

FACT SHEET No 301a

THE COLLEGIATE CHURCH AT SOUTHWELL AND HER PREBENDS 1108 -2008

The establishment of the Prebendal System

By David Turner 2008

The mediaeval diocese of York contained, in the churches of York, Ripon, Beverley, and Southwell, four ancient foundations of secular canons. The early history of each is obscure and there is uncertainty in the case of Southwell as to the date at which Nottinghamshire became transferred to the see of York. It seems probable that this took place around the middle of the 10th century, and that it was immediately followed by the grant to the reigning archbishop of lands which possessed in great part the boundaries of the later manor of Southwell. The date is generally taken to be 956 and the donor is King Eadwig. He gave the lands to Oskytel, who was probably translated to the see of York in that year.

Archbishop Oskytel was thus in possession of a large estate centring on the village of Southwell, but including land in a number of neighbouring hamlets. In all the land "between the Humber and the Welland", no other well-defined estate of such a size was owned by an individual subject.

It is probable that the foundation of the collegiate church followed hard upon the Archbishop's acquisition of his great estate. Oskytel is one of the more obscure Archbishops of York, but he is known to have been an ecclesiastical reformer and is generally regarded as the founder of our Collegiate Church. (That is not to say that no earlier church building existed in Southwell. It is quite possible that a form of church, or simply a shrine, built upon royal lands, already existed in 956 and contained the relics of St. Eadburh).

The new foundation was destined for a long life (1052 years and counting) but for more than a century we have no coherent narrative of its progress. *The Pilgrim's Guide to the Saints of England (1013)* records that: "There resteth St. Eadburh in the Minster at Southwell". In 1051 Archbishop Aelfric Puttoc died at Southwell, implying that there was an archiepiscopal residence associated with the church. It is recorded that Aelfric's successor Cynesige (1051-60) gave bells to the church, and then Ealdred, Archbishop of York at the time of the Conquest, established a common refectory for the use of the canons, and then created a number of Prebends in the church out of certain estates which he had procured for his see with his private wealth.

There is good evidence, then, that the Prebendal System had been established at Southwell before Ealdred's death in 1069. By this system each canon fulfilled a double function-that of a parish priest in the church which gave title to his Prebend, combined with participation in the duties of the collegiate body of which he was a member. In course of time, the average Prebendary discharged his parochial office by means of a resident vicar and was represented in the choir of Southwell by a vicar choral. This practice of non-residence played havoc with the premise upon which a college of secular canons had rested. By the middle of the 13th century, however, non-residence was recognized as the normal condition of affairs; and the two youngest Prebends of Eaton and North Leverton were provided, at the time of their creation, with a special endowment for vicars parochial and choral.

The full number of Prebends attached to the church was sixteen, a number completed in 1291 by the separation of North Leverton from Beckingham. Detailed information concerning the foundation of seven of these Prebends is available, but the date at which the remainder were created is a matter of inference. The attached table summarises what we know and don't know.

1	SACRIST'S PREBEND	No endowment in land, but probably created early, as connected with the maintenance of the services of the church.
2	NORMANTON	Undoubtedly early; the Prebendary of Normanton was patron of the vicarage of Southwell, and the statement in Domesday Book that 2 bovates in the Manor of Southwell were in a prebend almost certainly refers to the Normanton Prebend
3	NORWELL OVERHALL	The church of Southwell had possessed a manor of Norwell before the Conquest. Overhall was the most valuable of the sixteen prebends.
4	NORWELL PALISHALL	Palishall was also valuable
5	NORWELL TERTIAPARS	Tertia Pars was much less valuable. It was being created by division of Norwell I c 1191 to c 1194.
6	WOODBOROUGH	The Prebendary of Woodborough can be recognized in the 'clerk' who is entered in Domesday Book as holding 1 bovate in the village under the Archbishop. In addition to this bovate, the Archbishop possessed 7 other bovates in Woodborough, making a total estate of 1 carucate. As the clerk's holding is only spoken of in the present tense, it was probably detached from the carucate in question after 1066, and the foundation of Woodborough Prebend may therefore be assigned either to the last years of Archbishop Ealdred or to Archbishop Thomas I, more probably to the latter.
7	NORTH MUSKHAM	The Archbishop's holding of 1½ carucates is entered in Domesday Book as a note to the description of Southwell. It is uncertain whether any Prebend had been created out of this estate by 1086, but it is not improbable.
8	OXTON I	The creation of these Prebends presents great difficulty. They included an endowment in the distant village of Cropwell Bishop which 'St. Mary of Southwell' had held in 1066. The Archbishop's land in Oxton itself had been acquired during the reign of William I, and had not apparently by 1086 been appropriated to the Church of Southwell. It is therefore possible that the Oxton Prebends date between 1086 and Archbishop Thurstan's time, though in their later form they may represent the addition of land in Oxton to an earlier Prebend or Prebends in Cropwell Bishop. This, on the whole, seems the more probable explanation.
9	OXTON II	
10	SOUTH MUSKHAM	Probably created c 1200 by Archbishop Geoffrey.
11	DUNHAM	The church of this royal manor was given by Henry I to Archbishop Thurstan for the foundation of a prebend. The exact date is uncertain.
12	BECKINGHAM	Created by Archbishop Thurstan. Beckingham was one of the berewicks' of the Archbishop's great manor of Laneham.
13	HALLOUGHTON	With the exception of Normanton, the only Prebend created within the limits of the Manor of Southwell. The foundation of Archbishop Roger de Pont l'Eveque, c 1162, was later confirmed by Pope Alexander III.
14	RAMPTON	The solitary lay foundation among the Prebends of Southwell. Bestowed upon the church by Pavia de Malluvel and Robert her son about 1200.
15	EATON	Founded by Archbishop Romaine 1290.
16	NORTH LEVERTON	Separated from Beckingham by Archbishop Romaine in 1291.

The development of the Prebendal System

The Taxation Roll of 1291 enters all the sixteen Prebends, though they have to be identified with care, as some are given under the name of the Prebend and others under the name of the Prebendary then holding the preferment. The estimate of the annual value of these Prebends (including £4 13s. 4d. for the vicar of Dunham prebend; the church of Rolleston-which was assigned to the common fund-£13 6s. 8d.; and the church of Kirklington, £5) amounted to the large total of £342 13s. 4d. The Prebends varied very greatly in value; thus Dunham and another one held by Master John Clarell (Norwell) were each worth £36 a year, but the recent foundation of North Leverton was worth £13 6s. 8d., whilst that of Eaton was listed as £6 13s. 4d.

When the Valor of 1534 was drawn up, separate returns were made for each of the sixteen Prebends. The Prebend of Dunham had then fallen in value, being worth £28, but Eaton was worth £9 6s. 8d. Each Prebendary at that time paid £4 a year to his vicar choral, and 2s. 2½d. to the Chapter for visitation fees. Each of the sixteen vicars was in receipt of £7 4s. 8½d. (including the £4 from his Prebendary), their common revenues being equally divided. There were also thirteen Chantry Priests attached to the Minster, whose incomes varied from £8 7s. 5d. to £4 16s. 5d. A fabric fund brought in an annual income of £10 12s. 6½d.

When the College and Chantry Commissioners of 1545 visited Southwell Minster, they described it as '*reputed and taken for the head mother Church of the Town and County of Nottingham, founded by the Right famous of memory Edgar, the King's Majesties most noble progenitor*'. There were three Canons Residentiary, a parish Vicar, sixteen Vicars Choral, thirteen Chantry Priests, four Deacons and sub-Deacons, six Choristers, two 'Thuribales,' and two Clerks. The sixteen Prebends and the thirteen Chantry Priests are all specified; the latter had each a chamber and share in a common hall.

Disruption, Danger and Escape

On 12 August 1540 the Archbishop of York granted to the King the patronage of all promotions in the Collegiate Church of Southwell. On the same day the Vicars Choral surrendered their chief house or mansion in Southwell with all their possessions, and like surrenders were also executed by the Prebendaries and by the Chantry Priests. These definite and recorded surrenders, however, were, through some unknown influence, allowed to pass as dead letters, and in January 1543 their effect was formally annulled by a special Act of Parliament, whereby 'the College and Church Collegiate of Southwell' was legally re-established in every particular; the whole of its property and officials were restored, including lamps, obits, chantries, and chantry priests.

More than two hundred collegiate foundations extant throughout England in pre-Reformation days, both great and small, were ruthlessly confiscated by either Henry VIII or Edward VI; even the fabrics were in many cases destroyed and merchandise made not only of the lead and bells but of the very monuments, brasses, and gravestones. In some cases, like Beverley and Ripon, Southwell's sister Minsters, the churches were bought back by the inhabitants and turned into Parish Churches. In only five instances were fabrics and endowments eventually spared - Windsor and Manchester being amongst them - but of these by far the most ancient and famous, as well as one of the largest, richest, and most beautiful, was the Collegiate Church at Southwell.

Broken Promises, Dissolution and Restoration

It seems that it was the intention of Henry VIII to make Southwell the seat of a bishopric. The revenue was set down as £1,003, of which one-third was to be allotted to the bishop, who was designated in the person of one of the Prebendaries, Dr. Richard Cox, who afterwards became Bishop of Ely. This plan, however, like so many of the King's paper schemes, came to naught.

The Commissioners of Edward VI, carrying out a Visitation in 1547-8, made meticulous records of what they found. Of the Chantry Priests, one is entered as a preacher, two as 'meetly learned,' and four as 'unlearned.' Three Chapels of Ease are mentioned as being served from the Minster, namely Halam, Halloughton, and Morton.

This Visitation, however, not only swept away all the Chantries of Southwell, but the College itself, the church being continued as the Parish Church, on the petition of the parishioners. John Adams, the Sacrist's Prebendary, was appointed Parish Vicar with a salary of £20, and two others made 'assistants to the cure' at £5 each. By an Act, however, of Philip and Mary (1557) the Chapter was restored. Most of the confiscated property had passed to John Beaumont, Master of the Rolls, but he had fallen into disgrace and his estates had been resumed by the Crown in payment of his debts.

After this restoration until the final dissolution of the Chapter in 1841 the constitution of the Collegiate Church was governed by a set of Statutes promulgated by Queen Elizabeth on 2 April 1585, interpreted by injunctions issued by successive Archbishops of York as Visitors of the Church and by resolutions of the Chapter itself. No definite scheme of Residence was propounded in these Statutes, which left the performance of this duty to the will of the Prebendaries.

A new officer, elected by the Canons from among their number and known as the Vicar-general, was created at the same time to exercise the ecclesiastical jurisdiction belonging to the Chapter. The whole set of Statutes represented a very thorough reorganization, which reflected much credit upon the Queen's advisers, amongst whom was Edwin Sandys, the reigning Archbishop of York.

The Commonwealth

Whilst Southwell played a prominent part in the English Civil Wars, there is a dearth of information about the Minster during that period and the Commonwealth that followed. They were unstable times and records were lost or destroyed deliberately.

In 1649 Southwell Minster was deprived of its collegiate status and became an ordinary Parish Church once again. The Chapter ceased to exist and the Prebendaries were dispersed. The Archbishop's lands were sold off and Minster property was sequestered. For eleven years the great Collegiate Church, neglected and ungoverned, fell into decline and disrepair. Then on 29 May 1660, the Restoration of the House of Stuart revitalised the fortunes of the Minster. One of the first actions of the new government was to pass *The Act of Oblivion*, which reversed most of the actions which had paralysed churches across the land.

By 1661, the Minster had become a Collegiate Church once again and work began to re-staff the church, recover its property and restore the building. The first step was to re-establish the Chapter at its proper complement of 16 Prebendaries. Twelve members of the pre-interregnum Chapter had died or could not be traced, but some new men were brought in as early as 4 August 1660. By July 1661 the staff of the Minster was largely complete and the church, with a new font installed, was open for business once more.

Power and Continuity, then Abolition and Extinction

The main feature of the constitutional history of the church in the succeeding period of two hundred and fifty years lies in various attempts made by the Canons to arrange a permanent system of keeping residence. In 1693, by a Resolution of Chapter, which received the sanction of Archbishop Sharpe, it was decreed that for the future each Prebendary, in the order of his seniority, should keep a term of residence for three months, an arrangement which in theory prevailed until the Dissolution of the Chapter. It followed from this that the Canon in Residence became in effect the temporary head of the whole Collegiate Body; he presided over the sessions of the chapter, and was responsible for the conduct of the services of the church.

It could scarcely have been expected, however, that those Canons who held high ecclesiastical office elsewhere should consent to go into retirement at Southwell for three months in every four years, and in practice the office of Residentiary circulated among a small number of Prebendaries, mostly connected with the neighbourhood by birth or family. At last, in 1841, provision was made by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for the gradual abolition of the Chapter as a whole; the decease of each successive Canon after this time involved the extinction of his Prebend, and on 12 February 1873 this ancient corporate body came to its appointed end upon the death of the Rev. Thomas Henry Shepherd, rector of Clayworth and Prebendary of Beckingham.

A New Beginning, but a Rich Heritage

Eleven years after the death of the last surviving Prebendary the church of Southwell became once more a centre in the ecclesiastical organization of the county by its elevation to be the Cathedral of the newly created Diocese for the counties of Nottingham and Derby.

The constitution of Southwell Minster was based upon that of York. In the bull of Alexander III, granted in 1171, confirming the Canons in all their possessions, it is expressly stated that the ancient customs and liberties '*which the church of York is known to have had from old time and still to have*' were renewed and solemnly maintained to them. The special privileges that the Southwell Canons enjoyed, in common with those of York, were freedom in their common lands and also in their respective Prebends from all ordinary jurisdiction, spiritual or temporal, of Archbishop or King. No action could be taken by the sheriff without the Chapter's leave, or without the individual Prebend's leave in the case of Prebendal lands. '*The canons had civil and criminal jurisdiction over all their tenants and people in their liberty. The judges on circuit had to hold the pleas of the Crown at the south door of the church; in criminal cases in one of the canon's houses, outside the minster yard. They had to make a return of their proceedings to the canons, and the fines and forfeitures inflicted went to the canons and not to the king.*'

The canons also held the assize of bread and beer throughout their liberty, and could fine the infringers of this and other market regulations; but they did not possess either pillory or tumbrel. They and their tenants were also free from every form of toll and custom throughout England. These extensive powers and privileges were granted by charters of the first three Henrys, and were fully maintained into the beginning of the reign of Edward I.

In spiritual matters the Collegiate Church of Southwell was exempt from all archiepiscopal jurisdiction, save that the Diocesan had the power to visit to see that they kept their statutes; but this power was seldom if ever put in force after the early part of the 14th century. The Chapter alone exercised jurisdiction over the Vicars Choral and Chantry Priests, and over their Prebendal or parochial vicars (whom they instituted), and also over the laity throughout their Peculiar.

The Peculiar Jurisdiction of Southwell comprised the following 28 villages where the writ of the Chapter ran: Beckingham, Bleasby, Blidworth, Caunton, Calverton, Carlton, Cropwell Bishop, Darlton, Dunham, Eaton, Edingley, Farnsfield, Halam, Halloughton, Holme by Newark, Kirklington, Morton, North Leverton, North Muskham, Norwell, Oxton, Ragnall, Rampton, Southwell, South Muskham, South Wheatley, Upton, and Woodborough

In one important respect the Canons of Southwell differed from those of York. Unlike any other foundation of secular canons save that of Ripon, they possessed no Head Warden or Dean. Even Ripon gave a recognized supremacy, though no special title, to one of their number, the Prebendary of Stanwick; but at Southwell *all were of equal rights throughout their history*. In practice it is probable that the Senior Canon in Residence would preside at Chapter Meetings, and in other ways take precedence, but that was a custom and not a right.

The former Prebends today

In 2008, eleven of the churches of Nottinghamshire which gave title to the Prebends are with us still:

Norwell St Laurence (three Prebends)
 Woodborough St Swithun
 North Muskham St Wilfrid
 Oxton St Peter and St Paul (two Prebends)
 South Muskham St Wilfrid
 Dunham-on-Trent St Oswald
 Beckingham All Saints
 Halloughton St James
 Rampton All Saints
 Eaton All Saints
 North Leverton St Martin.

(Sacrist's Prebend had no church and Normanton was within the Manor of Southwell).

As Southwell Minster, that ancient and unique Collegiate Church, prepares to celebrate 900 years of service as a Parish, these sister Parishes surely have a major role to play in commemorating the rich history of our Mother Church, founded by Archbishop Osketil in 956 and invigorated by Archbishop Thomas II in 1108.

Timeline overleaf.

Archbishop	Approximate Date of Grant of Prebend	FS 301a Monarch
Oskytel 956 Oswald 971	SACRIST 980	Athelred 978
Aelfric Puttoc 1023	NORMANTON 1030	Knut 1016 Harold I 1035
Aethelric 1041	*OXTON I 1040 *OXTON II 1040	Harthacnut 1040 Edward Confessor 1042
Cynesige 1051 Ealdred 1060	NORWELL I 1065 NORWELL II 1065	William I 1066
Thomas I 1070	WOODBOROUGH 1070	William II 1087
Gerard 1 1101	NORTH MUSKHAM 1090	Henry I 1100
Thurstan 1119	BECKINGHAM 1123 DUNHAM 1130	Stephen of Blois 1135 Matilda 1141 Henry II 1154
Wm Fitzherbert 1143 R Pont l'Eveque 1154	HALLOUGHTON 1162	
Geoffrey 1181	NORWELL III 1192 RAMPTON 1200 SOUTH MUSKHAM 1200	Richard 1189 John 1199
Walter de Gray 1215 Wm Wickwain 1286 John Le Romaine 1286	EATON 1290 Nth LEVERTON 1291	Henry III 1216 Edward II 1272

* The Oxton Prebends were probably founded in Cropwell Bishop around these dates. Later the Oxton estates were added to the Prebends and then subsequently the Cropwell holdings seem to have been abandoned. The name plates on the back of the relevant stalls in the Minster Quire read:

Oxton & Cropwell I and Oxton & Cropwell II

The timeline shows that 6 prebends and their prebendaries were established and running the Saxon Minster before the Conquest and that the Normans continued the "System in Use" of prebends and prebendaries when they took over and appointed their own clerics.