

THE TOWN OF SOUTHWELL

Based on Betty Arundel's Talk on the 10 February 1990

SOUTHWELL AT THE PRESENT TIME

Many of Southwell's houses, cottages and other buildings are Georgian in date. The Baptist Church, the Assembly Rooms (now part of the "Saracen's Head") the old Grammar School, the Brewmaster's House and Maltings, a number of public houses, e.g. "The Crown", "The Reindeer", are all of that period. Linear development took place at that time as can be seen by the rows of cottages built sideways to the road in order to maximize the development of a piece of land which had a small frontage to the street - in Easthorpe, Westhorpe and King Street.

Prebendal Houses, situated along Westgate and Church Street, were the residences of the Prebendaries. The Prebendaries were the secular canons who formed the Chapter of the Minster and ran its affairs. There used to be sixteen Prebends named after the villages where the Prebendal Estates were situated (with the exception of Sacrista which had lands in Southwell) i.e. Rampton, Dunham, South Muskham, Woodborough. It was the practice for the Prebendaries to lease their Prebendal Houses to tenants. Dunham Prebendal House, now called Dunham Prebend, was leased to the Lowe family during the 1700s and 1800s. The land behind the House became known as "Lowe's Wong" - Mr. Lowe's piece of land.

Unfortunately, Oxton II called the "Red Prebend" (as it was built of brick) thought to be one of the earliest brick buildings in the County, was demolished in 1970. It stood near the Methodist Church. Cranfield House (Oxton I Prebend), is Queen Anne in date (named after Cranfield Becher who lived there in the 1800s); Dunham Prebend used to have seven gables on its front elevation similar to the three-gabled 17th Century Rampton Prebend; Sacrista Prebend was changed into the pretty "Gothic Revival" building we see today towards the end of the 1700s by Nicholas Hutchinson who was a surgeon.

Southwell does have a number of timber framed buildings - the "Saracen's Head", houses in King Street (although not obviously so) and the wall at the bottom of Queen Street is a good example of timber framing showing how buildings were extended by the filling in, by brickwork, of the space under the over-hanging first storey.

Many farms used to be situated along the streets of the Town. Sometimes farmers had to travel great distances to tend their strips of land in the Open Fields as the strips were often dispersed in different parts of the Parish. Normanton and Westhorpe still have farm houses and barns standing along the main streets.

In the 1950s and 70s, it was the order of the day to demolish old buildings without any

regard as to what history was being lost. Houses were condemned and demolished in King Street (where the Saturday Market currently is held), old cottages were demolished on Burgage Lane to provide old peoples' accommodation and other property was under threat including the W.I.Hall (once a School) and Sheppard's Row - to provide additional car parking. The Southwell Civic Society was formed by people who were concerned that "Old Southwell" was just disappearing!

Southwell has three Conservation Areas - Southwell Town Centre and The Burgage, Easthorpe and Westhorpe where special care is taken to ensure that any new buildings or alterations to buildings are "in keeping" with the area. There are also many Listed Buildings in Southwell.

In 1983, it was agreed by the District Council that Southwell should have an Urban Edge. Inside the Urban Edge is the built-up part of the Town, outside of which is a presumption against the erection of new buildings. This is so that Southwell should not end up as an urban sprawl but retain its "Cathedral in a Village" image.

A Southwell Bypass is proposed for the very near future to take heavy and through traffic away from the Town centre.

In 1959, a "rescue" excavation was mounted when it was proposed to build a new Southwell Minster Grammar School in Church Street - Roman artefacts had been found nearby. A large Roman Villa was discovered dating from the 3rd and 4th Centuries and earlier Roman occupation. 6 rooms found, 4 of which had tessellated pavements. 2 rooms were 27ft X 10ft approx. The 4 mosaics were geometric in design. A 24ft X 15ft Roman Bath had been filled in with plaster to form a floor. The painted plaster was pieced together, now on show in the Minster's south aisle. The Villa was of a sophisticated courtyard design, more usually associated with the south of England. Only a small part excavated, then reburied.

Stone tesserae from the Villa were reused by the Saxons to form flooring for their Saxon Church. An C11th list of Saints says, "There resteth St.Eadburh in the Minster of Southwell near the water called the Trent" - so the Minster must have been a place of pilgrimage. In 956, King Eadwig granted the Manor of Southwell and jurisdiction over adjoining villages to Danish Archbishop Oscytel. This part of the country had been part of the Danelaw, as evident in the names of Easthorpe and Westhorpe (torp - outlying hamlet). The Archbishops of York then remained Lords of the Manor until 1861 when the Ecclesiastical Commissioners took over Church land.

The Civil War and Charles 1. Southwell was between the two opposing forces: the Parliamentarians at Nottingham and the Royalists at Newark. Skirmishes took place in Southwell and, at one time, the Royalists tried to fortify it for the King, against the wishes of Southwell people. Lead was stripped from the roof of the Archbishop's Palace, probably by the Parliamentarians, the local people then robbed it of stone and timber.

Early in 1646 negotiations were started by King Charles with the Scottish Commissioners to surrender himself to them. The Scots were then besieging Newark. The King travelled from Oxford to Southwell, staying the night at Stamford. He arrived at the "King's Arms" (renamed soon afterwards the "Saracen's Head") early on 5 May 1646. After dining and resting, he met with the Scottish Commissioners and arranged to journey with them to Kelham in order to surrender.

Tradition has it that Edward Cludd, a prominent Parliamentarian, saved the Minster from destruction by the Parliamentarians. Edward Cludd bought Norwood Park and land in Southwell after the Civil War. Tradition also says that horses were stabled in the Minster by Parliamentary troops. Iron rings are recorded as being attached to stonework in the Minster until the Victorian restoration.

In 1740 a skeleton is said to have been found during alterations at the Palace, thrown into one of the wells (or garderobes). The skeleton had the iron part of an axe buried in the skull. Civil War armour was nearby. Mrs. Arundel's research found that a hoard of coins was discovered in 1820 when the old Chantry Priest house was demolished to make way for the Grammar School building in Church Street.

Lord Byron's mother, Mrs. Byron rented Burgage Manor House in 1803 when Newstead Abbey, the ancestral home, was leased to Lord Grey de Ruthyn. Lord Byron spent his vacations from Harrow School and Cambridge University in Southwell. He made friends with local young people, especially Elizabeth Pigot and her brother John who lived in the house called The Burgage. The Rev. J.T. Becher of Hill House, a prominent man in local affairs, involved in rebuilding the House of Correction on the Burgage, the Assembly Rooms, the Workhouse (now Greet House)- although much older than Byron, became Byron's friend and "mentor". He was a Prebendary, and later became Vicar General, a J.P., and involved with Penal and Poor Law Reform. The Rev. J.T. Becher and Elizabeth Pigot helped to persuade Lord Byron to have his poems printed. "Fugitive Pieces" was printed for private circulation to friends, but the edition (except for 4 copies - one now at Newstead Abbey) was burned on the advice of the Rev. Becher who considered one of the poems "To Mary" was "too warmly drawn"! "Occasional Pieces", also printed, for friends, again, by Samuel Ridge of Newark, proved popular in Southwell. In 1806, "Hours of Idleness" was published which was to make Lord Byron well known. Lord Byron, although slightly lame, swam in the River Greet, played cricket, enjoyed horse riding, firing with a pistol at a target, etc. He took part in private theatricals at Elmfield House in 1806, not Burgage House, as previously thought. Byron was very popular with the young ladies of Southwell and corresponded with Elizabeth Pigot after leaving Southwell.