

THE NEW VESTRY IN SOUTHWELL MINSTER

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In August 1915, the Rev. A. M. Y. Baylay called attention in the *Nottingham Guardian* to certain alterations in progress in Southwell Minster, by which the open court on the east side of the cloister leading to the Chapter-house would be roofed -in and converted into a choir vestry.

The Council of the Thoroton Society considered it their duty to ask for definite information from the Authorities in charge of the building, and were referred to the architect, Mr. Caroe, who however took no notice of the request.

On October 27th, a deputation of the members of the Thoroton Society paid a visit to Southwell in order to see for themselves the new work which had given rise to controversy in the correspondence columns of the *Nottingham Guardian*. By the courtesy of Archdeacon Wild, Rector of Southwell, the works were open for their inspection. By this time however the work had made so much progress that no further protest could be of any use.

It is only fair to say at the outset that the external appearance of the Minster will not be affected. Seeing that all the alterations are confined within the perimeter of the court they will probably escape the notice of the casual visitor; but everyone who is familiar with this beautiful Minster will surely look upon what has been done with regret. When the beautiful Chapter-house was added during the last decade of the 13th century. the exigencies of the plan enclosed what hitherto had been an open space-the traditional site of the holy well from whence Southwell derived its name-and ever since it has remained as an open court within the Minster. From this court, surrounded on all sides by ancient buildings, it was possible to see at a glance the successive styles of medieval architecture in picturesque grouping, and to enjoy the only attainable view of the north-east angle of choir and transept.

The court has now been covered in with a flat roof of concrete, and divided into two chambers by a brick wall. The old doorway in the north aisle of the choir became obsolete when the Chapter-house was built, but now is to be re-opened to form the approach, and the space thus secured will be used as vestries. All this change has been involved because the two chantry chapels standing side by side on the east of the north transept, which have been hitherto used as a vestry for the choir, are to be used for the purposes of a chapel.

The Thoroton Society is not concerned as to whether there is any actual need for an additional chapel, nor do they wish to advocate any of the numerous alternative ways of obtaining one if it is really needed, but the deputation came away with the impression that the present scheme is a mistake, and that the introduction of steel girders and a concrete roof with glass skylights into the very heart of the ancient Minster is quite out of tone and, character with the 12th and 13th century surroundings.

The State has lately passed an act for the preservation of ancient monuments, and expressly excluded from its powers the most splendid and valuable of all historic monuments, the cathedrals and large churches, rightly considering that such are part of a living and growing system, and could not be treated in the same way as ruins or earthworks, and that the ecclesiastical authorities had their own methods of securing proper treatment. A faculty, on due application to the Chancellor of the Diocese, is required in the case of any alteration in the structure of the smallest village church; but it appears that in cathedral establishments, as in the present instance, the destruction of valuable or beautiful features can be planned and carried out without the knowledge or restraining influence of any external competent authority.

I wanted to find a picture of some kind of the cloister garden before it was covered over but without success. However this one which comes AJ Loughton collection of photographs in the Minster Library surely must predate the vestries with the flood of sunlight into the passage. (Martin Everitt)

Also of interest is this extract from Nottinghamshire History & Pictorial SOUTHWELL from photographs by A J Loughton and text by M. Trebeck [1900] (see also FS288).

CLOISTER (1280). As you pass through a beautifully decorated doorway in the North Aisle you enter the Cloister, or Vestibule. Notice the arcading of the walls, it is very lovely; instead of the usual wreath round the capitals, the design of each capital is continued in a straight band along the thickness of the wall, and finishes up round the outside corresponding capital. The Cloisters were originally unglazed; the glass was put in later on as a protection from the weather.

On the west as you enter the door look up, and you will see the **“secular” priest shaking the “regular” monk by his tonsure.** The “seculars” had literally (as well as figuratively) the upper hand in Southwell. In the thirteenth century I fear that reverence for holy things and places was not always one of their characteristics, and while they loved their own aggrandisement, there was by no means the same amount of pious zeal expended on the spiritual interests of those committed to their care. Southwell was always a “Collegiate Church” of “Secular Clergy” as distinguished from the “Regular Clergy” who lived together in monasteries. The Secular Clergy were the Parochial Clergy of those days; they were, however, generally banded together in colleges, as at Southwell, with a rule of life. The idea of a “monk” was to save his own soul; that of a “secular” priest to save not only his own soul but the souls of others. It was a splendid idea and a marvellous system, working well for centuries. England owes much to such foundations, as they kept alive the spirit of throughout the country. The Church is now both a Cathedral and a Parish Bishopric was founded in 1884.

To return to the Cloister, on the east side is a quaint little court, and in the middle of it you will find a W cut in the pavingstone which covers the opening into the “Holy Well.”

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