

SOUTHWELL MINSTER
*The Cathedral & Parish Church
of the Blessed Virgin Mary*
GUILD of STEWARDS

J.H.

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**FACT
SHEET
No.**

33A

The Diocesan Coat of Arms and the Wells of Southwell

This note is a somewhat belated follow-up to the talk I gave at the foundation of the Diocese when I promised a note on the Coat of Arms (Fact Sheet 33). My apologies for the delay and for extending the subject to the wells whose number on the Coat of Arms intrigued and diverted me.

When the Diocese of Southwell was created in 1884 no Arms existed and it was the first Bishop of the new Diocese. George Ridding, who was responsible for obtaining a Grant of Arms from the College of Heralds. Lady Ridding in her biography of Bishop Ridding says that he himself bore the costs of the application and was responsible for the actual design which he created after consultation with Rouge Dragon - one of the officers of the College.

The Official description of the Coat of Arms is as follows: -

Sable, three fountains proper, a chief or, thereon a pale azure, charged with a representation of the Virgin Mary seated, bearing the Infant Christ or, between a stag lodged proper on the dexter side and on the sinister side a cross raguly vert."

Put in non-heraldic terms the shield has a black background and on it are the three 'Charges' which relate to the foundation the Diocese. These 'Charges' are found on the **"Chief" which is the** broad gold coloured band at the top of shield. Of these 'Charges' the most important is the Virgin and Child which represents the Collegiate Church, now of course the Cathedral. The Virgin is flanked by two 'Charges' representing the counties of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. It must be remembered that the Diocese was responsible for both counties until Derby was separated in 1927. Neither of these two 'Charges' is however. - an exact copy of the counties' Coats of Arms. The Derby Arms proper show a stag seated on the ground with its head erect and surrounded by palings with a gate. The palings and gate are omitted from the Southwell Arms. Similarly, the Nottingham Arms proper have a ragged cross with three gold coronets. The coronets are omitted from the Southwell Arms.

It seems very likely that the representation of the Virgin was intended to copy the ancient seal of the Chapter but for some unknown reason the Child was moved from the Virgin's left arm to her right. Interestingly enough both positions are to be found in the Minster today. cf. the two pulpits and the pulpitum.

Turning to the representation of the wells which appear on the Arms as wavy blue and white lines within a circle, I have found no explanation of why they are only three in number. Presumably this is a reference to the three wells most commonly associated with the Minster, namely the Holy Well, the Lord's Well and the Lady's Well.

On the other hand, the representation of the wells may simply be a reference to the fact that Southwell is a place of many wells and springs or possibly a design feature to fit the restricted shape of the shield. However, that may be, in medieval times there is mention of four principal wells. From extracts of documents in the Minster library and elsewhere we note that there was an important well known as St. Katherine's well in Westhorpe. In 1481 Thomas Scott (or de Rotherham) Archbishop of York gave a license to Thomas Urkill and Richard Roper (two of the Vicars Choral) and Richard Barrett to build a chapel in Westhorpe Field close to a well, known as St Katherine's Well, in honour of St Katherine the Virgin. An indulgence of 5 years was to be granted to all who helped to build the chapel.

On 6th Jan 1533 the Chapter gave a lease of St Katherine's chapel for: 61years to Nicholas Cotton, physician. He was to occupy and use the chapel "none other than a chapel should be occupied and used" also "to prepare it yearly and the altar standing in the same with the ornaments decent and convenient for a priest to celebrate at the Rogation Days". During those 50 years the waters of St Katherine's Well became famous as a cure for rheumatism. In 1720 Squire Burton of Norwood erected a bathhouse for those who wished to bathe in the waters. The last record of the well seems to be in 1934 when the waters were said to be running into a cattle trough but the building had completely disappeared. In the Pilgrims' chapel in the Minster there is a picture of St Katherine inscribed on the back to the effect that it was hung in the chapel at the well. This seems rather unlikely.

The **Lord's Well** was also famous for rheumatism cures and had a bath house for the use of patients. Dickinson Rastall in his "History of the Antiquities of the Town and Church of Southwell 1787" says that the well was situated on the side of the hill to the S.E. of the town and about ½ mile distant from it. The ground belonged to the Archbishop of York and was part of what was known as "Little Park" contiguous to the Palace. - The location within the domain of the Lord of the Manor probably gave it this title. Rastall goes on to say that even in his time the well had become a playground for boys and had joined the list of Southwell's lost antiquities. The description by Rastall is vague and could refer to several different locations.

The Holy Well was so called because it rose within the precincts of the Minster. It was situated in the small courtyard between the north quire aisle and the Chapter House. This area was filled in and covered to form the present vestries.

The Lady's Well, named after the Blessed Virgin, was not a spring but was dependent upon rainfall from the roof of the Minster. It was situated near the walls of the Chapter House and was covered in by order of the Chapter in 1761 following an accident to a Mr. Fowler who fell in and was drowned. Rastall says there was rumored to be a connection from this well to another part of the church through which "Romish priests" used to make blood flow on certain days "and play other such pranks"

Apart from the above the Pot Well must have given its name to Patwell Dyke and there is the Paulinus well in the garden of Bishop's Manor. Perhaps readers of this note can point me to other information about named wells in the area, so far as I am aware over 70 springs and wells have been identified in the Southwell area but are un-named apart from those mentioned above, The easiest one to see nowadays is the one featured in the lounge bar of the Admiral Rodney hotel. The Coat of Arms can be studied most readily by looking at the copy situated in the entrance to the vestries. I see it is also used on the twinning notices at the entrances to the town presumably by permission of the Diocese.