

EARLY FABRIC IN HISTORIC TOWNS: TIMBER-FRAMED BUILDINGS IN SOUTHWELL, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE, c.1350-1650

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Abstract

This article presents the results of an Historic England (then English Heritage) funded volunteer building recording project in Southwell, Nottinghamshire, conducted by the Southwell Community Archaeology Group under the direction of Dr Chris King (University of Nottingham) and Matthew Hurford (Trent & Peak Archaeology, York Archaeological Trust). Southwell, as a minster town with Roman and Anglo-Saxon antecedents, is one of the most important historic urban centres in the East Midlands and has an impressive and distinctive architectural legacy. The Group examined over thirty mainly brick structures which date to the eighteenth century or earlier, but this article concentrates on the six timber-framed buildings which survive in both the centre of the town and the outlying suburb of Westhorpe. These range in date from the first half of the seventeenth century back to the medieval period, with dendrochronological analysis carried out as part of the project by Nottingham Tree-Ring Dating Laboratory identifying the earliest known vernacular building in Southwell dating back to the mid fourteenth century.

INTRODUCTION

In 2013 the Southwell Community Archaeology Group, led by Dr Chris King (University of Nottingham) and Matthew Hurford (Trent & Peak Archaeology, York

Archaeological Trust) was awarded an Historic England (then English Heritage) grant under a National Heritage Protection Plan call for proposals for research on ‘Early fabric in historic towns: pre-1750 vernacular buildings’.¹ This provided funding for a reconnaissance survey of pre-1750 buildings in the historic centre of Southwell, and for more detailed survey and analysis of a select number of key structures to provide training for the group in building recording methods. A small budget was available for targeted dendrochronological analysis, carried out by Robert Howard of Nottingham Tree-Ring Dating Laboratory. The building recording forms part of a longer-term interdisciplinary research project on the origins and development of Southwell currently being undertaken by the Community Archaeology Group, both independently and in collaboration with the Universities of Nottingham and Leicester, with archaeological excavations and survey funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The project has been successful in both respects. A full walkover survey was carried out across the town centre and adjoining suburb of Westhorpe, identifying around thirty likely pre-1750 structures from their current listing descriptions and external appearance. Home-owners allowed access for internal survey of over 20 properties, and a full or partial measured survey was undertaken within a select number of properties which contained substantial elements of early fabric, where access allowed, following established recording methods.² This has enabled us to greatly improve the information on these structures available in the Nottinghamshire Historic Environment Record. We are particularly grateful to Jason Mordan (Nottinghamshire County Council) for his assistance in this process and for sharing his previous research on Nottinghamshire timber-framed buildings. The Group were also provided with training in hand survey and photography, enabling them to continue the research beyond the life of the project.

This article concentrates on the earliest buildings researched during the course of the project; the six timber-framed structures of which substantial elements survive, in some cases

hidden within later brick skins. The majority of these structures had been previously identified in the listing descriptions, including the Saracen's Head, one of Nottinghamshire's best-known medieval timber-framed buildings which has been tree-ring dated to the mid fifteenth century. Even in this well-studied building, however, the project has identified a previously unrecorded decorated open truss, suggesting the presence of a medieval open hall. The project also completed full measured surveys of two smaller medieval timber-framed structures in the outlying suburb of Westhorpe with further tree-ring dating of one of these. Together, this group of six buildings provide important evidence for the development of Southwell in the medieval and early modern period, and for the evolution of building types in the region outside the larger urban centres of Nottingham and Newark-on-Trent.³

SOUTHWELL: HISTORY AND ARCHITECTURE

The origins of Southwell as a settlement remain obscure, and are currently the subject of archaeological investigation by the Universities of Nottingham and Leicester and the Southwell Community Archaeology Group. The town is situated 14 miles north east of Nottingham and eight miles south west of Newark, in the valley of the river Greet, a minor tributary of the Trent (Fig. 1). A substantial Roman villa or other high-status building has long been known to have existed beneath the Dean's residence and site of the Southwell Grammar School to the east of the present Minster.⁴ The settlement first appears in the historical record in AD 956 when King Eadwig granted Archbishop Osgytel of York half of the royal estate at Southwell, presumably to endow a new Minster community; it is however likely that there was an earlier ecclesiastical presence associated with a large early Christian cemetery.⁵ From this point onwards Southwell was a town dominated by the collegiate church of St Mary. The existing Norman minster with its twin-towered west façade was

begun in c.1108, replacing an earlier stone church, with an Early English style eastern arm added in the 1230s and the polygonal chapter house with its famous carved foliage decoration added in c.1288.⁶ To the south of the Minster stands the substantial ruin of a medieval palace of the Archbishops of York, rebuilt in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries around a square courtyard plan, partly incorporated into the current Bishop's residence (itself built in the early twentieth century after Southwell had become the Cathedral church of Nottinghamshire in 1884).⁷

Surrounding the Minster are a group of large urban residences belonging to the canons prebendary, each of whom drew their income and title from one of the manors in the surrounding ecclesiastical Liberty or Peculiar, which comprised 28 parishes in central-east Nottinghamshire over which the Chapter exercised almost complete jurisdictional authority.⁸ A major medieval cartulary survives for the Chapter of St Mary's, known as the *Liber Albus* or 'White Book' of Southwell, which provides a full record of the charters and privileges of the collegiate church as well as the deeds of properties acquired by the Chapter and its prebendaries up to about 1460 in both Southwell and the wider Peculiar, and scattered throughout Nottinghamshire and the surrounding counties; a new scholarly edition of this important manuscript has recently been published.⁹

The prebendal mansions comprise a distinctive group of supra-vernacular houses which dominate the heart of Southwell and lend an air of architectural sophistication to this small market centre. The prebendaries, along with the Residence and Vicars' Court, have previously been the subject of extensive documentary and architectural research by Norman Summers and were therefore not the focus of our recording project, which instead concentrated on the more ordinary urban vernacular structures.¹⁰ By the end of the thirteenth century there were sixteen prebends; nine are still standing, but only a few of these retain elements of the original medieval ecclesiastical residence. The stone rear range of Norwell

Overhall Prebend contains a fourteenth-century two-light window.¹¹ Most notable among the early houses was South Muskham Prebend, a large H-plan timber-framed building with a hall between two cross-wings, with octagonal, crenelated crown-post roofs dating to the fifteenth century; unfortunately the structure was largely destroyed by fire in 2001.¹² The majority of the prebendal mansions were leased to gentry families by the seventeenth century and were substantially rebuilt or modernised in the period between the Restoration and the late eighteenth century. They include some very fine examples of early and later Georgian domestic architecture, such as the well-proportioned classical façades of Oxton I Prebend, now Cranfield House (c.1700-20) and Normanton Prebend (c.1765).¹³

The core of the town grew up to the north and west of the central crossroads which is dominated by the Minster church and prebendal houses. To the north-east is a large rectangular open green called the Burgage; this was a separate manor belonging to the Archbishops of York, whilst the rest of the town was held by the Chapter.¹⁴ To the east and west of the town are long roadside settlements called Easthorpe and Westhorpe, their place names suggesting their origins as tenth-to-eleventh-century additions to the central core. Easthorpe forms an extension of Church Street and contains several eighteenth-century houses, while the historic centre of Westhorpe is two miles distant from the Minster and largely formed a separate, rural hamlet around Westhorpe House, only becoming integrated into the town with infill buildings over the nineteenth century.¹⁵

The presence of a substantial Anglican hierarchy in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries made Southwell a prime location for the residence of Nottinghamshire gentry and professional men. The large prebendal mansions were joined by further impressive Georgian houses, such as those on the upper part of the Burgage – Elmfield House, built in c.1750 as the residence of the Lowe family; The Burgage, residence of the Pigots, and Burgage Manor, built in 1801-2 for Evelyn Faulkner to designs by well-known

local architect Richard Ingleman.¹⁶ From 1803 to 1809 the latter was famously the home of the young Lord Byron and his widowed mother, who had been forced to lease their expensive country residence at Newstead Abbey; in 1789 the Hon. John Byng had noted that ‘Southwell is a well built, clean town, such a one as a quiet distressed family ought to retire to; coals, provisions and religion to be had good and cheap’.¹⁷ To this could be added the more secular entertainments provided by the new Assembly Rooms added to the Saracen’s Head Inn in 1805 (again by Ingleman), the town’s inns and coffee rooms, and a small Georgian theatre above no. 4 Market Place.¹⁸

The prosperity engendered by this unusual cluster of gentry families spread throughout the town and resulted in a widespread rebuilding of the urban fabric in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Our project identified several examples of substantial two-storey brick houses dating to the first half of the eighteenth century, with characteristic segmental arched window and door heads and narrow plat bands – such as the Wheatsheaf Inn on King Street and 58 King Street opposite. The latter example can be shown to be a heightening and refronting of an earlier single-storey brick structure along the street frontage, presumably dating to the later seventeenth or early eighteenth century. Throughout the town, there is a great deal of evidence for the replacement or remodelling of older buildings, and the insertion of nicely detailed architectural features and decoration. The majority of this activity largely dates to the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and was therefore outside the main scope of our funded project, but our survey highlights that Southwell’s in many respects unique architectural development has significant potential to further our understanding of the ‘Georgianisation’ of a smaller English market centre.

THE TIMBER FRAMED BUILDINGS

The widespread Georgian rebuilding of Southwell at both elite and vernacular levels has limited the survival of earlier timber-framed structures in the town centre to a small number of examples, although it remains possible that earlier fabric remains hidden within seemingly later properties. The transition to brick appears to have commenced in the sixteenth century at the supra-vernacular level; the first prebendal house to be built in brick was Oxton II Prebend (now demolished), as early as 1553 known as ‘the Red Prebend’.¹⁹ Another early survival is Rampton Prebend which retains a gabled, diaper-patterned brick frontage, probably early seventeenth century, recently re-exposed from beneath a later stucco render.²⁰ In the core of the town, as noted above, there is some evidence of brick construction in the later seventeenth century followed by a more widespread rebuilding in brick beginning in the first half of the eighteenth century.

Six buildings which are wholly or in part of timber-framed construction survive in Southwell to the present day; four in the historic core, and two in the outlying hamlet of Westhorpe. In the original listing descriptions the majority of these are dated to the seventeenth century and often described as containing ‘re-used’ timber. These descriptions have proved to be conservative in many cases, and three timber-framed buildings have now been dated by dendrochronology to the medieval period; one of these is the Saracen’s Head Inn (dated to the 1460s), and the other two are the Westhorpe properties (dated to the mid-fourteenth century and early sixteenth century) – further discussed below. The three remaining houses can be dated on stylistic grounds between the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. We will now consider each of the buildings in turn, drawing on existing scholarship where it is available as well as the observations and recording undertaken by the Group.

The Saracen's Head Inn

The Saracen's Head is one of the best-known medieval timber-framed buildings in Nottinghamshire, standing on Market Street directly facing the crossroads at the centre of Southwell (Fig. 2). The Nottinghamshire antiquarian Robert Thoroton records that the messuage on which the structure was built was granted in escheat by the Archbishops of York to John and Margaret Fyssher of Southwell in 1396.²¹ Originally called the King's Arms, it bears local fame as the place where Charles I dined on his last night of freedom after his flight from Oxford, on 5 May 1646, before surrendering the following morning to the Scottish Commissioners at Newark.²² The building has been partially surveyed by Graham Beaumont and Jason Mordan, with dendrochronological analysis undertaken by Nottingham Tree-Ring Dating Laboratory in 1983 and 1988. The building was restored in the late 1970s with some unrecorded loss of historic fabric, and the roof structure in the north and east ranges has been recorded in detail, but not that in the south range.²³

The medieval core of the structure consists of three separate ranges arranged around a central courtyard; two long ranges running at right angles to the street to the north and south, joined by the east range along the street front with a wide central carriage-entry (Fig 3). Structural analysis reveals that each of the three ranges was constructed separately, with different roof framing methods used in each range, and it was long assumed that the north and south/east ranges were separated by at least a century in date; the tree-ring dating however revealed the surprising fact that all three ranges were constructed in the middle decades of the fifteenth century, and it is possible that they were put up in close succession.²⁴ This piecemeal rebuilding of each range and their different orientations may indicate that they were replacing earlier structures on the site.

The north range has 10 bays running back from the street frontage, with crown-post roof trusses, with a complete set of carpenters' marks with the trusses numbered 1-10. The sawn-off roof purlins in truss 11 show that the building continued further west for at least one more bay. Although recorded in 2001, the range is unfortunately now in a parlous state and unused except for the two easternmost bays and some ground-floor storage spaces, and is currently on the Heritage at Risk register; it was therefore not possible to enter the building to undertake further recording as part of this project. The range has been tree-ring dated using timbers from both wall posts and roof timbers, with a felling date range of AD1449-1484.²⁵ The range is L-shaped in plan as the two easternmost bays are turned and roofed parallel to the street, forming the northern end of the jettied and close-studded street range, and are used as hotel accommodation. Truss 2, spanning the first-floor street-front chamber, is an open truss with chamfered arch braces rising from the wall posts to the cambered tie beam; although now ceiled it would have originally been open to the central crown-post which has chamfered braces. This is an impressive two-bay chamber, with a stone fireplace on its west wall, today called the King Charles I suite. It contains a well-preserved set of wall paintings on the north and west walls, first discovered in 1988 (Fig. 4). The scheme is a 'fictive tapestry' of strapwork in orange and white interspersed with fruits and flowers on a black background, with a deep red upper and lower border, the upper border decorated with flowers and pomegranates. Further wall paintings were discovered in the ground floor Bramley Room directly beneath the Charles I suite by Graham Beaumont and David Measures in 1994 (Fig. 5); these are of a very different character and have two superimposed phases: a black-and-white 'anticke-work' design is found on the north wall, overlain by a second classical scheme with green and red panels divided by columns and with an upper border containing panels of text, which can be seen on both the north and south walls. The wall paintings in both the ground and first floor chambers have been re-examined as part of this project by Kathryn

Davies and Andrea Kirkham. They are believed to be broadly contemporary, dating to the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century.²⁶ These two decorated rooms may have been linked by a staircase adjoining the chimneystack, forming in effect a high-status suite of ground-floor and first-floor accommodation, in which case the different paint schemes may relate to a distinction between more public and private uses of the two rooms. Further fragments of wall painting remain in other first-floor chambers in both the north and east ranges. Truss 7 is a second open truss with an arch-braced crown post creating a further two-bay chamber in the middle of the first floor; all of the other trusses are closed above tie-beam level.

The south range contains the present lobby and bar area. It has five surviving bays, including a narrow smoke or chimney bay at its west end, and its eastern end wall is set back approximately 2m from the street frontage. The roof structure has not been fully surveyed but is recorded as of side-purlin construction clasped between collars and reduced principal rafters; there is clear evidence of smoke blackening and a possible smoke hood in the central section. The range was originally assumed to date to the sixteenth century with its side-purlin roof, at least a hundred years later than the crown posts in the north range; however, the tree-ring dating of the roof timbers produced precise felling dates of 1462 and 1463, as three samples contained bark. This means that both the north and south ranges were constructed in the middle decades of the fifteenth century, despite their very different roof structures.²⁷

The east range is structurally later than both the north and south ranges, and may be a replacement for an earlier street range. It abuts the street-front bays of the north range and extends their line running along the street frontage; the abutment can be clearly seen in the wall plate and adjoining wall posts on the first floor both externally and internally. The east range in turn wraps around the eastern end of the set-back south range, forming a two-bay linking structure between the north and south ranges with a carriage arch in bay 1. The roof is

again of clasped-purlin construction but in this case with a ridge-piece; the ridge-piece extends into the first bay of the south range and rests on the side purlin. The tree-ring dating produced a felling date range of AD1458-1488, although the actual date is thought likely to be close to the lower end of this range, consistent with the precise felling dates obtained in the 1460s. Therefore, it is possible that the range was constructed close in time with the north and south ranges, and all three may have been conceived as part of a single building project, despite their structural differences.²⁸ The timber framing throughout is of high quality, with decorative arch braces distinguishing the entry passage on the ground floor (Fig. 6) and cambered tie-beams and jowled posts on the first floor. The entire street frontage has close-studding on the first floor and was originally jettied; the jetty has been underbuilt in brick with eighteenth-century sash windows, but mortices remain for decorative jetty brackets rising from the main posts. The jetty bressumer has the remains of moulded brattishing at the south end. The close studding throughout the building was originally infilled with mortared stone slabs, a characteristic local technique. Mordan also records that the street-front infill panels originally had decorative arched niches, which were removed and the wall-studs turned (sadly without recording) in 1978.²⁹

As the Saracen's Head is a relatively well-studied building it was not anticipated that the present project would be able to shed much new light on its structural history. However, one feature was observed which has not been noted previously, highlighting the value of repeated recording visits – especially in a complex site where each range has been divided into hotel accommodation, making it difficult for any single recording campaign to encompass every element of the structure. In the south range, a room on the first floor contains the northern half of one of the main trusses with a jowled wall-post supporting a cambered tie-beam and wall-plates running east and west. The post and tie-beam have a finely-executed chamfer on both faces with a half-octagonal moulding on the soffit and with

mortices for a substantial arch-brace, demonstrating that this was an elaborate open truss (Fig. 7a). The wall-plate in this bay is also chamfered with run-out stops. Crucially, the moulding on the main truss extends down the post through the present floor level into the bar area on the ground floor, where it has been cut back approximately two feet below the ceiling (Fig. 7b). The beams of this ceiling have clearly been inserted, although it should be noted that all of the ceiling beams in this range have been heavily modified. Although it is only a fragmentary survival, the evidence supports the presence of a decorated two-storey open truss, suggesting the likelihood of a two-bay open hall at this point in the centre of the south range, even though the roof is of side purlin rather than crown-post construction. This observation is also consistent with the earlier observation of smoke blackening of the roof timbers in this section of the south range. It has always been assumed that all three ranges that make up the Saracen's Head were constructed from the start with two full stories, but the existence of an open hall is not unexpected in a fifteenth-century inn of this scale and status, as seen for instance in several near-contemporary examples of medieval inns in the nearby urban centre of Newark-on-Trent.³⁰

6 Market Place

6 Market Place abuts the north side of the Saracen's Head, running parallel to Market Place (Fig. 8). The north gable end is now exposed facing the open square at the junction of Market Place and Queen Street; this space was created after 1920 by the demolition of no. 8 Market Place and the exposed truss was originally internal, as shown by the presence of a large number of taper burn marks on the ground and first floors.³¹ The timber-framed building was two storied and jettied along the street frontage, with a clasped purlin roof, and the exposed truss is close-studded on both floors with no openings. The jetty has been

underbuilt and a new brick frontage was added to the whole structure in the nineteenth century. In the 1970s Summers noted the existence of further exposed timbers internally on the upper floor, but these are now covered.³² The overall form of the structure with its close-studded, jettied construction suggests a date in the late fifteenth or first half of the sixteenth century.

5 King Street, building in Bull Yard

Bull Yard is a narrow lane and courtyard running behind nos. 3-5 King Street, once the site of The Bull Inn, containing a range of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century cottage and workshop structures, and the partial remains of a substantial timber-framed structure forming the rear range of 5 King Street (Fig. 9). The surviving elements exposed externally consist of a north gable truss, one-and-a-half storeys in height, with a principal rafter roof with butt purlins; the infilled mortices for the tenons indicate that this extended for at least one bay further north. The upper section of one jowled wall post survives, and the ‘ghost’ of the other is preserved within the later brick infilling beneath the tie beam. Along the east elevation the timber wall plate is preserved, with a series of mortices in its soffit suggesting the presence of wall posts and other timbers, now replaced by brick. The pattern of mortices suggests at least two bays and a narrow half-bay at the north end of the range, with intervening mortices possibly for close-studding. The building is currently used for storage and there are no exposed internal features, although it remains possible that further timbers survive in the now inaccessible roof-space. The height of the structure of one-and-a-half storeys suggests that this was a rear service range to an original street-front building. The listing description for this structure suggests a seventeenth century date, and the principal rafter roof construction with tenoned butt purlins supports this.

64-64a-66 King Street

Nos. 64-64a-66 King Street are located at the upper end of King Street where it meets Burgage Lane. The present structure consists of a range with its north frontage parallel to the street, divided into two properties, and a rear range at right angles. The street frontage is rendered; the eastern end bay (66) has plain square-headed openings; the two western bays (64) have rendered quoins and nineteenth-century window frames with a central arched door (Fig. 10). There is clear evidence externally that the structure is timber framed beneath the render; the east gable has exposed close-studded timbers, and the rear elevation (in exposed brick) retains the original wall plate with peg holes for close studding.

Internal survey by the Group has revealed a near complete timber frame which clearly originated as two adjoining buildings, each of two bays, parallel to the street frontage. The eastern structure consists of no. 66 and the eastern bay of no. 64, divided by an inserted central stack. On the ground floor there are oak joists resting on a substantial cross-beam, and on the first floor a principal rafter roof with tenoned butt purlins and straight wind braces. The wall framing was originally close-studded throughout, although some studs have been removed. The western two bays of no. 64 abut this structure with paired wall posts and tie beams. The character of the timber framing is similar with close-studded wall framing of relatively substantial scantling and a principal rafter butt purlin roof but here with curved wind braces. The west gable end is preserved exposed inside the neighbouring property at 62 King Street; it is a complete two-storied close-studded timber frame resting on a tall stone plinth (Fig. 11). There are a large number of surviving carpenters' marks on the studs, sill-beam and cross-beam. The rear range behind the western half (no. 64a) is largely of brick externally although there is a surviving timber wall plate and a single jowled wall post,

indicating that this was also originally a timber-framed structure, but it is not possible to establish whether it was part of the primary phase or a later addition. The lack of front jetties and overall character of the framing indicates a likely date for these two buildings in a Nottinghamshire context at some point in the first half of the seventeenth century. Summers records a very similar timber-framed building mid-way down the west side of King Street, of three bays with close studding infilled with stone slabs; this structure was demolished in 1967.³³

Nos. 40-42 Westhorpe

Nos. 40-42 Westhorpe consist of an historic core (no. 40) of two bays running north-south at right angles to the street, with a hipped roof with gablet to the street and a gable with chimney stack to the north, beyond which is a rear single storey brick extension (Fig. 12). The property has a brick outshot to the west, and also incorporates a nineteenth-century single-storey brick structure with a parallel gabled roof (no. 42). The outer walls are of brick, but the overall shape and profile of the building and its uneven roof line suggest even to the casual observer a much older structure within. The interior reveals the survival of a near-complete two-bay timber framed structure, which has previously been the subject of sustained investigation, firstly by its owner David Measures and subsequently by Graham Beaumont and Jason Mordan. There is a narrow outshot along its western side, containing two wider stairs, and it has been suggested by earlier recorders that this may contain the remains of an original aisle. The listing description mistakenly assigns an early seventeenth-century date to the timber frame; however, a dendrochronological survey conducted in 2001 produced a felling date range of AD1514-1527 for the roof structure, although the wall/aisle post did not date.³⁴

Although most of the external wall framing has been replaced in brick, the internal central truss survives for the primary two-bay structure, along with an almost complete clasped-purlin roof (Fig. 13). The central truss is formed of substantial east and west posts, each with jowled heads, supporting a cross-beam at ground-floor level and a tie-beam at wall-plate level, both steeply cambered. The first floor of the central truss is infilled with close-studding with no original opening (the current access between the bays at first-floor level was cut through by the present owners). In the north bay a curved arch brace rises from the central post to the wall plate, with the mortice for a matching brace to the north, and two matching braces in identical positions in the south bay. There are no other mortices in the underside of the wall plate for studs for infill, which supports the idea that this could instead have been an arcade plate for an open aisle, now embedded within the current outshot along the western side of the building, which has what appears to be an early timber wall-plate.³⁵ In counter to this argument, however, is the presence of mortices in the central and northern wall-posts at ground-floor ceiling height which, if original, would be evidence for girding beams in the western side wall (Fig. 14).

In the attic, the original medieval roof structure survives almost completely intact. There are two full bays and a narrow half-bay at the north end. The roof has side purlins clasped between curved collars, with original coupled rafters jointed at the apex. The south bay facing the street has five hip rafters resting on a straight upper collar creating the gablet seen from the exterior (Fig. 15). At the north gable end the narrow bay may represent an original smoke bay which has been replaced by the present inglenook fireplace; the purlins and rafters at the north end are heavily sooted, but there is no smoke blackening of the remaining roof timbers, suggesting that the primary phase did not possess an open hearth. The central truss has studs rising from the tie beam pegged into the collar, with surviving

lathe and daub infilling, showing that the central truss was closed from at least the first floor to collar.

On the ground floor, the north room has a large inglenook fireplace with a very heavy timber bressumer taking up the majority of the north gable; the present entrance is into a lobby against the west side of the stack. The width of the fireplace opening, combined with the evidence for smoke blackening at the north end in the attic, may suggest that there was a smoke bay or hood in this position later replaced by a brick stack. The ceiling in this room is finely detailed with a large central spine beam, chamfered with bar stops, and chamfered joists; although it has not been tree-ring dated these features are characteristic of the early seventeenth century (Fig. 16). The spine beam rests on the cambered cross-beam in the central truss and is jointed into the chimney bressumer; the joists are supported on a girding beam against the west wall which also rests on the central cross-beam and chimney bressumer, without being jointed into the wall posts. This makes it likely that the ceiling and stack were both inserted at the same time. The ceiling in the south bay is also clearly a later insertion; it has a substantial spine beam but without any decorative stops; it is supported to the south by the later south gable chimneystack, and to the north by a brick pillar against the central truss, rather than being lodged on the central cross-beam.

The overall form of this building is not entirely clear, but its main features can be identified. The surviving structure had two bays, divided by a central truss (closed from at least the first floor and up to the central collar), and there is likely to have been a smoke hood or bay at the north end of the building. It is possible that the west wall of the structure formed an open timber arcade to a narrow western aisle, but the evidence for this is not certain. The ground floor ceilings are clearly post-medieval insertions, so one interpretation of the original form is that both bays were open to the roof in the first phase. An alternative interpretation is that at least one of the bays had a floor but that this was replaced in the post-medieval period,

perhaps to raise the ground-floor ceiling height; the inserted floor in the north bay is clearly associated with the substantial brick chimney stack. It is possible that there was a third bay to the north, making this a central hall, but there is no evidence for this and examples are known of buildings with smoke bays at the end of the building.³⁶ The overall quality of the timber framing is high, with substantial and well finished jowled posts, arch braces and cambered cross-beams. The early sixteenth century date fits well with the overall style of the timber framing, although the presence of an aisle in a domestic building would not be a common feature by this period.

Home Farm Cottage, Westhorpe

From the exterior, Home Farm Cottage appears as a simple late eighteenth or nineteenth-century two-storeyed brick structure, with a north-south gable roof at right-angles to the street, attached to the west end of Home Farmhouse, a late Georgian three-storey brick residence (Fig. 17). To the north and west are extensive barns and courtyards, the whole forming the estate farm of Westhorpe House, itself an impressive eighteenth-century mansion with early ‘Gothick’ additions, now converted into apartments. Home Farm Cottage was for a long period part of the service rooms for the main Farmhouse, being converted into a separate dwelling in the twentieth century. The listing description for the building records the presence of timbers, which are suggested to date to the seventeenth century and to be substantially reused; our project has created the first complete survey of the structure and dendrochronological dating has proved that the core of the house dates back to the medieval period.

The house as it stands is a three-unit structure. The northern unit containing the present kitchen and bathroom is an eighteenth- or nineteenth-century extension, and given

that the external brickwork is continuous the current external brick skin was probably added at this time, and the roof structure was also replaced. The oldest section of the building consists of the two southern bays, closest to the road. The central bay has a large inglenook fireplace and substantial chimneystack on its north wall, which was probably originally external. The southern bay, closest to the street, extends to the east with a narrow aisle wrapping around the front of Home Farmhouse (Fig. 18).

The most obvious historic element of the current building is the surviving fragment of the central internal truss between the southern and central bays, now forming the partition between the dining room and living room on the ground floor. This consists of the main eastern wall post which rises from the ground floor to a square-cut jowled head on the first floor. Extending from the post is a truncated cross-beam with an arch brace. This in turn supports the girding beam of the inserted ground-floor ceiling in the south bay; the spine beams in the rooms on either side are lodged in the replacement partition wall (Fig. 19a). On the first floor the wall post contains a large mortice with peg holes on its west (inner) face below the jowl and is chamfered on this face on both sides; there is a substantial tenon extending from its top for the original tie-beam (Fig. 19b). There is also a surviving wall-plate which extends along the east wall of the central bay. The whole is suggestive of a two-storeyed structure with an arch-braced central open truss on the first floor (Fig. 20). Furthermore, the wall post also retains evidence for features on its east (outer) face – a mortice with peg holes at the top of the post and peg holes further down the post in line with the ground-floor cross-beam. This is suggestive of a further timber-framed structure extending to the east of the two-storeyed building, and there are two possible scenarios. The first is that, as may have also been the case at no. 40 Westhorpe, there was an aisle on the east side of the structure, with an aisle tie and rafters jointed into the eastern face of the main wall (aisle) post. This is supported by the plan of the present structure, which does include just

such an aisle on the east side of the southern bay in the form of a single-storey outshot with a timber wall plate; this could have extended along the entire length of the structure. A second possibility is that a further timber-framed wing extended at right angles to the east of the two-storeyed building and was jointed into the eastern wall post, on the site of the present Home Farmhouse.

There are no further exposed timbers which form part of the original structure, and the ground floor ceilings in both the southern and central bays are clearly later insertions or replacements, with chamfered oak spine beams and joists in a mixture of oak and later softwood. The other key historic architectural feature is the large inglenook fireplace in the central bay with a chamfered oak lintel, originally on the north external gable and now contained within the northern extension. The chimneystack is well constructed using early brick, much narrower than the bricks in the main external walls and suggestive of a late sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century date.

Home Farm Cottage was the only structure surveyed during the present project which was identified as a suitable candidate for further dendrochronological dating. The analysis was undertaken by Alison Arnold and Robert Howard of Nottingham Tree-Ring Dating Laboratory in summer 2014.³⁷ Sixteen timbers were sampled, of which eleven had sufficient rings to be suitable for dating. The samples from the surviving wall-post, cross-beam and wall plate which could be identified as a remaining part of a primary truss formed a site-sequence of 192 rings, with one timber retaining the heartwood-sapwood boundary; this provides a felling date range of AD1332-1357. Two other samples, both from ceiling joists, were dated individually. One timber has an estimated felling date in the range AD1573–98, with the second having an estimated felling date range of AD1618–43, supporting the structural analysis that the floors were replaced or inserted in the post-medieval period

associated with the large brick inglenook fireplace; one or both of these timbers could have been re-used.³⁸

The framing of this structure is very similar to at least one of the fourteenth-century buildings in the nearby town of Newark, at nos. 22-24 Kirkgate. This four-bay two-storied jettied structure has a central open crown-post truss on the first floor; like the Southwell building the wall posts are chamfered on the first floor with square-cut jowls and substantial braces rising from just beneath the jowl to the tie-beam. 22-24 Kirkgate was tree-ring dated to 1337, making it closely contemporary with Home Farm Cottage.³⁹ Elements of the timber-framing are also paralleled by Old Farmhouse, School Lane, in the nearby village of Norwell, Nottinghamshire, which shares the long square-cut jowl of the main post with a large brace rising to the tie-beam. Old Farmhouse originated as an open hall with a smoke-blackened crown-post roof structure and has been dated by dendrochronology to between 1337-1362.⁴⁰ Although only a small fragment of the first phase of the structure survives at Home Farm Cottage, Westhorpe it was clearly a relatively high-status two-storied building with an open truss on the first floor, which may possibly have served as a chamber block to a now-lost medieval hall to the east. It is currently the oldest known element of a timber-framed building in Southwell.

DISCUSSION

Although the majority of the timber-framed structures which are discussed in this paper were already identified in the original listing descriptions of the town, our more detailed analysis has provided some significant new insights. Firstly, the majority of the timber-framed structures were provisionally identified as seventeenth-century in date when they were first listed, and this has shown to be conservative in many cases, with both 40

Westhorpe and Home Farm Cottage, Westhorpe now being re-dated by dendrochronology to the medieval period. A similar tendency was identified in the earlier tree-ring dating project in Newark-on-Trent, and this fits with a much wider appreciation in recent decades of the extent of medieval timber-framed survival in both rural and urban areas in many parts of the country.⁴¹

The mid-fourteenth century date of construction for Home Farm Cottage, Westhorpe fits well with the earliest cluster of surviving buildings in Newark, and this also matches the wider pattern in Nottinghamshire as a whole.⁴² The similarities in timber-framing construction identified between Home Farm Cottage, Westhorpe and nos. 22-24 Kirkgate, Newark may suggest that the same carpenters worked in both places, and this subject deserves further research. Later buildings identified in Southwell also fit within known clusters of building activity in the region, in the mid-fifteenth century (the Saracen's Head) and the early sixteenth century (40 Westhorpe). In the nearby village of Norwell, Nottinghamshire, the extensive dendrochronological survey undertaken by Historic England with the Norwell Parish Heritage Group identified three buildings dating between the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries and three dating to the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.⁴³

It therefore seems likely that smaller market towns, of historic importance and prosperity but with less pressure of continuous urban redevelopment, will be particularly fruitful areas to concentrate future searches for surviving early fabric. In many cases this will be hidden within seemingly later structures which, being relatively humble, may not have been investigated in detail, as we discovered in the case of Home Farm Cottage. Even well-studied examples such as the Saracen's Head can repay multiple visits with fresh eyes; our identification of the evidence for an open hall in the north range significantly revises the currently accepted interpretation of this building's plan and structure. Such discoveries are

perhaps more likely in a complex urban building where previous researchers may not have had access to all parts of a property. New research agendas can lead to the recognition of new evidence in previously unremarked features, such as the growing interest in the ritual significance of taper marks and carved symbols.⁴⁴

At the same time, it is worth bearing in mind some of the limitations of smaller urban centres as resources for the study of building history. The number of buildings surviving from an early period is likely to be relatively small in any one market town, meaning that broader trends in building development will be based on only a few examples which might be difficult to understand in context. Large scale dendrochronological surveys are also less likely to be successful with only a small number of buildings, and documentary sources for the development of the town and its social and economic history may also be less complete than for a larger urban centre, further limiting the interpretation.

Southwell is in many ways a unique settlement with a distinctive architectural history. The powerful presence of the medieval Minster and the prebendal residences have naturally affected the progress of urban development. The records of the properties belonging to the Chapter contained in the White Book of Southwell provide us with some information about the development of the town, but they are insufficient to create a full topographical survey. Grants and leases contained in the White Book frequently refer to both tofts and messuages in Southwell, sometimes also mentioning the presence of a house (*domus*) or buildings (*edificiis*), and market stalls are mentioned on several occasions in the mid thirteenth century and early fourteenth century.⁴⁵

The most impressive medieval timber-framed building in the town, the Saracen's Head Inn, no doubt hosted travellers and pilgrims attracted to this important ecclesiastical centre. It is a good example of this well-known medieval urban building type in a

comparatively small market centre, providing a great hall, extensive first-floor lodging chambers, and services and stables around a large courtyard, fronted by a close-studded and decorative street range.⁴⁶ It remained a prominent feature in Southwell's urban landscape throughout the post-medieval period. The best chambers in the medieval north range were decorated with fashionable wall painting schemes in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, providing updated accommodation for high-ranking guests, no doubt drawn to Southwell by the legal and administrative business created by the continued prominence of the Minster and its Peculiar.

Church building activity could well account for some of the other substantial timber-framed structures in the town centre which could be rented out as shops and houses, as is known from many other larger medieval towns. In the White Book grants are frequently made of parts of tenements or rents to support the fabric of the Minster or its chantries, which may suggest the subdivision of urban plots into rental units⁴⁷ As we have demonstrated, the buildings in Southwell share some similarities with those in the larger town of Newark, six miles to the east, where the role of the Archbishops in stimulating urban development was also important. However, with a comparatively limited survival of timber-framed buildings it is difficult to generalise about the plan and form of these structures and the extent to which they followed the models of urban buildings found in larger towns. For instance, there are no surviving examples of timber-framed row houses built as rental properties in Southwell, or any evidence for medieval shop fronts.⁴⁸ The Saracen's Head and no. 6 Market place have jettied frontages and close-studded wall framing which are typical urban forms of construction which demonstrate status through the lavish use of timber. By the seventeenth century when the pair of buildings at 66-64 King Street were constructed jetties had been abandoned but close studding was still used. The centre of Southwell is still dominated by the large messuages associated with the prebends which preserve their primary medieval layout,

but along Market Street and King Street can be found narrow burgage plots more typical of medieval urban plans. However the surviving timber-framed buildings in the centre of town are oriented parallel to the street, rather than at right angles, suggesting that there was little need to adopt urban plan forms developed for more densely packed towns.

As well as the buildings in the centre of Southwell with more characteristically urban features, this project has also examined two well-built timber-framed houses in Westhorpe in a suburb of the town which was more rural in character up to the nineteenth century. Here the plots are comparatively wide, with houses and farm buildings running at right angles alongside a farmyard, in a manner typical of Nottinghamshire rural settlements. The mid-fourteenth century building at Home Farm Cottage seems to have been a two-storey structure with an open truss on the first floor, possibly a chamber block attached to an open hall, while the early sixteenth-century building at no. 40 Westhorpe may have been open to the roof in one or both bays, with a smoke bay or hood. Both structures had ceilings and brick chimneystacks inserted in the post-medieval period, either replacing existing medieval floors or ceiling over previously open spaces for the first time. These buildings have more in common with known rural examples, albeit with elements of their timber-framed construction which also have parallels in urban centres such as Newark. They are evidence for the wealth of medieval rural households in close proximity to a market centre, able to build substantial timber houses in the decades before the Black Death and in the subsequent period of recovery in the later middle ages; a similar chronology has been proposed for Norwell where rebuilding in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries has been attributed to ‘upwardly mobile, wealthy tenants’ on the Chapter’s estates.⁴⁹ Whilst the number of surviving timber-framed buildings in Southwell is relatively small, when placed within a wider historical context they are an important resource for understanding the character and development of this historic market town.

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NOTES

¹ Historic England, ‘Historic Towns and Suburbs’, National Heritage Protection Plan 4A1 (<https://historicengland.org.uk/research/research-results/activities/4a1> [accessed 12/10/2017]).

² Historic England, *Understanding Historic Buildings*.

³ Mordan, *Timber-Framed Buildings*; Arnold and McMillan, ‘Development of Newark-on-Trent’.

⁴ Daniels, ‘Excavations on the site of the Roman villa’; Elliott, ‘Roman and Medieval remains’.

⁵ Stenton, ‘Founding of Southwell Minster’, Lyth and Davies, ‘The Southwell Charter’, Elliott, ‘Excavations on the site of the Minster Chambers’.

⁶ Pevsner and Williamson, *Nottinghamshire*, 319-28.

⁷ Summers, *A Prospect of Southwell*; Pevsner and Williamson, *Nottinghamshire*, 318-34; Alexander, *Southwell and Nottinghamshire*.

⁸ The town was also the administrative centre of the Archbishop of York’s Liberty of Southwell and Scrooby, which operated as a distinct civil district with its own Justices of the Peace and Petty and Quarter Sessions Courts: Hardstaff, *Georgian Diary 1781*.

⁹ Jones et al, *The White Book of Southwell*.

¹⁰ Summers, *A Prospect of Southwell*, provides a full description of the prebendal houses, including building plans, and analyses their historical development in the context of the wider town. There were also communal lodgings in courtyard form for the Vicars Choral and the Chantry priests.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 74-76.

¹² *Ibid.*, 90-93 and Plate LX; Mordan, *Timber-Framed Buildings*, 9.

¹³ Summers, *A Prospect of Southwell*; Pevsner and Williamson, *Nottinghamshire*, 331-2.

¹⁴ Summers, *A Prospect of Southwell*, 9-10.

¹⁵ Gover et al., *Place Names of Nottinghamshire*; Stroud, *Nottinghamshire Extensive Urban Survey*.

¹⁶ Chapman, ‘Eminent local families’; Chapman, ‘Burgage Manor’.

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- ¹⁷ Byng, *The Torrington Diaries*, 140-42.
- ¹⁸ Shilton, *The History of Southwell*; Hardstaff and Lyth, *Georgian Southwell*; Kirton, *Georgian Diary 1780*.
- ¹⁹ Summers, *A Prospect of Southwell*, 78-82; one wing of this structure survived until 1970, with a first-floor chamber with roll-moulded roof timbers of mid sixteenth-century character.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 88-91.
- ²¹ Robert Thoroton relied on now lost charters for this information: Thoroton, *History of Nottinghamshire*, 71-92. John Fysshier, senior, appears several times as a witness in the White Book of Southwell and was clearly one of the leading townsmen in the late fourteenth century: Jones et al, *The White Book of Southwell*, 302.
- ²² Thoroton, *History of Nottinghamshire*, 71-92; Shilton, *The History of Southwell*, 159-163.
- ²³ The following building description is based on surveys undertaken by Graham Beaumont and Jason Mordan and unpublished plans and drawings held in NHER: Record no. M5710.
- ²⁴ NTRDL, 'Tree-Ring Dates: List 29', 40; see Mordan, *Timber-Framed Buildings*, 23; Mordan, *Dendrochronology Summary Report No. 9*, NHER 3.70.142.
- ²⁵ Dendrochronological survey undertaken by NTRDL in 1988: NTRDL, 'Tree-Ring Dates: List 29', entry 9(c), 40.
- ²⁶ Davies, K. *Report on the wall paintings at the Saracen's Head, Nottinghamshire* (2012 unpub); Kirkham, A. *Saracen's Head, Southwell, Nottinghamshire: Results of the Paint Analysis* (2018 unpub). Paint analysis was generously funded by a Thoroton Society of Nottingham Research Grant in 2018. The Group are continuing their research into the wall paintings which will be published in full in due course.
- ²⁷ Dendrochronological survey undertaken by NTRDL in 1988: NTRDL, 'Tree-Ring Dates: List 29', entry 9(a), 40;
- ²⁸ Dendrochronological survey undertaken by NTRDL in 1983: NTRDL, 'Tree-Ring Dates: List 29', entry 9(b), 40; Mordan, *Dendrochronology Summary Report No. 9*, NHER 3.70.142.
- ²⁹ Mordan, *Dendrochronology Summary Report No. 9*, NHER 3.70.142.
- ³⁰ Arnold and McMillan, 'Development of Newark-on-Trent'.
- ³¹ Sadly the majority of the timbers with taper burn marks have been replaced in a 2018 restoration of this exposed truss.
- ³² Summers, *A Prospect of Southwell*, 14.
- ³³ This building also had a long 12-bay post-medieval rear range built as a maltings: Ibid., 15-16 and Plates VII-IX.
- ³⁴ NHER Record no. M13460; dendrochronological survey undertaken by NTRDL in 2001; Mordan, *Dendrochronology Summary Report No. 10*, NHER 3.70.229.
- ³⁵ Mordan, *Dendrochronology Summary Report No. 10*, NHER 3.70.229.
- ³⁶ Some of these buildings originated as detached kitchen blocks, which may also be the case for 40 Westhorpe: Martin and Martin, 'Detached kitchens: a re-assessment'; Pearson, 'Provision of services in medieval houses'.
- ³⁷ Dendrochronological analysis was funded by the Historic England Scientific Dating Team.
- ³⁸ Arnold and Howard, *Home Farm Cottage, Westhorpe*; the date ranges were estimated using a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 40 sapwood rings at 95% confidence.
- ³⁹ Arnold et al, *Urban development of Newark-on-Trent*, 75-85.
- ⁴⁰ Jones, *Norwell Buildings*; Hurford et al., *Old Farmhouse, Norwell*.
- ⁴¹ Arnold and McMillan, 'Development of Newark-on-Trent', 59-60.
- ⁴² Laxton et al., 'Nottinghamshire houses dated by dendrochronology'. For national trends in tree-ring dated buildings which broadly follow the same pattern see: Pearson, 'Tree-ring dating', and Pearson, 'The chronological distribution of tree-ring dates'.
- ⁴³ Jones, *Norwell Buildings*, 10-16; Hurford et al, 'Tree-ring dating of buildings in Norwell'; tree-ring dating undertaken by NTRDL and Sheffield University Dendrochronology Laboratory.
- ⁴⁴ Easton, 'Ritual marks'; Dean and Hill, 'Burn marks'.
- ⁴⁵ Jones et al, *The White Book of Southwell*, 250-261, 423-5, 519.
- ⁴⁶ Quiney, *Town Houses*, 199-208.
- ⁴⁷ Jones et al, *The White Book of Southwell*, 250-261; Quiney, *Town Houses*, 255-68.
- ⁴⁸ Pearson, 'Medieval houses', 7-20.
- ⁴⁹ Hurford et al, 'Tree-ring dating of buildings in Norwell', 52-54.

ABBREVIATIONS

NHER Nottinghamshire Historic Environment Record

NTRDL Nottingham Tree-Ring Dating Laboratory

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