



Southwell, Nottinghamshire

Συῶpell

Cathedral of St Mary the Virgin

Church fabric

Grid ref SK 70? 54?

Date

Pilaster capitals supporting East arch of crossing probably re-used late Anglo-Saxon stones. Traces of tessellated paving under pews in South transept. A carved tympanum now over lintel of doorway in the West wall of the North transept shows St Michael and the dragon and St David rescuing the lamb from the lion.

Notes

... Until late in the C19 this was an independent church within the see of York, served by a group of priests, each of whom was supported by prebendal endowments of land and tithes which went with the office, a form of church government dating back to Saxon times

The earliest record of the foundation of the Minster is in a C14 copy of a Charter of c. 956, the original of which has been lost. In that year King Eadwig granted Southwell to Oskytel, Archbishop of York, and he is almost certainly established or reformed a church here with a body of clergy to serve it. Even by 956 it was not certain that England would ever become a stable and united kingdom, or that Christianity could be maintained at last in peaceful continuity, but by the early years of the C11 Southwell contained the relics of St Eadburgh, a daughter of a King of the East Angles, which would have made it a place of pilgrimage. Later, Archbishop Kinsius (1050-60) gave bells to Southwell, and his successor Ealdred founded prebends and was recorded as building the first refectory where the canons might take their meals in common; so that it is clear that by the Norman Conquest a collegiate foundation was fully established.

No part of this early church is still standing today, but there is evidence that it was even then an important building of fine workmanship. In the W wall of the present north transept is a doorway, the head of which is a lintel of late Saxon date and carved in low relief, which most likely came from the earlier church at the time of its rebuilding. The capitals in the jambs of the eastern arch of the crossing are similar in technique and may also have been reused. Next is the fragment of tessellated paving still to be seen below the pews of

the S transept: the workmanship is too crude to have been Roman and is now thought to have been much later in date. Its position is consistent with being part of the transept of a substantial Saxon cruciform church on the site. Finally it is recorded in the C19 that during repairs to the S wall of the nave, a number of carved and moulded stones were uncovered in the foundations, which by their design and workmanship were pre-Conquest in date, used as base material in the rebuilding, and an understandable economy when the nearest stone quarries were at Mansfield twelve miles away.

When Archbishop Thomas I succeeded to the See of York in 1070, he found the church there in ruins and the canons dispersed after the vengeance of William the Conqueror. He devoted his energies to the reconstruction of the Church and Chapter of York, and it was Thomas II (Archbishop 1108-1114) who turned his attention to Southwell. Although ideally situated as a southern centre for the Diocese, Southwell was remote from the main centres of strife and isolated from the main lines of communication in its sheltered valley three miles from the River Trent. It seems to have come unscathed through the Conquest, but much still had to be done in re-organisation.

*N. Summers, Senior Lecturer at the Department of Architecture, University of Nottingham:
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