

## SOUTHWELL MINSTER IN THE REIGN OF GEORGE III

From Ruth Robinson February 2016

Ruth Robinson writes: This account of Southwell was found amongst others - one dated 1932 - in a small book which belonged to my father, John Caudwell, who was a great keeper and collector of all sorts.

In May, 1789, the Hon. John Byng, afterwards Lord Torrington, set out from London on horseback for a tour which took him through Northamptonshire and Lincolnshire and eventually brought him into Nottinghamshire. The story of the tour was printed, some twenty years ago, in a thin and little-read volume, supplementary to the much better known Torrington Diaries. In it will be found a delightful account of Southwell and its Minster which the Hon. John reached on Monday, June 8, 1789. It is curious to find that at a time when the Church is regarded as having been at one of its darkest periods, there were three choral services daily in the Minster. By contrast in these more opulent times, there is now only one choral service on weekdays, with a weekly choir holiday.

In the account which follows: The author's orthography, with its profusion of capital letters, is reproduced - a few deletions are made of passages which interrupt the narrative. S.R.

Leaving Thurgarton I soon came in sight of The Pretty Town of Southwell and of its superb Collegiate Church, and put up at the Saracens Head Inn, where to my great contentment I was instantly Served, in a large Room, with Cold Beef, Cold Veal, and Gooseberry Tart, and having fared sumptuously, sent for the Clerk, a reverend old man of 82 years of age, who showed me every part of this beautiful well kept Church, and the most elegant Chapter House, the carving about which is the best executed and lightest I ever saw. Everything, to my Surprise, was in good order. The Screen, unlike to that of Peterboro' is of both Sides of the best timed Gothic Sculpture. There are 16 Prebends, 6 Vicars, Six singing men and 12 Singing Boys, besides Vergers, an 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! A New Room is now building for their Books, which at present are lodg'd behind the Altar. At a small distance from The Church Remain These Ruins of the Archbishop of York's Palace, which enclose a Garden at one end of which is the Sessions House, wherein reside one of the Vicars (who all seem to be with the rest of the Choir most comfortably, nay superbly Lodged.) A beautiful old Chimney yet endures. These Ruins, well preserv'd are clothed with Ivy, and look as they shou'd do.

At the small Shop I enter'd, I sat for some time with the Master and his Mother, an old woman of 80, and at the next door lives one of 92. This must be a very healthy, as well as a cheap place, for coals are 10s per tun, Beef and Mutton prime Pieces 4d. Pr. Lb., Veal 3d., Butter 4 1/2 d.

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 3 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. 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 an Antient Concert; The Anthem of 3 parts, "Sing O Heavens" by Mr Kent was capitally perform' d, and I was told that one of The Boys was reckoned to have the finest voice in England and that the men have been sent for to the Abbey Musick. The Service being concluded, I waited upon Dr. M. To thank him for his Politeness, and to express my Thanks for the Pleasure I have receiv'd and my wonder at the Proprieties observed.

(A pleasing conversation ensued in the course of which Dr. Marsden said: "What Refreshment will you take, Sir, Wine or Tea before you renew your Journey")

On Returning to my Inn, I call'd for Tea, and had then to pay this Enormous Bill, and to receive at my Departure many Bows from the Family:

<u>Saracens Head Inn, Southwell.</u>	
Eating.....	0 10
Brandy .....	0 6
Horse: Hay and Com.....	0 5
	1 9
Tea.....	8
	2 5

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.

Extract from the Torrington Diaries, vol IV.