

## THE GREAT FIRE OF 1711

Mark Keepe, Clerk of the fabric of Southwell Minster kept rough accounts in a little vellum-covered notebook, of money paid out and received, and it is in this book that we learn much about the fire. He wrote:

" On Monday the fifth of November in the year one thousand seven hundred and eleven about ten o'clock at night, the top of the ball on the South Spire of this Collegiate Church of Southwell was fir'd by lightning which, back'd by a furious wind, that drove it almost directly upon the body of the church, in a few hours burnt down the spire and roof, melted down the bells and spa'd nothing that was combustible saveing the North Spire, till it came to the Choire, where by singular providence it was stopt".

The book also tells us that a Richard Ingleman who retired as a stone mason after working at the Minster for 47 years, applied to the Chapter for a pension in these words:

"... In the time of the Fire when the South Steeple was on fire that it fired the North Steeple which was seen by light in that steeple so that Richard Ingleman went for longer ladders to raise the first window where he went up but could not get a pale in that window but dipt his hat in the water and so quenched that fire but the flames took hold on a great many small sticks brought in by jackdaws, which was very violent and afterwards quenched the floors and as soon as he had done that he found the end of the low roof on the North Ile on fire, next that Steeple and so made to bring water upstairs. So he broke a round window and threw water upon that roof so there was not above two or three spars burnt. Then he took the same ladder and carried (it) to the side of the Quire and raised it to the low Roof, and found no fire. Then he drew it up and raised it to the high Roof where by breaking through the roof we found a beam on ye Quire Roof on fire, so threw in water (and) quenched it, which could not be got at by any other way; so that if it had not been stopped by that means, it had surely burnt down all ye roof ...

(for further details about the rebuilding work and about renewing the bells, see "*A Flash of Lightning on Guy Fawkes Night 1711: The Fire at Southwell Minster*" reprinted from an article in *Translations of the Thoroton Society of Nottingham* for 1973, and published for Southwell Minster in 1980).

**1775 For details of painting the Minster**, with some accounts of the work, please refer to Harold Brooke's Fact Sheet, reproduced in the section about the Minster Building.

**1789 – An extract from Viscount Torrington's Diary** (A Tour of the Midlands – The entry for Southwell).

"At most cathedrals under the Eye of a Bishop, Six o'clock prayers are left off. Here they are Continued, and there is Regular Service performed three times a day all the year round.

The Bell now ringing for Evening Service carried me to the Church, where I was met by Dr Marsden, a Prebend, who offer'd me, as a Stranger, every civility, as a Choice of Anthem etc., and I then enter'd a Stall. Therefore let me now express my astonishment of Pleasure at hearing this Service. The Prebend was attended in due Form; the Prayers were read most leisurely and devoutly by Mr Houlson, one of the Vicars; The Organ was excellently play'd; and four Singing Men and Eleven Boys, sang as carefully as if at the Antient Concert! The anthem of three parts, "Sing O Heavens", by Mr Kent, was capitally perform'd; and I was told that one of The Boys was reckon'd to have the finest voice in England, and that the men has been sent for to The Abbey Musick. The Service being concluded, I waited on Dr M., to thank him for his politeness; and to express my astonishment at the decency, Regularity etc., etc.

(Viscount Torrington was delighted with Southwell, the food at the Saracen's Head Inn and the wonder of the Minster).

"Everything, to my Surprise, was in good Order; The Screen, unlike to that of Peterboro' indeed, everything shewed unlike Peterboro' in management), is of both sides of the best-times Gothic Sculpture. There are 16 Prebends, Six Vicars, Six Singing Men, and Twelve Singing Boys; besides Vergers, and Organist, etc., belonging to this Church. The roof of the Choir is admirable, and with the other Parts looks Clean and well-kept. No dirt, No broken Windows".

(He ends his Diary Entry for Southwell):

"Southwell is a well built clean Town. Such a one as a quiet, distressed Family ought to retire to: Coals, Provisions and Religion to be had good and cheap".