The Victorian Church of England in the Midlands: The Founding of the Diocese of Southwell, 1876–1884

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Major changes to the diocesan structure of the Church of England began during Disraeli’s Conservative administration, 1874–80. Birmingham, Coventry, and Nottingham were all discussed as possible new cathedral cities, but the first new diocese formed in the Midlands, in 1884, was an amalgamation of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire with Southwell Minster as the cathedral. Birmingham was founded only in 1905. This article discusses the background to the formation of the new diocese, the political context surrounding the creation of new dioceses nationally, the debates about the geography of Southwell diocese, and the debates about the location of the cathedral. George Ridding, the first bishop, soon discovered that the two-county diocese did not work, reflecting the divisive effect of county loyalties. A suffragan was appointed for Derbyshire in 1889, and separate dioceses were created in 1927 for the archdeaconries of Derby and Nottingham.

Keywords: bishop, Church of England, county, Derbyshire, diocese, Lincolnshire, MacLagan, Nottinghamshire, Ridding, Southwell, Wordsworth

In February 1876 R. A. Cross, the Conservative Home Secretary, announced in the House of Commons that following various discussions he was preparing to bring forward in the next parliamentary session a government bill to expand the episcopate of the Church of England. This apparently innocuous proposal sparked months of speculation until in November 1876 Cross confirmed to Archbishop Tait of Canterbury that he was prepared to ‘bring in a bill for the establishment of four new sees’ during the 1876–77 Parliamentary session. Cross passed to the Archbishop the onerous task of deciding where these should be, adding his own suggestions: Nottingham, Liverpool, some town in South Yorkshire, Newcastle, and ‘What about Birmingham?’

1 Hansard, 3rd ser., 227, 369–70, 16 Feb. 1876.
2 Lambeth Palace Library (LPL), Tait Papers 96, f. 256, Cross to Tait, 25 Nov. 1876.
This innocuous comment provides the context for any discussion of the realignment of the Church of England dioceses in the midlands. Between 1877 (St Albans and Truro) and 1914, ten new dioceses were formed in England, two of them in the midlands: Southwell in 1884 and Birmingham in 1905. Subsequently new dioceses were formed for Coventry (1918), Leicester (1926–27), and Derby (1927), before the Church brought diocesan creation to a halt with Portsmouth, also in 1927. Both Southwell and Birmingham proved contentious, and took years of negotiation to set up. The case for Birmingham has already been examined, and this paper looks at the Southwell bishopric, which was finally achieved in 1884, and had implications for the Church of England from Shropshire to Lincolnshire. The paper offers by way of conclusion some thoughts on why it was so difficult to achieve amicable diocesan division in the midlands in these years.

The Church of England was faced with numerous issues in Victorian England, of which the division of existing dioceses and the creation of new ones was perhaps not the most pressing. Yet it occupied a great deal of time and energy because the demographic explosion since the mid-eighteenth century was posing some serious questions about parochial and diocesan pastoral provision. The latter was a particular concern of the Tractarian movement, which argued that, if the Church was to remain true to its apostolic tradition, dioceses ought to be of a size that enabled bishops to be accessible to their clergy and laity, to exercise clerical discipline, and generally to guide the Church without being overwhelmed by the workload.

New dioceses were formed in Ripon and Manchester under legislation passed in 1836, which also brought about a wholesale reorganization of the English diocesan structure. One of the changes affected the Diocese of Lincoln, which shed Leicestershire to the diocese of Peterborough, Huntingdonshire, and Bedfordshire to the diocese of Ely, Buckinghamshire to the diocese of Oxford, and its parishes in Hertfordshire to the diocese of Rochester. In turn it received Nottinghamshire, which was detached from the Diocese of York and, at the same time, moved from the northern to the southern province. After this frenzy of activity the matter stalled. In 1842, a Royal Commission was established to examine how Anglican cathedral churches and revenues might be used to help promote new dioceses. In 1861, Lord Lytton introduced into Parliament the first of several unsuccessful bills aimed at promoting an increase in the bishopric. The subject was regularly discussed at church congresses. In 1865, it was proposed that county dioceses should be the norm in southern England and urban dioceses in the north. The position was particularly awkward in northern England, with its vast parishes, and even vaster dioceses. Various pieces of legislation led to parochial sub-division, particularly in the 1840s and 1850s, but the question of sub-dividing dioceses and thereby increasing the number of bishops was left open. No one doubted that something needed to be done. The Bishop of Chester’s responsibilities included the whole of Lancashire and north-west Yorkshire — the heartlands of the industrial revolution — as well as large parts of Cumberland and Westmorland and, of course, Cheshire.

K. D. M. Snell, Parish and Belonging (Cambridge, 2006), especially ch. 7.
Any change required legislation and the Church of England faced a largely unresponsive government through the middle decades of the century. The only partial breakthrough came with the decision in 1869 to reactivate the unrepealed legislation from Henry VIII’s reign permitting the appointment of suffragan bishops. Nottingham and Dover were created in 1870, and Bedford, Colchester, and Guildford subsequently.6

Two particular issues dominated the discussions. Should new dioceses be based on towns or counties, and how should the cathedral be chosen? One argument was that the geography of any new diocese should take into account the importance of identifying in advance a church which would be appropriate as the cathedral. An alternative view was put forward by those who believed the great towns already had appropriate churches which could be promoted. This view was perhaps best summed up in words which would subsequently come to haunt their author, Revd Christopher Wordsworth, writing in 1860:

> there is scarcely a large district, or any populous town in England, which does not possess some noble ancient church, distinguished by architectural beauty, which might soon become a Cathedral. If the inhabitants of a district or a town are desirous of such a result, and if the desire is right, let them be enabled to attain it.7

Both views accepted that a cathedral was fundamental to a diocese, and that it should be an impressive building, but should the diocese be determined by the cathedral, or the cathedral selected from the available churches after the geography had been agreed?

In 1874, a Conservative government was returned to power with a Home Secretary, R. A. Cross, who was sympathetic to the cause of diocesan sub-division. He sponsored bills in 1875 and 1876 respectively for the creation of new dioceses based on St Albans and Truro. Both were established in 1877. The new diocese of St Albans comprised the counties of Hertfordshire and Essex, but as they had no major towns, and the Abbey church of Norman origin in St Albans was considered to be a cathedral-in-waiting, it was duly nominated for promotion.8 Truro was a compromise because, unlike St Albans, none of the Cornish towns had an outstanding church. Much energy was spent on debating whether the cathedral should be in Bodmin, Newquay, St Austell, St Germans, or Truro. In the event, Edward Benson, the first bishop of the new diocese, drove the campaign for a new cathedral, built 1880–1910, incorporating the existing St Mary’s Church, Truro, within its south aisle.9

Once it was clear that the government was willing to promote new dioceses, a conference of churchmen was convened in London on 10 February 1876 ‘to promote’, in the words of The Times, ‘the general movement for the increase of the Episcopate

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7 Christopher Wordsworth, *On a Proposed Sub-division of Dioceses* (1860), 40.
now going on throughout the country’. A. J. Beresford Hope MP, a Derbyshire landowner and leading campaigner for diocesan reform, explained to the House of Commons why he was introducing a bill to amend the existing structure. In the Upper House, Archbishop Tait of Canterbury moved a resolution which called for ‘a well-organised scheme for the increase of the Home Episcopate’, and for ‘the redistribution and division of dioceses’. A committee was appointed to draw up specific proposals, and an Additional Home Bishoprics’ Fund was established to begin fundraising.¹⁰

In this new atmosphere of optimism for those favouring diocesan division, speculation was rife. Proposals came forward for new sees to be based on Liverpool, Newcastle, Bradford, Birmingham, Coventry, Sheffield, Bristol, South Wales, and South London. A correspondent of the Guardian in June 1876 proposing bishoprics for Liverpool, Birmingham and the Black Country, Leeds, Sheffield, Halifax or Bradford, Rochdale, Blackburn or Preston, Newcastle, Suffolk, Nottingham, the Potteries, and Shrewsbury. He was careful to point out which of the places he listed had ‘important churches in public patronage which perhaps might be made available’ as cathedrals.¹¹ The Committee of the Home Episcopate Fund brought forward its own proposals to create six new dioceses in addition to St Albans and Truro. These were to be Newcastle, the West Riding, and Liverpool in the Archdiocese of York, and Southwell, Warwickshire, and Southwark in the Archdiocese of Canterbury.¹²

The Home Secretary did not believe that Parliament had the political will to support a wholesale break-up of the existing diocesan structure, and to try to achieve some sort of agreement for a limited expansion he set up two Home Bishoprics Committees under the chairmanship of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Bishops of London, Exeter, Lichfield, and Lincoln were members of the committee considering the province of Canterbury, together with the Earl of Chichester and two MPs.

Setting up the committees was straightforward, but reaching a consensus proved to be far more difficult. Through the summer of 1876 there were disputes in the midlands about the location of any new dioceses, in Yorkshire about the most appropriate town to be the recipient of a new see, and in Liverpool as to the possibility of a combined diocese with the Isle of Man.¹³ An exasperated Cross ended up laying down his own stipulations, notably that the bill he was proposing would nominate four new bishoprics, and the archbishop was to decide where they should be.¹⁴

Tait replied somewhat ambivalently, largely because he was well aware of the controversy, but in doing so he annoyed the Home Secretary even more, drawing from Cross the acidic comment that ‘the principal points are Nottingham, Liverpool, south Yorkshire, Newcastle, and perhaps Birmingham with Coventry [. . .] It is quite

¹⁰ The Times, 11 Feb. 1876; Guardian, 16 Feb. 1876; Official Yearbook of the Church of England (1883), 301.
¹¹ Guardian, 14 June 1876. Extensive proposals of a similar nature had been brought forward before, e.g. the list identified by C. H. Frewen in the Guardian, 5 Aug. 1846, and George Gilbert Scott’s book Additional Cathedrals (1854).
¹³ LPL, Tait Papers 96, f. 258, Tait to Cross, 29 Nov. 1876; Morrish, ‘Anglican Diocese of Liverpool’.
¹⁴ LPL, Tait Papers 96, f. 256, Cross to Tait, 25 Nov. 1876.
clear that all churchmen must be all of one mind before the bill is brought in'.

Although agreement seemed unlikely, Cross chose to press ahead, and on 1 May 1877 he introduced his Bishoprics Bill into the Commons. The bill, he explained, was to create four new bishoprics, for Liverpool, Wakefield or Halifax, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, and ‘out of the county of Northumberland’. Birmingham and/or Coventry had quietly disappeared off the radar. This was despite discussions dating back to the 1830s relating to diocesan rationalization in the west midlands, Cross’s earlier comments, and further discussion in the 1870s on the possible promotion of a new diocese based on either Birmingham or Coventry. The matter was not raised again until 1889.

The Nottingham option for the east midlands remained in contention, but here the controversy which followed hinged on two issues: the physical make up of the diocese, and the location of the cathedral. When Cross introduced the bill in 1877, he did so on the premise that it would create four new bishoprics, one of which would bring together Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. Beresford Hope asked, ‘where the cathedral city of the See to be formed out of the counties of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire would be?’ Cross replied, ‘Southwell’, to which Beresford Hope responded that ‘he approved the church of Southwell [. . .] a suitable cathedral [. . .] [it] would not compromise the rivalry of the two county towns, Nottingham and Derby’. The bill was read a second time in June, but lost on 19 July on a parliamentary technicality.

The exchange between Cross and Beresford Hope was rather more nuanced than the wording in Hansard might have been taken to imply. The idea of promoting a diocese based on the collegiate church of St Mary the Virgin, Southwell Minster, dated back to the early 1830s when it was first suggested by Lord Henley. Subsequently proposals came forward on various occasions between 1847 and 1867. The case gained momentum when the Archdeaconry of Nottingham, which was more or less the same geography as the county, was transferred from the archdiocese of York into the diocese of Lincoln. No one doubted that Southwell was an appropriate building for cathedral status. It dated from 956 AD and retained the essentials of its Saxon foundation until the nineteenth century. Early in the twelfth century Southwell was raised to the dignity of the mother church of the county of Nottinghamshire. King Henry VIII considered it as the possible seat of a new diocese in the 1540s, but under the terms of the Chantries Act of 1547 the chapter was dissolved and the church was reduced to parochial status. It was restored under Queen Mary, and the College of Prebends (canons) survived with few further changes until 1840. Legislation passed that year suspended the future appointments of prebends, and vested the church’s property in the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. The church was reduced once again to

17 Hansard, 3rd ser., 234 (1877), 182–3.
parochial status and the college disappeared with the death of the last prebend in 1873.19
The 1837 arrangements did not suit the bishops of Lincoln. In 1852 Bishop Jackson told the Ecclesiastical Commissioners that his diocese was too large. He suggested that Nottinghamshire should become a separate diocese, and ‘gave it as his deliberate opinion that the see of that diocese of Nottingham should be in the town of Southwell’.20 Nothing came of this, but in 1855 the Cathedrals Commission recommended in its third report that Nottinghamshire should be a separate diocese. A petition to the government drawn up in 1860 and published in the Ecclesiastical Gazette noted that a cathedral for the proposed new diocese based on Nottinghamshire ‘would be found already prepared in the Collegiate Church of Southwell’.21
The case for separating the Archdeaconry of Nottingham from Lincoln, and creating a separate diocese with the cathedral at Southwell was further complicated when in 1869 Bishop Jackson was translated to London and succeeded at Lincoln by Christopher Wordsworth. The new bishop was bound to follow Jackson’s lead on dividing the diocese. After all, he had told Convocation in 1864 that all the bishops were overworked, and that the only way to alleviate the situation was by doubling their numbers. Yet Wordsworth could hardly ignore his own comments of 1860, which were themselves an outcome of his work as a member of the Cathedrals Commission. What, he had asked in 1860, would the early Christian fathers have said ‘to our Liverpools and Birminghams, to our Leeds, Nottingham, Sheffield, Derby, Newcastle, Plymouth, left without bishops’? They would, he suggested in answer to his own rhetorical question, accuse the contemporary church of abandoning ‘the very first principles of missionary labour’.22
Within a few months of his enthronement at Lincoln, Wordsworth successfully petitioned the Crown for the appointment of a suffragan bishop of Nottingham within his own diocese. Nottingham meant in ecclesiastical terms the archdeaconry (effectively the county), but the name was chosen because it was one of the towns identified in sixteenth-century legislation as places from which suffragans might take their titles. The suffragan was to have responsibility for the archdeaconry of Nottingham.23 Archdeacon Henry Mackenzie was consecrated Suffragan Bishop of Nottingham in the cathedral-like church of St Mary the Virgin, Nottingham; Wordsworth recognized the significance of this event: ‘the appointment of a bishop suffragan, with a title derived from it, may be expected to lead to [...] a bishop of its own’.24

20 Guardian, 6 June 1883.
21 Quoted Wordsworth, On a Proposed Subdivision, 41–3.
22 Ibid., 28.
23 O. Chadwick, The Victorian Church, pt 2 (1970), 344. Practice varied in the nineteenth century as to whether suffragans should be allocated specific areas within a county or not. Wordsworth’s argument for a suffragan at Nottingham is set out in British Library (BL), Additional MSS, 44,346, f. 184.
24 J. Overton and E. Wordsworth, Christopher Wordsworth: Bishop of Lincoln, 1807–1885 (1888), 302; Laura Ridding, George Ridding: Schoolmaster and Bishop (1908), 164.
The suffragan issue focused local attention on the question of the cathedral: was it to be Southwell, or Nottingham? In 1873, when the bishoprics issue was still only under discussion, a petition was raised in Nottingham urging the Ecclesiastical Commissioners to support the creation of a bishopric of Nottingham. The reasoning here is interesting. It was partly that the previous and present bishops of Lincoln were in favour of a new diocese, and partly that Nottinghamshire was a county of 300,000 people with 300 clergy so that it needed a bishop of its own. This echoed the principle of the county as a suitable geographical area for a diocese, but the petition went one stage further. While referring to a new bishopric of Nottingham, it proposed that the bishop’s see should be at Southwell. The county might be the diocese and the county town might give its name to the diocese, but Southwell had the property. St Mary’s, Nottingham, was acceptable as the seat of a suffragan bishop — by now it even had a throne — but a diocese needed rather more, and Southwell had it: ‘a Minster and an ancient palace suitable for a bishop as well as other property for a dean etc.’. The contention stirred up by such proposals was almost immediately apparent, with the publication of a forceful editorial in the Nottingham Journal. The newspaper, Tory and Anglican by inclination, commented on the petition in its edition of 11 April 1873:

Whilst giving publicity to the [petition] we think it would be a serious mistake to select a small place like Southwell as the residence of the Bishop and Chapter. If the Bishop and his ecclesiastical associates are to be made serviceable to the diocese they ought to be located in Nottingham as the principal spot where the work has to be done, and which for the county is far more convenient as a centre of action than Southwell. The fact that there are certain ecclesiastical buildings at Southwell is a matter of very small importance, and there is no reason why if the interests of the diocese requires it these should not be disposed of, and the proceeds applied to the erection of any buildings which may be required in Nottingham, in connection with the new Bishopric when formed. Ed N.J. 26

A furious debate ensued. All but two of the rural deans within the archdeaconry of Nottingham petitioned the Ecclesiastical Commissioners on 1 May requesting that Southwell should be considered as the cathedral for the new diocese of Nottingham. A meeting of bishops, clergy, and laity on 21 May reaffirmed the Southwell option, and at a public meeting in Southwell on 2 June speaker after speaker extolled the Southwell option with the minster as the new cathedral. At this meeting 1013 people from ‘Southwell and its vicinity’ signed a petition to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.27 Since in 1873 there was as yet no immediate prospect of the government bowing to church demands for new dioceses, the potential for conflict in Nottinghamshire, should legislation ever be contemplated, clearly existed in substantial measure: many people, it seemed, supported the case for a separate diocese, but the cathedral was more problematic.

25 The Chancel was refurbished in 1871–72, during Mackenzie’s time as suffragan, in order to add a suitable throne (St Mary’s Vestry Minutes). I am grateful to Andrew Abbot for help on this point: D. J. Peters, Nottingham Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin: A Short History and Guide (1974), 7.
26 Nottingham Journal, 11 Apr. 1873.
27 Church of England Record Office (CERO), file 47,749, pt 1, 1–5; Nottingham Journal, 4 June 1873.
This debate had taken place entirely on the assumption that the Archdeaconry of Nottingham would be created an independent diocese, but, when diocesan reform arrived in 1876, it did so in a somewhat different context. In the summer of 1876, when Cross had confirmed his willingness to promote new bishoprics, and the debate was under way as to where these should be, the bishops of Lincoln and Lichfield made clear to the Archbishop of Canterbury their desire that both dioceses should be split: that the archdeaconries of Nottingham and Derby should be taken from Lincoln and Lichfield respectively to form new and independent dioceses: Nottinghamshire, according to Bishop Wordsworth, ‘ought to be a distinct diocese with a residence at Southwell’. This was fair comment, but it was soon clear that only one of the four new bishoprics would be founded in the midlands, and this led to a compromise proposal for a single bishopric bringing together the archdeaconries of Derby and Nottingham.

The initial response to the proposal for a two-archdeaconry diocese spanning most of two counties was cautiously favourable. In May 1876, a meeting of the committee for the archdeaconries of Stafford and Derby at Lichfield accepted that the whole of Derbyshire should form with Nottinghamshire the future diocese, with ‘St Mary’s Church, Nottingham, becoming the future Cathedral of the new diocese’. Yet as the summer wore on such certainty came increasingly to look misplaced in relation to both the geography and, more critically, the cathedral. The Additional Home Bishoprics Endowment Fund published its own report in July 1876:

> There can be no doubt as to the necessity of a see of Nottingham with its see town at Nottingham or Southwell. The former is much the larger place, and has a well built and handsome church. Southwell enjoys the ancient prestige of what has been a collegiate church since Saxon days, and can point to the existence there of an episcopal palace, and of buildings suitable for a chapter. On the whole, the committee recommend Nottingham should be the see town.

If Nottinghamshire was not considered sufficient on its own, rather than add the whole of Derbyshire the committee recommended just ‘the parliamentary division of East Derbyshire’. This was not a popular suggestion. The Bishop of Lichfield opposed any division on parliamentary constituency lines, and a committee set up to look into the various options took much the same view.

During the autumn of 1876 it became increasingly clear that both counties were digging in their heels about becoming individual dioceses. In September, the Derby Mercury led the way by arguing that ‘surely Derbyshire is sufficiently large and populous to form a diocese of itself’, and the baton was taken up at various conferences over the following months. On 7 November the Diocesan Conference unanimously backed a resolution opposing any sub-division of Derbyshire for church

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29 Derby Mercury, 8 Nov. 1876.
31 Derby Mercury, 8 Nov. 1876.
purposes. Lieutenant Colonel Sir Henry Wilmot, Bt, ‘in seconding the proposal, expressed in forcible terms the strong feeling that generally exists against any “dissection” of the county of Derby, and the desire that prevails that the county should, under any circumstances, remain united for all purposes of Church government and organization’. Only the Bishop of Lichfield sounded a note of caution, reiterating to the Conference his view that Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire might need to be temporarily united for diocesan purposes as a step towards separate administrations.

Opinion was just as hard on the other side of the proposed new diocese. On 13 October 1876 the Lincoln Diocesan Conference met in Lincoln. Edward Trollope, rector of Leasingham and Archdeacon of Stow, opened proceedings and ‘devoted a large portion of his paper to the advocating the erection of Nottinghamshire into a new see’. Bishop Wordsworth was in the chair and had doubtless discussed with Trollope the generous offer which formed the second part of his speech:

Deeming it to be unworthy of this great diocese that any sum less than £10,000 should be at once raised towards the accomplishment of the object I have the privilege of setting before our Diocesan Conference today, and profiting by the fact that a conditional offer of £5,000, made to the Committee of the Home Bishoprics Endowment Fund was soon responded to by two other offerings of the same amount, I desire to adopt the same principle in regard to our own dioceses, by making a first offer of £500 towards the erection of a see of Nottingham, on condition that nineteen others give a similar sum each within a year from the present day.

Wordsworth lent his backing to the proposal and the motion was carried unanimously. In a memorandum to the Home Secretary, Trollope stated that ‘as far as Lincoln Diocese is concerned the present bishop would consent to no other scheme as Nottinghamshire, with its rapidly increasing population, would gain nothing by being severed from Lincolnshire to be tied to Derbyshire’, adding that he understood similar sentiments to be held in the case of Lichfield diocese and Derbyshire.

Despite this show of independence, Cross was politically unwilling to accept the case for separate dioceses. He would not budge on the number of new bishoprics across the country. On 19 December 1876, he told Archbishop Tait that he had ‘no doubt that eventually this would be very right’ and there would one day be a diocese each for Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, but ‘I fear that at present it would be difficult’. Cross confirmed on 30 January 1877 that only a single new diocese could be anticipated in the midlands.

The Derbyshire churchmen were keen to ensure that Southwell Minster, rather than St Mary, Nottingham, was the cathedral. As the Derby Mercury put it on 1 November, ‘Although St Mary’s Church at Nottingham may be considered in

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32 Derby Mercury, 13 Sept., 1, 15 Nov., 20 Dec. 1876.
33 Derby Mercury, 15 Nov. 1876; Michael Austin, A Stage or Two Beyond Christendom (Matlock, 2001), 165.
34 Guardian, 1 Nov. 1876.
35 BL, Additional MS 51,272, f. 183. The note is undated and is endorsed by Cross ‘may be burnt’.
36 LPL, Tait Papers 96, ff. 102–3.
37 LPL, Tait Papers 228, ff. 43–7.
38 Austin, Stage or Two, 166–7.
some respects superior to any in Derbyshire, it has no chapter-house, and is not structurally suitable for a Cathedral’. However, Southwell

is in every way fit to be made the Cathedral of an important diocese. It has a fine Chapter house and there are in connection with the church several houses which are quite suitable for a bishop’s palace, a deanery, and residence for canons, &c. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners derive a very large revenue from the appropriated prebendal estates, and would (it is supposed) be willing with or without the consent of Parliament, also able, to provide, at all events, some portion of the necessary endowments. Southwell is well connected with nearly all parts of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire [see Figure 1].

Archdeacon Brough Maltby of Nottingham was later to suggest that the jealousies between Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire ‘no doubt influenced the choice of the government in deciding that neither Nottingham nor Derby should be the sedes episcopi’.40

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39 Derby Mercury, 1 Nov. 1876.
40 LPL, Benson Papers, 7, ff. 300–2.
What were the points for and against Southwell? In favour was its heritage. In October 1876 Beresford Hope wrote a stinging attack in the *Church Quarterly Review* on the St Mary’s, Nottingham option: ‘If Nottingham he taken, it can certainly offer a fine town church as cathedral, though not one to be thought of on any principle of comparison in conjunction with Southwell’. R. H. Whitworth, vicar of Bledworth and a leading Nottinghamshire ecclesiologist, used the article as a pretext for a defence of the Southwell option which he published in the *Nottingham Guardian*. Whitworth questioned the need for a bishop to live in the principal centre of population, arguing instead that Southwell was in most respects an ecclesiastical town with the trappings of a diocesan headquarters including, of course, a ready-made cathedral. He privately printed the letter and sent a copy to Beresford Hope, who responded:

The selection of Nottingham instead would be one of those far too common mistakes which arise out of looking at a question not as it really is in all its bearings, but in the deliberate light of an a priori assumption ‘because Nottingham is much bigger than Southwell, therefore the Bishop should be at Nottingham’.

Against this positive viewpoint, Southwell presented several obvious problems. First, the place itself was scarcely worthy of being called a town, and could most accurately be described as a substantial village. With a population in 1881 of 2897, Southwell was potentially the smallest diocesan centre in the country by far. It could not in any way stand comparison with the great industrial towns of the diocese. Nottingham, already substantial, more than doubled in size while the negotiations were in progress because, by the terms of the Nottingham Borough Extension Act of 1877, five adjoining parishes were brought within the town boundary and population rose from 86,000 in 1871 to 186,000 in 1881. Derby, the second town of the proposed new diocese, had a population of 58,000 in 1881. Nor was Southwell easily accessible by public transport, since it was on a railway branch line. Somewhat bizarrely, Archdeacon Maltby suggested that this was an advantage since accessibility to the railway in Nottingham would need to be set against the distance the bishop would have needed to live from the station had he resided in the county town. The first bishop of the new diocese, George Ridding, later complained that even a cursory knowledge of Bradshaw’s railway timetable would tell interested observers that Southwell was an unfortunate choice of residence.

Bishop Selwyn of Lichfield also thought Southwell an appropriate see. He saw it as more akin to his own diocesan headquarters at Lichfield. Rural Lichfield he considered to be far more appropriate than Wolverhampton, a suggested urban alternative on account of its capitular church of St Katherine’s. Selwyn preferred the country ‘because he could attend there quietly to his diocesan duties instead of giving the lion’s share of his time and attention to one great town, which would be

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41 *Church Quart. Rev.* (October 1876), 217–18. The article was published anonymously, but Beresford Hope admitted his authorship in writing to R. H. Whitworth (see next footnote).


43 LPL, Benson Papers 7, ff. 300–2, statement by Archdeacon Maltby.

expected to do, if he lived in it’.45 Wordsworth’s position was more interesting, since he was now arguing that if a bishop was based in a town he ‘ought to have his energies limited to that town’, and that ‘if he was not to be killed they must take him into the country’.46 The country, of course, meant Southwell, and this view was markedly different both from his pamphlet of 1860 and his comments following the institution of a suffragan in 1870. As a clergyman who worked in the Lincoln diocese during Wordsworth’s episcopate was later to recall:

I think he found it difficult to realise the popular movements of our own times; I remember how he once made me miserable by checking a strong expression of local feeling at an important meeting in Nottingham, called to consider the division of the diocese, when it was not absolutely settled that the new see must take its name from a village rather than from a great and thriving town.47

Despite the discussions in 1876, no one seemed any longer to doubt that the new bishopric was to be in Southwell, and the Home Secretary refused to accept further representations in relation to separate dioceses for Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire.48

Second, the trappings which in some ways appeared to make Southwell an ideal choice were in a number of respects rather hollow. The new dioceses founded under the 1870s legislation took existing parish churches as their cathedrals, and this raised a number of awkward ecclesiastical questions. One contentious issue concerned whether or not they should be provided with chapters. Collegiate status had been important in the creations of Ripon and Manchester, but the issue was initially fudged over St Albans. To avoid potential trouble in parliament and to keep down costs, the legislation simply authorized the appointment of a bishop by letters patent until such time as a chapter might exist. This fudge was subsequently continued for the other new dioceses, and it undermined one of the claims on behalf of Southwell that, because until 1840 it had retained its College of Canons, it had a history which pointed to its fitness to be a cathedral.

Finally, the building was in a state of disrepair. Precentor Edmund Venables of Lincoln claimed in a letter to The Times in September 1876 that it had ‘been carefully restored at the expense of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, under the direction of their experienced architect Mr Ewan Christian’. He was right on the second point, but somewhat less accurate on the first one. In 1841 the Ecclesiastical Commissioners had taken over responsibility for the minster fabric. They found the church in a mess, and in 1851 they asked their architect, Ewan Christian, to prepare a report on the fabric to include a refurbishment plan. Work commenced in 1852. It was a slow and tedious business, with the Commissioners querying and questioning every last detail.

45 LPL, Tait Papers 228, f. 47.
46 Guardian, 6 June 1883.
48 LPL, Tait Papers 228, f. 49.
The exasperated parishioners finally complained in 1876 — no doubt influenced by the debate about the cathedral for the proposed new diocese — about the state of the building. The choir had been dismantled so they had to meet in the nave, with the choristers robing in a corner of one transept and the other presenting ‘the appearance of a stonemason’s shed’. Arches were stopped up with ‘worn-out curtains and pieces of coarse white calico’. And the only hope they had of the work ever finishing was ‘the sight of a single stonemason, employed for the most part on portions of the fabric not required for daily worship and an occasional carver carving foliage in the choir aisles of the cloister’. These were hardly propitious circumstances for the creation of a cathedral, although this plea by the parishioners did produce some speeding up of the restoration work. Even so, the minster had to be hastily and temporarily patched up for the service at which it became a cathedral in 1884, and it was closed again immediately afterwards.49

By contrast, the alternative ‘cathedral’ was in excellent shape. St Mary the Virgin, Nottingham, was and indeed still is a grand church of cathedral-like proportions, if not on the same scale as Southwell. During the nineteenth century it had been subject to rather more successful restoration work than Southwell, notably between 1845 and 1853 to designs by W. F. Moffatt, and its appropriateness for cathedral status was emphasized in the 1870s: ‘if required for such a use, it stands ready for the reception of its future bishop without further adornment, or the addition of any accessories’.50 By then it was already the seat of a suffragan bishop. Where St Mary’s was at a disadvantage was that it lacked the appropriate buildings, including houses for the cathedral clergy. Sitting as it did in the middle of the built-up area of Victorian Nottingham, St Mary’s was partially overshadowed by lace warehouses. No land was available near the church for a cathedral close or a suitable residence for the bishop. Such buildings already existed in Southwell, and any additional land or buildings could be obtained at a fraction of the cost which would be involved at Nottingham. In other words, the set-up costs of the diocese in Nottingham would be much greater than in Southwell. It was an argument which Archbishop Benson of Canterbury, for one, found compelling, perhaps because of his own experience in setting up Truro diocese and cathedral.

Nor did Nottingham help itself: a strongly Nonconformist town, it contributed little to the endowment of the bishopric, and apparently made few if any representations about having the bishopric in the town. As Canon Francis Morse, vicar of St Mary’s, was subsequently to note: ‘I venture to hope that, especially as Nottingham people have not done much for the Bishopric of Southwell, they will show that they are not behind in liberality to the Church, by making the principal Church in their town worthy of being the chief church — if not the Cathedral — of the new Diocese’. Morse also commented that ‘St Mary’s by its position, has become very much the church of the poor of the parish and yet it is in no inconsiderable degree the church of the town and the church of the county, on all public occasions’.51 It was, in other

51 Quoted in Peters, *Nottingham Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin*, 7, 17.
words, a cathedral church in function if not in reality. St Mary’s claimed a prestige within Nottingham similar to that of Leeds parish church, but in church law neither was entitled to any particular position and, as with Leeds and subsequently also with Birmingham, lukewarm support from the principal town in the area of a proposed new diocese delayed the process of setting it up.

The Home Secretary reintroduced the episcopate bill on 18 March 1878 and it received the Royal Assent on 15 August. Under its terms, the new diocese of Southwell was to consist of the archdeaconries of Nottingham and Derby. The Archdeaconry of Derby was reorganized to include parishes in the south and west of the county which had previously been in the diocese of Lichfield. The cathedral was to be Southwell Minster.

The first hurdle had been cleared, but nothing could actually happen until funds had been raised. Under the terms of the legislation, endowment funds had to be set up for each of the four new bishoprics. The diocese could be established only when the value of the fund was sufficient to produce an annual sum of between £3,500 and £4,200. That meant raising a capital sum of at least £70,000. For Southwell, the bishop’s salary was to be constituted by £500 taken from the income of the Bishop of Lincoln, and £300 from the Bishop of Lichfield. The rest was to come from the endowment fund. The intention was to provide the new bishop with a salary of £3,000 a year, and a residence worth £500 a year. Until these conditions were achieved, the new diocese could not be founded. The Home Secretary made it clear that he expected his political support in steering the legislation through Parliament to be matched by vigorous fundraising, and he complained rather petulantly to Archbishop Tait in February 1879 that ‘I cannot help thinking that after all this outcry for the Bill Churchmen will lay themselves open to no small criticism and perhaps ridicule if now that the bill has become an act advantage be not soon taken of its provisions’.

The potential problems when it came to raising the funding for Southwell were already clear while the bill was still before Parliament. Bishop Selwyn of Lichfield encouraged his diocesan conference in 1877 to consider the financial implications of the new, two-county diocese:

I urge my rich friends among the laity, who have done so much for the Church on their own estates in building schools and parsonages, in the building and restoration of churches, and in the augmentation of the incomes of their clergymen, not to allow their bishops to be excepted from this general spirit of beneficence.

The plea seems to have fallen on deaf ears, since he told the Home Secretary in February 1878 that ‘I am not able to report that any considerable amount of money

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52 Statutes of the Realm, 41&42 Victoria c. xxx 1878.
53 Neither archdeaconry was exactly co-terminous with its respective county. Several parishes in Leicestershire were transferred from Derby to the see of Leicester in 1888–89, and three parishes in north Derbyshire were transferred to York and subsequently to Sheffield. Parishes in south Yorkshire which were part of the Archdeaconry of Nottingham have subsequently been transferred to Sheffield. I am grateful to Dr Anne Tarver and Chris Hodson for help on this point.
54 The Times, 30 Aug. 1878.
56 Derby Mercury, 3 Oct. 1877.
has been promised for the endowment fund. The general disposition being to wait for the passing of the bill’. He was not destined to see the outcome: two months later he was dead, and the task of steering through the diocesan reorganization fell to his successor Bishop William MacLagan.

With the passing of the 1878 Act the initiative was seized once again by Archdeacon Trollope or, as he had been since December 1877, Suffragan Bishop Trollope of Nottingham. Trollope devised a development plan which envisaged each part of the two dioceses of Lincoln and Lichfield contributing to the funding process. He proposed that Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, and Staffordshire should each contribute £16,000 to the bishopric fund, and Shropshire £6000, thereby producing the required £70,000. Unfortunately, the different counties showed less enthusiasm than the Suffragan Bishop for meeting their targets. As Trollope told Wordsworth in June 1879 ‘about £20,000 has been raised, chiefly from the County of Lincoln where £8,000 has been raised, that of Notts has raised £2,000, Salop £2,500, the remainder being made up by the Society for the Promotion of the Increase of the Home Episcopate (which gives £5,000)’. A committee set up in Shropshire to raise the money agreed in April 1879 ‘to do our best to raise the £6,000’ within two years. Although £1225 was subscribed at this meeting, raising additional sums proved difficult. Contributions to the bishopric fund from Derbyshire were given ‘with strings’. The secretary of the Derbyshire Committee recalled many years later that money had been given on the express condition that Southwell should be the seat of the see. Before the Bill was introduced into Parliament, and when the question could not be considered as absolutely settled, as secretary of the Derbyshire Committee he received several subscriptions on that condition. The first £500 [afterwards trebled] was given for Southwell expressly. The first £100, the first £50, the first £20, the first £10, followed by several others before the act was passed, were all given on the same condition.

In July 1879, Bishop MacLagan was urged to ‘issue a pastoral letter to all incumbents in the diocese asking them to have church offertories or collections for this object before the end of the present year’. MacLagan subsequently decided economic conditions were inappropriate and postponed the pastoral letter until 1880. Meantime Beresford Hope told a meeting in Lichfield in October 1879 that the joint bishopric should be seen as one step towards a separate see for Derbyshire with a cathedral in Derby.

The major problem was the lack of substantial individual contributions to the Southwell fund. By the summer of 1880 about £33,000 had been raised, of which the largest individual donation (£3000) was from the Dowager Duchess of Cleveland who did not even live in the new diocese. George Strutt of Belper gave £1500, but the wealthy Duke of Portland gave only £500, despite a personal approach from Archbishop Tait, and the great majority of contributions were very much smaller.

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57 LPL, Tait Papers 253, f. 298; Derby Mercury, 2 Apr. 1879.
58 Derby Mercury, 21 Oct. 1885.
59 Lichfield Joint Record Office (LJRO), B/A/26/3/1, ff. 48–9, 54; TNA, HO 45/9539/51214G, Bishop of Lichfield to the Home Secretary, 2 Feb. 1878.
60 Austin, Stage or Two, 166.
62 LPL, Tait Papers 253, f. 298.
In an effort to drum up support, in September 1880 special services were held at Southwell ‘in connection with the proposed new Bishopric of Southwell’, at which sermons were preached by the bishops of Lincoln and Lichfield. Thereafter enthusiasm waned again.

Little interest was being shown in the western side of the new diocese, so the Lichfield Diocesan Council agreed at its meeting on 31 January 1882 that ‘the subject of the division of the diocese be brought prominently before the Church Congress of 1882’. As a result, a paper was read on the subject at the October conference ‘dealing with some of the objections which have been urged against it’. The Bishop of Lichfield gave an address on the same theme, and the Bishop of Lincoln made an impassioned plea to ‘men of the greatest substance, who could with the greatest facility put their hands in their pockets and take out £1,000 each’. He continued:

You have manufacturing and industrial wealth, but what was this wealth given for but to be rich towards God and the salvation of souls? I am sorry that men in high stations do not claim the inestimable privilege of doing good, knowing the time is very short indeed.64

By early 1883 just over £40,000 had been raised, much of it from private individuals able to afford less than £1. In Nottinghamshire, a few were anonymous contributions. Sixty-four churches had made collections totalling £261 15s 7d. The largest was from Newark parish church, which contributed £32 12s 4d, while the only Nottingham church to contribute was St John the Baptist, Leenside — significantly a church with high church leanings — from which £6 16s 9d had been given. The wealthy evangelical churches, notably Holy Trinity, ignored the appeal. Ten guineas had come from 270 Sunday School teachers, scholars, and others in Sutton-in-Ashfield.65

In a bid to complete the fundraising for Southwell, the Lord Mayor of London called a meeting at the Mansion House for Friday, 1 June 1883. In advance the embers were raked over once again, and it became clear that one reason why funds were so hard to gather was the proposed cathedral. A writer in the Church Quarterly Review argued that

The county town, with but few exceptions, should be made the city of the bishop’s title and residence. In this light we cannot but regard the selection of Southwell as the seat of the new bishopric which is to embrace the county of Nottingham as an unfortunate mistake. It is selected from the mere fact that there is there a noble collegiate church of cathedral dimensions, with other buildings suitable for a chapter.66

A correspondent told the Nottingham Journal that the selection of Southwell was nothing short of a scandal:

In this proposed scheme the good of the church is being sacrificed to make things personally pleasant for the bishop, and the law of self sacrifice which is the spirit of Christianity is being distinctly set at naught and disregarded […] Southwell has in fact

63 LJRO, B/A/25/3/1, f. 110; B/A/26/1/1/1, 26 Oct. 1882.
64 Official Year-Book of the Church of England (1883), 307.
65 LPL, Benson Papers, 297, f. 298.
66 Church Quart. Rev. (Apr./July 1883), 177.
nothing to recommend it but its Minster, in the restoration of which an enormous sum of money has recently been spent without any real advantage to the community. The established church has been losing ground in this county and especially in the large towns, and this Southwell Bishopric scheme shows how insensible its promoters are to the duties which the Church ought to perform.67

The Southwell question dominated discussions at the Mansion House on 1 June 1883. Archbishop Benson, speaking from notes prepared for him by Archdeacon Maltby, repeated the standard defence of Southwell. ‘The town’, he told the gathering, ‘was just the right size [. . .] It was just so far from Nottingham as to enable the Bishop really to supervise the whole diocese, and not be merely a superior rector in a great town’. As a firm supporter of the trappings of a cathedral, he found Nottingham disadvantageous. At Truro, Benson had established a chapter, and, although no provision had been made for one at Southwell, he clearly thought one would eventually be necessary:

It had been urged that the see should be at Nottingham; but he would ask them to consider what Nottingham was. With the enormous warehouses that clustered around St Mary’s, they could not get the necessary buildings in the place where they were wanted. To do so they would have to buy the ground by the inch, and the cost would swallow up the whole of the sum required for the endowment of the see [. . .] Let no one delude themselves into believing that buildings were not necessary. They must have them.

By contrast, he continued, ‘Southwell was simply the most beautiful and the most perfect place for an episcopal residence that could be imagined’.68

Benson’s certainty was countered by Wordsworth’s vacillation: ‘every great town in the Kingdom’, the Guardian reported him as saying, ‘ought to have its bishop. Nottingham and Derby had both of them very strong claims’. Indeed, he ‘could not deny that Nottingham had a very strong claim for a bishopric (hear, hear) [. . .] They would, however, ask him if he was not very inconsistent in coming before this large and influential meeting and pleading for the see to be at Southwell [. . .] [He] expressed a hope that the time would come when there would be a bishop of Nottingham as well as of Southwell’.69 He had said all these things before, but this hardly seemed the moment to repeat them.

Whatever Wordsworth’s doubts, the meeting had the required effect because it restarted the stalled funding process. Nine pledges of £1000 each were made at the meeting, leaving a deficit on the fund of £19,000. Subscriptions were still coming in several months later, but by December 1883 the long-running saga appeared to be close to a conclusion,70 and on 17 January 1884 a deputation arrived by appointment for a meeting chaired by the Archbishop of Canterbury at the offices of the Ecclesiastical Commission. They had come to report that the funding was complete and Southwell diocese could be founded.

67 Nottingham Journal, 23 May 1883.
69 Taken from reports in the Guardian, 6 June 1883, and Nottingham Journal, 2 June 1883.
70 Nottingham Daily Express, 4, 21 Dec. 1883.
In overall terms, about £15,000 was contributed by ‘churchmen at large’, £16,200 from Lincolnshire, £10,800 from Nottinghamshire, and the rest from the various parts of the diocese of Lichfield. Lady Laura Ridding, the first bishop’s wife, later commented rather tartly that ill-feeling in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire about having to have a single diocese rather than one each meant that much of the fundraising was left to Lincolnshire, Staffordshire, and Shropshire.\(^7^1\) When to this sum were added the £500 a year transferred from the see of Lincoln, and the £300 from Lichfield, the total income topped £3,000. The other £500, to make up the £3,500 required under the 1878 legislation, was to be represented by the bishop’s residence.\(^7^2\)

The commissioners were satisfied, and on 18 January 1884 *The Times* carried an announcement that the letters patent to found the new bishopric had been sealed. Within a few days the rest of the documentation had been completed, and the founding of the bishopric was announced in the *London Gazette* on 5 February.\(^7^3\) When the good news arrived in Southwell ‘the ringers of the grand peal of bells connected with the fine old minster, now so soon to become a cathedral, ascended the belfry, and rang forth many merry peals [...] which were listened to with much gratification’.\(^7^4\) The patched-up minster was opened long enough to be created a cathedral, and then immediately closed again. The choir was refitted in 1886–87, but the cathedral was not reopened for public worship until 2 February 1888.

Dr George Ridding, headmaster of Winchester College, was appointed as the first bishop (Figure 2). Although he had been a priest for twenty-eight years, he had no pastoral or diocesan church experience to speak of: as he freely admitted, he was ‘a perfect stranger’ to his diocese, with ‘little experience of purely pastoral work’.\(^7^5\) Like Edward Benson, the first bishop of Truro, he was a former public school headmaster appointed not for his spirituality but for his experience of running an organization. He was faced with trying to make something of a diocese that owed more to political than to ecclesiastical and spiritual considerations. It proved to be too large to be manageable, and ongoing hostility between Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire was such as to reopen the earlier debate as to whether counties were the appropriate geographical area for dioceses. ‘Southwell Diocese’, as his wife Lady Laura later recalled rather bitterly in her biography of him,

was created regardless of all precedents, unwieldy in size and population. The daughter See contained twenty-three more benefices than those of the parent See of Lichfield, and a hundred more than those of Lincoln. In acreage it exceeded the former by 100,000, and its population was nearly double that of the latter. Unlike the ancient dioceses, it had no equipments of Chapter staff, or endowment, or diocesan funds. It was naked as Truth.\(^7^6\)

\(^7^1\) Ridding, *George Ridding*, 160.


\(^7^3\) *The Times*, 18 Jan., 6 Feb. 1884; CERO, file 47749, pt 2/3, 5; *Church of England Year Book* (1885), 256.

\(^7^4\) *Nottingham Journal*, 19 Jan. 1884.


\(^7^6\) Ridding, *George Ridding*, 160.
Nor did the location of the cathedral help. ‘It seems to me’, wrote Ridding, ‘that, in constituting a Cathedral, it is worthwhile to consider whether making it out of a parish church in a small village is any contribution to the diocese’. ‘The Cathedral’, he added, ‘is in a village. It is a question whether, with all its beauty, it can be a centre in the diocese without being in the midst of the people’. It was ironic that, after all the effort expended on Southwell, the first bishop made it quite clear that he would have preferred the see to be in Nottingham. Poignantly, his first official engagement as bishop was to preach at Evensong in St Mary’s, Nottingham, the day after his enthronement at Southwell. He resisted local pressure to live in Southwell, taking up residence at Thurgarton, three miles south of the town, largely because it was on a main line.

Ridding threw himself into the task of making the new diocese work. In 1887 alone he presided or preached at 200 services, attended 74 meetings and functions, and made 176 parish visits. The workload was more than he could handle and in 1888 he was ill and had to take time off. He petitioned for a suffragan at the earliest.

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77 Ibid., 164.
78 *Nottingham Journal*, 30 May 1884.
79 Austin, *Stage or Two*, 169; Hampshire Record Office, 9M68, Lady Laura Ridding’s Diaries, give a sense of the urgency with which the bishop and his wife approached the task.
possible opportunity, and Bishop Edward Ash Were was appointed Bishop of Derby in 1889.80

Ridding’s experience made him a firm supporter of single-county dioceses. At a Church Congress in 1886 he spoke in favour of county dioceses, except in particularly populous districts such as Lancashire and Yorkshire. The idea gathered pace in the later years of the nineteenth century, partly because it was widely recognized that putting Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire together to form a diocese had not been a success.81 Ridding argued that single-county dioceses were the best solution, and that a diocese should be of 300,000–500,000 people — his own was about 700,000. Ridding was talking as early as 1889 of dividing Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire for diocesan purposes,82 and he petitioned Lord Salisbury, the Prime Minister, requesting the appointment of a suffragan. In doing so, he made it clear that in his view it would have been far better to create two dioceses from the beginning — the multi-county approach simply did not work. Canon Robert Gregory, canon residentiary of St Paul’s Cathedral 1877–1911 and a native of Nottingham, was sure as early as 1877 that Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire would never work together.83

The cultural affinity of counties remained a force in Victorian England, retaining a capacity to evoke fierce local loyalties which crippled the organization of the diocese. Ridding, despite his best efforts, found that the two counties demanded their own committees, and he complained to his diocesan conference in 1891 about the duplication of effort this involved. As Peter Morrish has observed, ‘neither archbishop Tait nor Cross had appreciated what Southwell best exemplified — the pride and prejudices which counties could still evoke’.84

The argument for county dioceses could not be taken to extremes — no one suggested forming a diocese out of Rutland — but single-county dioceses were considered to be the norm subsequently. Bishop Perceval of Oxford argued that county diocese should be the rule whenever a multi-county diocese was divided, because that would make it easier to solicit lay support. Bishop Carpenter in 1908 argued that county dioceses would benefit from the historical continuity of the secular unit — a position strengthened with the formation in 1888 of county councils.85 East Anglia was reorganized along county lines in 1913 and after the First World War counties were the basis of the dioceses of Derby and Leicester. But, while Southwell had demonstrated the problems surrounding unwieldy county dioceses, no one could seriously deny that Birmingham ought not to be a diocese in its own right. The decision in 1876 to drop the Birmingham-Coventry diocesan proposal, leaving Birmingham and the Black Country split between Lichfield and Worcester, always looked likely to need revisiting at some point. The time came in 1889 when Birmingham received a city charter reflecting its importance as a major English industrial town. Yet it was not until 1905 that the diocese was set up, and part of the reason for the delay was geography, notably the proposal to base a diocese on a city rather than a

81 Austin, Stage or Two, 163–86.
82 Ibid., 169.
83 Morrish, ‘County and Urban Dioceses’, 290.
84 Ibid., 291, 293.
85 Ibid., 293.
county. Here was another new principle, that some towns might be diocesan sees with areas of countryside around them included, but not necessarily whole counties. It was followed by Bradford, Sheffield, Guildford, Blackburn, and Portsmouth.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Church of England recognized the need to re-think the boundaries of its dioceses. It did so initially in an environment in which parliament was unenthusiastic about passing the necessary legislation, but once the Conservatives returned to power in 1874 and R. A. Cross took up the matter seriously, the theoretical debate had to be reconfigured in practical terms, and it was here that the Church found itself caught between county and urban dioceses, and between selecting ready-made cathedrals, or promoting adequate parish churches. The debate over Southwell was about geography and architecture. The geography was partly forced upon the new bishop by political expediency on the part of R. A. Cross, who regarded four as the maximum number of bishoprics he could steer through Parliament, while the architecture was a running wound because the Derbyshire churchmen would accept the two-county diocese only if Southwell was the cathedral. Unfortunately, Southwell Minster was in a place which was little more than a village. Manchester, Liverpool, and Newcastle had all been founded in important towns, and even Truro was based on the county capital in Cornwall. Both Ripon and Wakefield were far larger than Southwell when their sees were created, even if they were not the largest towns in their new diocese. The new midland diocese in 1884 was a compromise involving as it did two archdeaconries with little in common and little desire to work together, and a cathedral which was clearly not at the centre of the diocese in respect to population and industry. Divorce was only a matter of time, and it came in 1927, although it had been on the cards for some years previously.86 Meantime some of the same debates had been further rehearsed in the case of Birmingham, particularly over where the diocese should be deemed to begin and end. In the end it was agreed that it should be the archdeaconry of Birmingham and the rural deanery of Handsworth. Fortunately, no one seems to have been seriously offended by the choice of St Martin’s for promotion to cathedral.87

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Wendy Bateman for some help with research for this paper, and to Peter Morrish for reading and commenting on an earlier draft.

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86 Southwell Diocesan Magazine, xxxix (1926), 126; The Times, 14 May 1923.