revolution the church was sold. The windows were subsequently found in a pawn shop in Paris and presented to the Minster in **1818** by **Henry Gally Knight**, a Nottinghamshire squire, poet and antiquarian from Warsop. They show scenes from the life of Christ: his baptism, the raising of Lazarus, the entry into Jerusalem and the mockery of Jesus. In each a purple cloak suggests some hint of a royal personage is present in the actions portrayed in the stories.

Southwell's first Bishop and Dean, **George Ridding**. The memorial was designed by W.D.Caröe. The kneeling figure is by F.W.Pomeroy

4 The South Transept

Returning through the Pulpitum and moving into the South Transept. **The Kelham Madonna** by Alan Coleman [1952] was formerly in the chapel of Kelham Hall, once home to the Anglican religious order, The Society of the Sacred Mission.

On the west wall of the Transept adjacent to the Royal British Legion window is a bas relief carving of the Holy Family **The Flight into Egypt** by **Robert Kiddey**. It was given to the Minster in 1987.

On the other side of the Transept is another sculpture by Peter Ball. This **pieta** shows a figure of the sorrowing Mary that is in marked contrast to the upright

Madonna and appropriately lies alongside the **War Memorial of 1920 by W.D.Caröe.**

This area also contains the earliest artefacts in the Minster. Just inside the archway near the Kelham Madonna is a **Roman ceiling painting** from the bath house of the Roman villa that lay some 100 metres to the east. The painting shows a figure of Cupid and some fish.

The Saxon Minster that predates the present building made use of materials from the villa and evidence of this can be seen under the 15th century **bread pews**. A small section of mosaic flooring can be illuminated by pressing the timed switch. The bread pews were the place where money and food were once distributed to the needy.

A plaque opposite denotes a bequest made to fund payments to the poor of the parish.

5 Christ of the Light of the World Chapel

This ancient chantry chapel now offers a secluded space for prayer and reflection before Christ the Light of the World. The figure of Christ behind the candles and inviting our intercessions is another sculpture by Peter Ball.

6 St Oswald's Chapel

Adjacent to Bishop Ridging's memorial is the chapel dedicated to St Oswald. Oswald became Bishop of Worcester in 959 and retained the see when appointed Archbishop of York in 972 shortly after the lands around Southwell had been given to a predecessor, Archbishop Oskytel. **St Oswald** died washing the feet of the faithful on Maundy Thursday in Worcester in **992**. The distinguished 20th century artist **John Piper** incorporated the design of a raven in the red altar frontal, perhaps believing this to be St Oswald's symbol. In fact the raven is associated with an earlier Oswald, the king and martyr who died in 633. There is a tenuous connection with Southwell in that Oswald was the nephew of King Edwin, who was baptised by Paulinus. The **reredos** is the work of W.D.Caröe, later decorated by Ronald Sims.

7 The Airmen's Chapel

At the end of the north Quire aisle is the airmen's chapel with the flags of the RAF and Polish nation. Since the end of the first World War there has been a chapel in the Minster commemorating those who have lost their lives in conflict. The altar was made in 1919 by apprentices from RAF Norton using wood recovered from broken propeller blades found in French battlefields. The **communion rail** was made at RAF Newton in 1984 and the blue **carpet** a gift in **1941** from the variety artistes Elsie and Doris Waters. The **memorial tablet** by Ronald Sims commemorates the victims of the Katyn Forest Massacre in which 14,500 Polish prisoners of war were killed. An urn containing soil from the forest is held within the wall behind it. During the Second World War many Polish refugees came to Britain to fly with the RAF or to work the Nottinghamshire coalfields. The large Polish community in the county holds an annual service here.

The **Triptych** was painted in 1958 by Hamish Moyle, a member of the Little Gidding community and was inspired by the poem *Still Falls the Rain* by Dame Edith Sitwell which speaks of the sacrifice and tragedy of war. The poem is printed on the back of the small replica of the painting.

Reflection on the human face of God and the cost of suffering and violence is further encouraged by **Ecce Homo**, another sculpture by Peter Ball.

8 St Thomas' Chapel

The small adjoining chapel is currently being used as a clergy vestry and is closed off by a curtain. Visitors particularly interested in the stained glass by the notable Victorian glass maker **C.E.Kempe** can ask permission to enter from the vergers at their adjoining vestry along the north Quire aisle.

9 The Chapter House

The Chapter House – the great climax of a visit to Southwell, its greatest and most glorious surprise... *among Chapter Houses as a rose among flowers,*' so wrote Henry Thorold in his *Shell Guide to Nottinghamshire* (1984).

It is reached by way of a gated archway from the north Quire aisle through a covered passage. On the right hand side are small **windows** containing glass that reflects the details of the Great West Window.

On the left hand side are the **capitals of the 49** columns which mark the start of carvings which increase in complexity as the spectacular entrance to the Chapter House itself is approached.

The magnificent stone foliage of this elegant **archway** and the wealth of delicate carvings on the capitals are regarded as some of the finest examples of medieval craftsmanship existing today. These world renowned **leaves** are based on close study of local hedgerows, yet also contain green men and creatures both real and imagined. At least sixteen varieties of foliage have been identified including vine, hawthorn, field maple, ranunculus (buttercup), mulberry, and even different species of oak. In contrast to idealised leaf forms familiar in the decorative period these naturalistic carvings demonstrate both extraordinary dexterity and remarkably accurate observation.

By **1291** the number of canons had risen to sixteen. The **octagonal structure** of the Chapter House ensured egalitarian representation and was modelled closely on that of York Minster. Whilst considerably smaller, it shares the features of large windows and a gravity defying **vault** unsupported by a central pillar. Unlike York however the vault is not made of timber but of Mansfield stone and the leaves of the stalls have a more particular reference to the natural world of the canons' estates. Pigs eating acorns, foxes stealing grapes, dogs chasing hares are all to be found, together with the plants that sustained the canons' incomes.

Damage caused during the Civil War is evident but the figure traditionally thought to be the **Master Mason** is in reasonable condition. There is some

variation in the high standard of the carvings but all display skill, artistry, wit and an appreciation of a creation to respect and take delight in. Much of the original **stained glass** has gone but some fragments remain set in the windows.

10 The North Transept

Past the door of the Minster's Historic Library we reach the North Transept. To the right are two **bronze memorials**. One commemorates **J.J.Trebeck**, Rector and the first Sub Dean when the Minster became a Cathedral in 1884. The second is that of **Francis Willoughby**, a noted 17th century author and naturalist. There is also a fine bronze bust of **Sir Edwyn Hoskyns**, the second Bishop of Southwell, by W Reynolds- Stephens [1925], together with the prayer he commended for use by his confirmation candidates. The turntable can be gently rotated to inspect the detail of the Bishop's cope.

On the north wall is the red veined alabaster monument to **Edwin Sandys** (d.1588), Archbishop of York. The carving on the front is of his family in mourning with sons preceding daughters, regardless of age. A Low Churchman, he might not have approved of his marble figure dressed in full episcopal robes

On the west wall of the Transept are two features that represent the old and the new. The ancient lintel or **tympanum** may have been part of the Saxon Minster and is dated between the 9th and 11th century. The carving of St Michael warding off a dragon is thought to date from 1100 but the carving on the underside may be part of a 10th century grave slab.

On the same wall is the **Bramley Apple window** celebrating the first propagation of the apple 200 years ago in Southwell.

Opposite and above the door of the chapel is a modern sculpture **The Millennium Pilgrim**

11 The Pilgrims' Chapel

The Pilgrims' Chapel where the Blessed Sacrament is kept is an appropriately quiet place for a tour of the Minster to end. The words of the poet T.S.Eliot are apt, 'In the end is my beginning'. Here we are close to one of the original pools used for **baptism**, the ceremony marking the start of the Christian journey. This was originally held in the open air, brought inside with the rebuilding of the east end, and only later moved to a font at the west end of the Minster. Having perhaps served as a baptistery the chapel was divided into two in 1285 and over the centuries had a variety of uses as a library, a song school, a vestry and an airmen's chapel. It was redesigned by **Ronald Sims in 1984** to mark the centenary of the diocese.

On the wall to the right of the chapel is a **tapestry** on the theme of pilgrimage made by Geraldine Brock to commemorate 150 years **of policing** in the county.

12 The North Porch

The doorway of the Minster marks the threshold of sacred space. Norman builders lavished fine workmanship on porches and entrances of which

Southwell's is a magnificent and rare example. The **14th century door** is surrounded by seven orders of moulding including one with 'beaks head' decoration.

Above the porch is the **Parvis room** which provided lodging for a watchman who would have ensured the bells were rung. From the outside a chimney can be seen for the room's fireplace. Among the grotesques on the window mouldings is one which features **Judas Iscariot being swallowed by Satan**. This curious imagery can remind us that we are at a point of transition. It may help us reflect on our own faithfulness and prompt us to ask what we shall take from this hallowed place into God's world.