

SOUTHWELL MINSTER - THE HISTORY

(Some other details of British and Church history have been included so that the development of the Minster can be set into a context).

THE EARLY HISTORY

The valley in which Southwell stands was home to prehistoric settlements as it was a fertile land with fresh water springs and streams, with wooded lands near at hand. It had everything necessary to support life - food, water, and wood for fires and buildings.

43 - 410 AD. When the Romans came to Britain Southwell was in the Coritani territory that stretched from the Wash to the Humber and included Leicester and Nottingham. As the Romans advanced they built roads like the Fosse Way throughout the country and towns and villas were built. The ninth legion manned a fort at Lincoln and there was a smaller fortified establishment at Osmundthorpe, near Kirklington. A Roman road from Osmunthorpe to the Trent passed through Southwell, and many traces of Roman buildings have been found in the town. Circa 200 AD there was an especially large Roman villa in the area of Vicar's Court and the present Minster School in Church Street. Excavations in 1959 revealed a large site (at least 100 X 70 yards) and uncovered a bath complex filled with rubble from its walls and ceiling. Part of the painting from the bathhouse was re-assembled and can be seen in the south quire aisle of the Minster. It shows a winged god (?Cupid), fish and a turtle. There are also Roman tesserae to be seen beneath the Bread Pews in the South Transept. These are presumed to be part of the floor of Saxon Church. Whether these were brought from the ruins of the villa for that purpose, or whether they have always been in that place, as some experts have suggested, is not known. It is possible that the inhabitants of the villa had a temple or a shrine on their property. It is even possible that it was an early place of Christian worship, though we do not know if the people here were Christians. Christianity had been brought to England, and a Roman font, with a Chi Rho symbol was found at Ad Pontem, about 5 miles away, near Newark. (For further details about Southwell in Roman times, see Peter Latham's book).

409. The Goths attacked Rome and the Roman legions were withdrawn from Britain. The villa fell into disuse. By the middle of the fifth century Anglo Saxon invaders had settled in the country. The cultural, political and religious life that the Romans had established was lost. By 600AD the historical Kingdoms of the Anglo Saxons were taking shape. Nothing is known of Southwell's history during these years, though some place names in Southwell suggest Anglo Saxon influence here.

c563. St Columba arrived in Iona from Ireland and set about converting mainland Scotland. In later years some of the bishops of York were to come from Iona.

596/7. Pope Gregory the Great sent Augustine as a missionary to Britain. Augustine converted King Ethelbert of Kent, whose wife was already a Christian, and made a great impact on that area. When he arrived in Britain there were also still some small Celtic Christian communities in other parts of the country.

601. At Augustine's request, Paulinus and others were sent from Rome to help with his missionary work.

625. Paulinus was consecrated Bishop by Justus. He was chaplain to princess Ethelburga of Kent, and he went with her to York when she was betrothed to King Edwin of Northumbria. (See the series of carvings on the nave pulpit). Having converted Edwin and his followers, and having founded the church of St Peter at York, Paulinus travelled throughout Yorkshire and Lincolnshire preaching the Gospel.

627. Bede tells how Paulinus baptised believers in the River Trent at a place called Tiowulfingacaestir, now thought to be Littleborough near Retford. There is no record of him having visited Southwell, though tradition tells us that he did and that he had founded a church here by 630AD. Whether he did or not, he certainly (re)-introduced the Christian Church to Nottinghamshire, and it is, perhaps, fitting that he should be shown (in the O'Connor window by the font) holding a model of the Minster, the Mother Church of the County.

633. King Edwin was defeated and killed in battle. With Queen Ethelburga and her children Paulinus returned to Kent where he became Bishop of Rochester.

664. [The Synod of Whitby](#). Until this time Celtic Christians in northern Britain followed the Irish calendar and customs. Now they adopted the Roman ways that were followed in the south of England and throughout most of Christendom.

787. In their history of the Mercian King, Offa, the 12th century historians, Matthew Paris and Wilkins claimed that in Nottinghamshire Peter's Pence - an ecclesiastical tax paid to the Pope - were collected by the Archbishops of York. Obviously there were still Christians in the County, and they still came under the jurisdiction of York, even though the County lay within the Kingdom of Mercia.

In the 8th and 9th centuries Viking invaders settled in the north. Anglo-Saxon culture was superseded. Nottinghamshire now came within the Danelaw. A series of English Kings made inroads into the area, until in 937 Athelstan won a great victory at Brunanburgh and became King of England. However the throne was not really stable until after the Norman Conquest. (See notes on [The Historical Kingdoms](#)).

THE SOUTHWELL CHARTER AND THE SAXON CHURCH

c956. King Eadwig (Edwy or Edwig) granted a [Charter](#) to Archbishop [Oskytel \(Oscitel\)](#) of York, giving him the Manor of Southwell and surrounding lands. The Charter itself is lost, but fortunately it was copied by a 14th century clerk and is now in the White Book in the Library. Oskytel established a church in Southwell (or, possibly, restored and enlarged an earlier building). As a Minster it was served by a body (a college) of clergy who also served the surrounding villages. The See of York was a large one and the churches at Beverley and Ripon helped with the work in eastern and western areas. Southwell gave the Archbishop an excellent site from which to administer the southern part of his province. As he owned the land he was responsible for civil and criminal courts as well as the ecclesiastical ones. The college of clergy acted for him when he was not in Southwell. Southwell Minster was never a monastic foundation. The priests who served the church were "secular" not "regular", i.e. not monks. This college of clergy was entrusted with the maintenance of the services in the church, and with the cure of souls. They were supported by the income from endowments, land and tithes called prebends. The canons were therefore known as prebendaries, and together they formed the Chapter, the church's administrative body. A few years later King Edgar and St Dunstan set about abolishing secular canons in most places and replaced them with monks, but Southwell escaped these reforms and the collegiate body continued almost without a break until the middle of the 19th century.

Very little is known about the Saxon church building and hardly anything of it remains. Archaeologists think that it may have been something like the church at Stow, with a maximum length of about 100ft, and was probably sited from the present south transept westwards. Apart from the [tessellated pavement](#) beneath the [Bread Pews](#), the only remaining pieces of the Saxon Church are (i) the [tympanum](#) over the doorway in the north transept, and (ii) a short piece of a pillar which was found beneath the floor during restoration work and which is now in the Visitors' Centre. The rest of the stone would have been reused in the Norman walls and in the foundations and in the filling for the drum pillars: there is a record by the Revd J.F. Dimmock, writing in 1853, of the finding of moulding and carved stones of the late Saxon period which had been used as rubble in the 12th century construction of the piers to the central tower and the foundations of the south wall of the nave.

Not a lot more is known about the Minster's Saxon period, except that in

992. [Archbishop Oswald of Worcester](#) (whose name is commemorated in the present day St Oswald's Chapel at the east end of the south quire aisle) died at Worcester on 29th February after washing the feet of the poor on Maundy Thursday.

1014. A list of Saxon Saints and their resting places states that "then rested [Saint Eadburgh](#) in the Minster of Southwell near the water called the Trent". Southwell became a place of pilgrimage.

1023 - 1051. Archbishop Alfric Puttoc spent a lot of time in Southwell, and died here.

1050's. Archbishop Kinsius (Cynesige) gave two bells to the Minster - a sign that the building was a significant place

1061 -1069. Archbishop Aldred (Ealdred) - who crowned William the Conqueror - also spent much time in Southwell. He founded Prebends and built a refectory where the canons might eat together.

1066. The Norman Conquest. The Normans were great builders of castles and churches.

1068. [The Domesday Book](#) mentioned Southwell and the Canons' properties.

THE BUILDING OF THE PRESENT MINSTER

1070. The Norman Conquest was followed by a period of great change, reorganisation and rebuilding throughout the country. Ecclesiastical institutions were included in the upheaval. Archbishop Thomas I (who came from Bayeux) succeeded to the See of York and immediately turned his attention to rebuilding the ruined cathedral at York and to fetching back the canons of York who had been dispersed during King William's raids on the north. The Archbishop ordered his canons there in the Norman style, with a Dean at their head, and with other formal officers, a precentor, a chancellor and a treasurer. Beverley and Ripon were similarly re-ordered, but Southwell was not, so was unique in retaining its pre-Conquest form. There was no formal head of the Chapter at Southwell. The senior canon in residence presided at meetings and residence was a duty which the canons performed in rotation. Under this system there was no continuous leadership and no one had an opportunity to impose his ideas. No one moved to modernise the building. That was left to Archbishop Thomas II

1108. Archbishop Gerard died at Southwell, very suddenly, in the garden of his house. His attendants believed that the book he had been reading was one about astrology and witchcraft (It was possibly about astronomy), and carried his body to York in disgrace. He was buried outside the church there, and only after many years was he reburied inside.

1108. His successor, Archbishop Thomas II turned his attentions to the church at Southwell. He did not impose the Norman system of government on his canons, but he made the church at Southwell the Mother Church for the whole of Nottinghamshire, founded further prebends and instigated the re-building of the church on a larger scale and in the Romanesque style. Archbishop Thomas sent a [letter](#) to his parishioners in the County asking for funds to build the church and, in return, allowing them to make their Whitsuntide pilgrimage to Southwell instead of to York. It took approximately 50 years for the church to be built.

1171. A Bull of Pope Alexander III granted the Southwell Chapter the same privileges as those held by the Dean and Chapter at York. This gave the Chapter independence of spiritual or temporal jurisdiction from both the Archbishop and the King, owing allegiance to none but the Pope, though in fact they were still accountable to the Archbishop of York who had responsibilities as the official visitor, and appointed prebendaries. The Chapter now had the power to try offenders for offences against ecclesiastical law in their "Peculiar", as well as civil offences on church property, and to take the fines. They had the right of "pillory and tumbrel" - preventing false weights and the adulteration of bread and ale. They were exempt from having to provide military support for the King in time of war, and from providing knights in the Shire. The Chapter acted as a court of appeal in cases tried by canons in their Prebendal villages. Marriage licenses and probates of will were granted by the Chapter. Although there were only 6 or 7 prebendaries at the time of the Conquest, there were 16 by the end of the 12th century. The Bull of 1171 specifically allowed the prebendaries to appoint Vicars Choral, and lodgings and a common hall were provided for them on the site of the present Vicars Court.

1215. The signing of Magna Carta.

1216. The death of King John at Newark Castle. He was succeeded by King Henry III.

1234. [Archbishop Walter de Gray](#) encouraged the building of a new and larger quire at Southwell to accommodate the larger number of people - by now there were approximately 60 people to be fitted in for services. It replaced the 59ft long Romanesque quire and was built in the Early English Gothic style. The Archbishop issued [letters of indulgence](#) for 30 days for those who contributed to the new building "lately begun". King Henry III gave oak from Sherwood Forest for the roof timbers.

The Prior of Thurgaton held the principal seat in Chapter, and the Archbishops stayed at Thurgaton Priory when they were visiting Southwell.

1241. The foundation of the first of the [Chantry Chapels](#) by Robert de Lexington, a canon at that time. The deed of foundation directed that services were to be celebrated "in the Chapel of St Thomas the martyr, in the new work".

c1260. A new chapel was built to replace the shallow apse in the east wall of the north transept. This is now the Pilgrim's Chapel, with the library above it. The apse on the east side of the south transept was also demolished.

1286. [John le Romaine](#) became Archbishop and began reforms at York and Southwell. On [25th of January 1288](#) he issued a decree which proposed raising funds to build a Chapter House where the Chapter would meet daily, and threatened sequestration against those members of the Chapter who had not paid their levy by Easter. Work on the Chapter House was begun in the early 1290's. In another decree issued on [13th January 1294](#) John le Romaine ordered that the Prebendal houses of the foreign canons should be repaired within a year. Failure to comply would result in heavy fines which would be devoted to the cost of the fabric of the new Chapter House, now well in hand. The resulting building is an octagonal masterpiece with a stone vault which is unsupported by a central pillar. It is full of magnificent, naturalistic foliage carvings, with animals, birds, green men, etc. The carvings are famous throughout the world.

1295. Edward I's Model Parliament.

c1300. Or early in the 14th century the north doors were fitted.

1301. The Conquest of Wales in 1301. The first Prince of Wales.

1304 Archbishop Thomas Corbridge died on 22nd September. He is buried at Southwell.

1314. The Battle of Bannockburn

1337. After a dispute with the King's foresters, King Edward III granted the right of free carriage of stone through Sherwood Forest from the quarries in Mansfield. Presumably the stone was intended for the building of the [Pulpitum](#), or screen, between the crossing and the quire, a feature that is even more elaborately decorated than the Chapter House. It is decorated with nearly 300 carved heads representing rich and poor, famous and infamous, animals and grotesques. The five-seated sedilia which is now in the sanctuary was made at the same time.

1337. The start of the Hundred Years War between Edward III and France.

1348. The Black Death killed roughly a third of the population over the next ten years.

c1350. The addition of flying buttresses over the quire aisles and the insertion of the present windows in the Pilgrim's Chapel. New windows were also put into the lower stages of the west towers, but the Victorians replaced these in the Romanesque style.

1379. Richard de Chesterfield, Canon of Norwell Overhall, had a new house built at the east end of the churchyard for the Vicars Choral.

1415. Thomas Haxey, Canon of Rampton, founded the Morrow Masse Priests' Quire, afterwards called the [Booth's Chapel](#).

1438. The Grant of the [Priory of Ravendale](#), Nr Grimsby, to the Chapter of Southwell.

c1450. The insertion of the [Great West Window](#) in the perpendicular style of architecture to give better light for reading.

The Chapter continued to order its own affairs, taking turns to preside at meetings. No early minute books exist; only a few entries in the White Book, and in the Chapter Register, which begins in 1469. There was a sacristan who looked after the books, vestments and ornaments, rang the bell at proper times for services and was responsible for discipline: he was supposed to sleep in the church. There was also a Chancellor who licensed schoolmasters throughout the County and supervised the Grammar School. Two "wardens" who were elected annually kept the accounts: there are some intermittent accounts from 1429.

The wardens were Vicars Choral and their accounts were audited by a third person. The Vicars Choral were a corporate body, with their own seal and their own lands. In addition there were chantry priests (who had a house in the north west corner of the churchyard), incense bearers, wand bearers, organ player, a verger, choristers and a clock winder.

Discussions at Chapter Meetings included details of services and music, behaviour in church, reproof for choristers playing in the churchyard, and sometimes more serious matters such as brawling, playing at dice, and Vicars Choral "sleeping out". There are some cases of temporary excommunication. (Some details of these records can be read under the Archives section.)

1453. (The end of the Hundred Years' War. The beginning of the Wars of the Roses)

1464 Archbishop William Booth died. He is buried at Southwell.

1480 Archbishop Lawrence Booth died. He is buried at Southwell.

c1498. William Talbot, Canon of Oxtun and Cropwell enlarged the Vicarage.

THE REFORMATION

1530. [Cardinal Thomas Wolsey](#) spent three months in Southwell after he lost favour with King Henry VIII. Having had it repaired, he lived in the Archbishop's Palace, and went out preaching in the villages, where he was much loved by the people

1530. Henry VIII broke with Rome.

1533. Archbishop [Thomas Cranmer](#) of Canterbury wrote to his sister encouraging her to send her son to school at Southwell.

1536. Monasteries were being dissolved and their property was seized by the King.

1540. The Archbishop of York, with the Canons, Vicars Choral and Chantry priests of Southwell formally surrendered their property separately and collectively to the King, but the Chapter continued to function

1543. A Private Act, not recorded on the Parliament Roll, restored all the Southwell properties, and the Chapter was re-founded on 12th May, the only difference being that the King was to be regarded as its founder and would have the right to appoint new prebendaries in the future, instead of the Archbishop of York.

1545. It was probable that Henry VIII intended to make Southwell the See of a bishopric. Dr Cocks was chosen for the post, but it never came about.

1545. Another Act (37 Henry VIII Cap.VI) abolished Chantries and other organisations including colleges other than those which had been in the King's hands. This Act was not to further the cause of Protestantism, but for seizing of spoil to finance defence and for the maintenance of the King's "honour and estimation". Sir Edward North, Chancellor of the Court of Augmentations was responsible for this. Some of his letters are preserved in the White Book. No harm came to Southwell's Chapter under this Act.

1547. Henry VIII died and Edward VI came to the throne. Another Chantries Act was passed and all remaining Chantries and colleges were dissolved. Most of the prebendaries and chantry priests at Southwell were pensioned off, only John Adams staying on as parish vicar with two assistants. The Crown gave most of the Chapter property to William Nevell, Steward to the Duke of Northumberland, then to John Beaumont (Master of the Rolls). He was charged with corruption and forgery and the lands returned to the King who died before he had disposed of them.

1549. [The First Prayer Book](#) was published.

1552. [The Second Prayer Book](#) was published.

1553. Queen Mary came to the throne. She re-established the Southwell Chapter and restored as many of the properties as she could.

1557. By a Charter of Exemplification under the Great Seal, dated 20th June 1557, the Chapter was re-established and the prebendaries and others were re-admitted. The Crown returned to the Archbishop the power to make appointments.

1558. Queen Elizabeth became queen. She granted new statutes to Southwell and made herself the Visitor in place of the Archbishop of York, though he actually did that work on her behalf.

1558. Death of Archbishop [Edwyn Sandys](#) on 10th July 1588. He is buried at Southwell.

1566. Elizabeth confirmed the restoration of the Chapter's lands.

1604. King James I put the Southwell Chapter onto a firm footing with a new Charter, Properly recorded.

THE CIVIL WAR

1642. King Charles I raised his standard at Nottingham

1646. Charles I surrendered to the Scots after spending his last night of freedom at the King's Head (now the Saracen's Head).
Episcopacy was abolished. The Minster Chapter was broken up and lands and properties were confiscated. The army stole the lead from the roof of the Bishop's Palace. There appears to have been damage to the Minster; or at very least the fabric was badly neglected.

1647. [Edward Cludd](#) is given the Archbishop's Park

1649. Execution of King Charles I.

1660. King Charles II was restored to the throne. On 28th July there was a Royal Warrant to reclaim the Minster's property.

1661. Repairs to the roof and windows were begun and a new font was installed.

1662. [The Book of Common Prayer](#) was published.

1670. Thomas Wren, Canon of Oxtou, gave the Verger's silver mace.

1689. The Archbishop was petitioned for permission to build an official house for residence for the canons as many of the Prebendal houses were in a state of disrepair, or had been leased. William Mompesson (of Eyam fame) was largely responsible for this.

1693. At a Visitation Archbishop Sharpe made another (unsuccessful) attempt to order the lives of the Vicars Choral, and the Canons duties.
Thomas Wymondesold gave land in Easthorpe for the preservation of the chimes. The Chimes Trust still functions.

1711. On November 5th the southwest tower of the Minster was struck by lightning and a terrible [fire](#) ensued. It spread through the nave, crossing and tower, and the roofs, the organ, clock and bells were all destroyed. The Chapter petitioned Queen Anne for help, the Archbishop gave trees from Norwood and public subscriptions were raised. Work was quickly put in hand to restore the damage and the repairs were complete by 1720 at a cost of £4,000. A lower pitched roof had been put onto the Minster, necessitating a raised portion at the west end to clear the west window, and the nave and transepts were given a flat, panelled ceiling. The spires on the west towers were also low pitched.

1714. Queen Anne dies.

1744. The Chapter gave £20.00 towards the cost of providing a parish fire engine.

- 1780.** The Vicars buildings were pulled down and replaced by the present houses in Vicars Court.
- 1784.** The Booth Chapel was demolished. A library was built to the south side of the quire.
- 1785.** A new frontage was added to the Residence.
- 1801.** The spires were removed from the western towers because cracks appeared in the north west tower.
- 1805.** Sir Richard Kaye, who was then Dean of Lincoln, gave the "Newstead" Lectern to the Minster: he had bought it from Lord Byron 30 years earlier.
- 1818.** Sir Henry Galley Knight gave the Minster the four panels of 16th century Flemish glass fill the which now lower lights of the east window.
- 1835.** The Ecclesiastical Commissioners were set up to manage the estates and revenues of the Church of England. The Archdeaconry of Nottingham was transferred to the diocese of Lincoln (and so to the Province of Canterbury) in 1840 and the Southwell Peculiar followed in 1841.
- 1837.** Victoria became Queen.
- 1840.** The ancient Chapter came to an end with the passing of an Act which dissolved the collegiate foundation. The property and wealth of the College of Canons was handed over to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. Only one voice was raised in protest and that was that of William Ewart Gladstone, the brilliant young MP for Newark who knew that money might be needed to set up a new diocese for Southwell. Nevertheless our ancient funds were diverted to found the Dioceses of Ripon and Manchester. However, because Act of Parliament bound the Commissioners to maintain the fabric of the Minster, the building was well cared for over the next century. Southwell Minster became an ordinary parish church within the Diocese of Lincoln. It was thus transferred from the Province of York into the Province of Canterbury, where it was to remain for the next 70 years. The ancient Chapter of the Minster died slowly. As canonries became vacant they were suspended, and the Prebendal estates passed into the hands of the Commissioners. The last of the Canons, Canon Shepherd, died in 1878, and one of the Vicars Choral, RF.Smith, survived until 1905.
- 1847.** The Booth Chapel was demolished.
- 1851.** Restoration work was begun under the guidance of Mr Ewan Christian.
- 1870.** The appointment of a Suffragan Bishop of Nottingham.
- 1878.** The Bishops Act was passed for the creation of new dioceses and the new Diocese of Southwell was planned.
- 1880.** New spires were added to the western towers.
- 1884.** The Diocese of Southwell came into being with the Minster as its cathedral. Dr George Ridding became its first Bishop and was enthroned in the Minster on 28th May. The new Diocese covered Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. Bishop Ridding lived at Thurgaton. He acted as Dean to the body of Honorary Canons, and he appointed a Sub-Dean - Canon Trebeck - who had been Rector of Southwell since 1886. Dr Ridding designed and paid for the grant of Arms now used as the Diocesan Coat of Arms.
- 1887.** Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.
- 1888.** The Minster was re-opened on 2nd February at the end of Ewan Christian's restoration work. The service was conducted by the Archbishop of Canterbury.
- 1889.**The appointment of a Suffragan Bishop of Derby.
- 1897.** Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. Two new bells were added to the Minster's tower so that the carillon could play "God Save the Queen"

1899-1902 The Boer War

1904. Bishop Ridding died and was succeeded by Bishop Hoskyns.

1905. Bishops Manor was built into the ruins of the old Archbishops Palace. It was finished in 1907 and Bishop Hoskyns was the first Bishop to live there.

1909. The Archbishop of York visited the Minster to celebrate the 800th Anniversary of the building of the Norman church.

1919. Bishop Hoskyns established the Airmen's Chapel (then in the North transept chapel) and dedicated it to St Eadburgh.

1926. Bishop Hoskyns died and was succeeded by Bishop Heywood

1927. The County of Derby is moved from the Southwell Diocese into the newly created Diocese of Derby.

1927. Bishop Mosley succeeded Bishop Heywood.

1928. Prayer Book

1931. The Rector of Southwell, then the [Reverend Conybeare](#), became the first Provost, and so was given the same dignity and precedence as a Dean

1935. The Church Commissioners agreed that the Diocese of Southwell should be returned to the Province of York.

1936. The Minster received new statutes

1944. Bishop Russell Barry was appointed after the retirement of bishop Mosley.

1947. The foundation of the Friends of Southwell Minster

1956. Millennium Celebrations and the visit of Princess Margaret

1957. Provision was made for Residentiary Canons.

1967. Minster properties and the Seal were surrendered again; this time to the Cathedral Council.

1984. Centenary of the Diocese of Southwell.

Queen Elizabeth II visited the Minster on 19th April to distribute the Maundy Money

1994. The Archbishops' Commission on Cathedrals proposed the changes that came into force at Southwell in 2000

2000. Under a new [Constitution](#) the Provost became the First Dean of Southwell. A new Governing body called the [Cathedral Chapter](#) came into being. The former Chapter became the [College of Canons](#), and to that were added a [Canon Theologian](#) and [6 Lay Canons](#). A new [Cathedral Council](#) was formed.