

A Reassessment of the Construction of the Passage und Vestibule
to the Chapter House of Southwell Minster
A pamphlet by Richard Beaumont

A very full description of the passageway and entrance to the Chapter House is given in the book written by Greville Mairis Livett B.A. published in 1883 called *An Account of the Collegiate and Cathedral Church of Southwell*.

More recently the late Dr Norman Summers, shortly before his death in 1985, produced a new account of the same work with the expertise of an architect who was also a diligent researcher into all relevant documentary evidence that he could find. This writer had many discussions with Dr Summers at the time when he was doing his research and called his attention to some early fabric accounts which had at that time had not been fully transcribed or digested. The reason for this was that in two of them it seemed that many payments were being made for work which was then being carried out to the Chapter House entrance. As these Accounts are for the years 1429 and 1430, and it is beyond dispute for documentary as well as architectural reasons that the Chapter House was actually being built before 1300, the interesting question arises as to what work can now be identified as having been carried out as late as 1430.

It is this point which has been exercising the mind of the writer for some years. Dr Summers in his publication expressed some caution, but mentioned that some alterations had been made to the arcading and string courses and that the roof of the passage had been raised after its original building. All this is plain to be seen.

Apart from close study of the of stone used for the passage and vestibule, it is of interest to note the masons' marks that are still to be seen and which this writer has recorded. A summary of these appears below since they are not referred to elsewhere.

The following are translated extracts from the two accounts which seem certainly to relate to the passage-way, vestibule or the Chapter House itself. Where the text or the translation is uncertain, the copy is in capital letters.

1429 Payments by Robert Sampson¹ and John Chetill, Fabric Wardens.

.....

'In buying from the stones and other purchases from MARIORIA FERERIE² at 6d per stone, 4/8.

Paid to Robert Wylch Smith for making a clapper broken in the middle and mending a bolt for the door to the tower of the Chapter House.

And of 2/3 paid to Robert Sempingham with his family for 2½ days for placing a beam at the entrance to the Chapter House at 11d a day on the job . . .

And of 8d paid to 5 workmen under the orders of one of them for one day carrying and removing materials and the aforesaid beams from the entrance to the Chapter House and for disposing of the same And of 23/8 paid for stones bought at Hesilbargh³ (or Hasilbargh) 'in gross' for the clerestory [illegible] in the entrance to the Chapter House. And of 19/10 paid for 8 carters for the said stone carted from Hesilbargh and thence to Southwell

And of 10/- paid for 2 TONS⁴ of 'sclatstones' bought at Mawnsfield in gross and of 6/- paid to 4 carters carting the said sclatstones from Mawnsfield aforesaid to Southwell. And of 3d paid to the same for positioning [? stacking] them and of 12d paid to the two tilers for fixing the said sclatstones to the Chapter House.

1430 (Payments made by the same two Fabric Wardens).

¹ Robert Sampson described as "capellanus" was flourishing in Southwell between 1395 and 1446. In 1395 the Chapter gave him a Power of Attorney. White Book 355.

² There was a Hospital of St. Mary Magdalene in 1313. Tanner's Notitia Monastica. Notmuch is known about it and it seems to have disappeared before the Chantries Act. See V.C.H. Notts.

³ Hesilbargh or Hasilbargh was a well-known quarry at this time and it is recorded that stones from there were used at Windsor Castle. But no-one seems to be certain where it was. The name is not mentioned in *Place Names of Notts*. There was a quarry at Hazelbrough in Northants which produced a stone of a different character from any now seen in the Minster. It seems more likely that Hazelbarrow near Sheffield is the place referred to. Mr. A. Henstock, County Archivist, has come across this quarry in other documents.

⁴ This is a guess.

.....

" - - - 8d paid to John Barker, Priest, for mending six feet of guttering between the entrance to the Chapter House and DIVERTING THE WATER to the well ... and of 2d paid for mending 8 locks at the door of the well. And of 2d paid for 2 new keys made for the door near the Chapter House... And of 2/10 paid for 6 stones called vancers¹ bought at Hasilbargh..... And of 2/5 paid for the carriage of the same stones.....And of 2/- paid to Robert Barker senior for 6 cartloads of stone bought from the same place..... And of 12d paid to Richard Wyntton for the carriage of the same stones from Burgage as far as the new door of the Church.... And of 6/8 paid for 10 quarters of quicklime bought for the wall in the interior of the Chapter House rebuilt.....And of 11d paid to Richard Wyntton for 3 cartloads of sand carted for the aforesaid wall..... And of 14d paid to the said Richard for 2 cartloads of timber carried from Edingley as far as the churchyard bought for the entrance to the Chapter House..... And for 2 casual men engaged to help in the said carting 8d ...

And of 16/8 paid to the same stonemasons² working for Peter de Hasilbargh during 6 weeks from Michaelmas in the clerestory in the entrance to the Chapter House hired for 2/10 per week and of 21/6 paid to Robert Eperston contractor for the aforesaid work for 7 weeks and 1 day before the festival of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross hired at 3/- per week.....And of 4/2 paid to John Maltby contracting stonemason during 10 days on account of the foresaid work during the weeks of St. James, St. Andrew and St. Peter hired at 5d per day.....And of 3/6 paid to John Blaknowe contracting stonemason during the same 10 days hired at 4d per day and 11d more in total..... And of 8d paid to John

Bracie contractor for 1 day and a half in helping Robert Eperston for positioning the stones as above..... And of 3/4 paid to Henry Palmer contractor for the aforementioned 10 days for supervising the said stonemasons in the work aforementioned hired at 4d per day.....And of 8d paid to John Benett clerk contractor for 2 days taking care of the stonemasons as above hired at 4d per day.....And of 3/- paid to Robert Eperston stonemason contractor for 6 days making apertures for the beams and TILES or BUILDING MATERIALS? LAID UPON STEEL FOR rabyting the wall upon THE ROOF OF THE ENTRANCE TO THE CHAPTER HOUSE IN THE PRESENCE OF THE PLUMBERS AND THE MASTER MASON for the supervision of the aforesaid works and making moulds for the same.

¹ "voussoirs".

² It is not clear who these were.

Stipends of the sawyers.....And of 17/10 paid to 2 sawyers for 5 poles and ?27 feet of timber and scaffolding for the roof of the entrance to the Chapter House purchased at 3/4 per pole and at 20 feet 2d by agreement¹ Total 17/10.

5 rods or poles at 3/4=16/8 leaving 7ft. for the timber at 2d per ft=1/2 Totals 17/10.

Stipend of the carpenter.....In the first place the Wardens seek allowance for 40/- paid the carpenter to Thomas Wryght carpenter contractor in gross for the making of the said roof at the entrance to the Chapter House and of 12d paid for purchases and for carrying things away at the building of the same

Stipends of the plumbers.....And of 15/- paid to plumbers for SMELTING two fother and a half of lead bought offor the Church for covering the aforesaid roof paid per fother 6/- and of 4d paid to Robert Ffrere BOUGHT at Nottingham on behalf of the aforesaid plumbers to be added and of 8d paid to the same plumbers in their expenses in respect of help they had in covering the aforesaid roof.....And of 8d paid for 4 OUNCES or POUNDS of nails bought at the same place..... And of 2d for painting so-called "greco" at the same Total 16/10

My own expenses.....And of 3/4 paid for 4 POUNDS of nails bought from Master Richard Hampton for the use of Master Thomas Wryght for the roof of the entrance to the Chapter House as above as the remainder not needed at the Chapter House for the clerestory of the Church".

Analysing the above accounts to try to assess what work was actually done to the Chapter House and entrance is by no means easy. However, certain details come out quite clearly.

First, a new door had been made to the Church. There is no means of knowing where this was. But it might have been the rather poor doorway in the North Transept now blocked up, but shown for a short time when the recent repairs were carried out externally.

Secondly in 1429

1 Repairs were carried out to the roof of the Chapter House by placing new slatestones upon it.

2 Robert Sempingham and "his family" spent 2½ days placing a "beam" at the entrance to the Chapter House. This must have been quite a big job because five workmen had to spend a whole day clearing away the rubbish caused by the insertion of this beam.

3 Some stone was bought for the clerestory.

In 1430 A very considerable amount of work was carried out to the entrance of the Chapter House.

1 A new wooden roof was made for the entrance to the Chapter House. This must have been the Vestibule because it required scaffolding. This roof was covered with new lead secured by nails. It was built by Thomas Wryght, a Master Carpenter who contracted for the job at £2, plus the cost of materials.

2 The guttering from the building which is now the Library was altered under the direction of a Priest, so that the rain-water was conducted to the well which is now covered up under the Vestry. This pipe was still being used for that purpose until after the last War when, because of blockage and flooding, it was removed by Mr W Tinley and the water now flows to the outside drain.

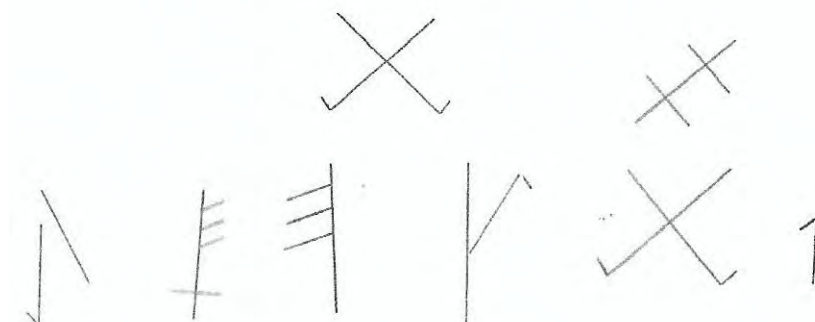
3 A large quantity of stone was bought, including six special voussoirs. The carriage of all this stone alone cost 27/- for six or seven cartloads. This was unskilled labour.

4 The building work took six to seven weeks, assuming the weeks of St. James, St. Andrew and St. Peter were included in that period. No less than eight stonemasons or helpers were on the job, not counting the Priest. The Master Mason is not named precisely, but it seems as if it might have been Peter de Hasilbargh. But John Maltby and Robert Eperston were both paid above the standard rate of 4d per day. So they were presumably skilled masons.

5 What looks like a wall was built, or perhaps rebuilt, inside the Chapter House.

The days worked amount to 124½.

[Note these marks are upside down and the wrong way round rotate through 180°]



Apart from close study of the types of stone used for the passage and vestibule, it might be of interest to note the masons' marks that are to be found there. These, which are few in number, have now been recorded. A summary of the record shows that, apart from simple crosses which are common everywhere, the masons' marks in the passage and vestibule seem to differ from those to be found in the Chapter House. It is of course necessary to disregard the marks on the two buttresses which support the wall of the Chapel, as these were no doubt built at the same time as the Chapel was built. Examination of the stone shows that there is a great variety of stone in the passage itself, quite apart from Ewan Christian's wall within the East Arcade. It is impossible to locate the voussoirs. There are far more lengthy strips of stone in the eight square-headed windows (which were probably built in the 1400s) than those referred to in the accounts. The stone used for the Vestibule contains some long narrow strips. But it seems on casual inspection from the interior that no structural alteration could have taken place at that height since its original construction. Within 3 or 4 feet of ground level, the stones are in some cases very eroded and many of them may not be original.

One other small point of interest emerges from the Accounts which might possibly have some bearing on the work mentioned. This is the following entry in the sheet for 1429: "....And of 4d paid to John Markham for scything the Churchyard against the arrival of the Lord Archbishop ...".

This was Cardinal Kemp who certainly ordered building work to be done at the Palace.

R.M.B.

The 1430 Account Roll was largely transcribed and translated by Dr H Lucas, whose expertise in odd words in no recognised language is immense.
