

last year, the meetings of the Committee having been well attended, and produced much interest to the members.

“In order, however, to increase the efficiency of the Society’s operations, the Committee recommend a few alterations in the Rules, and principally in Rule VIII., which it is proposed shall stand as follows:—

“That meetings of the members be held the last Monday in every alternate month, and a General Meeting in each year, previous to the Public Meetings; and that at such General Meeting the Committee be elected, the Accounts be passed, and the yearly Report presented; and such new Rules, or alterations in the Rules, proposed and made, as may be thought necessary.’

“The Committee also recommend that Rules XI. and XII. be altered and amended as follows:—

“‘XI.—That the Public Meetings of the Society be holden at such times and places as shall be appointed by the Committee.

“‘XII.—That the Committee meet at the times and places which they themselves may appoint.’

“Your Committee record with regret the resignation of his office of Secretary by Mr. Ingram, to whom the Society is much indebted for his valuable and zealous services; but they think his place will be efficiently supplied by Mr. G. C. Bellairs, who has kindly consented to fill the vacant post.”

The Rev. R. Stephens moved the adoption of the Report, which was seconded by Mr. G. C. Bellairs, and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Proceedings, Rules, and Objects of the Society be advertised in the public local papers under the direction of the Committee once a year.

The Treasurer’s Accounts for the year were audited and allowed. The Committee for the ensuing year were elected.

A vote of thanks to the Chairman terminated the business of the Meeting.

A MUSEUM was opened in the New Hall, which contained a variety of objects of architectural and archæological interest, exhibited by many members and friends of the Society.

A Public Dinner took place at the Bell Hotel, and at eight o’clock in the evening a PUBLIC MEETING was held in the New Hall, the Rev. R. Stephens (in the absence of E. B. Hartopp, Esq.) in the chair. The Chairman called upon Mr. James Thompson to read a paper upon

#### LEICESTER CASTLE.

MR. THOMPSON commenced by remarking that we have few Remains of Saxon defensive structures—our ancestors relying more upon the personal valour of their troops than upon fortified buildings.

It was doubtful whether anything in the shape of a donjon or castle-keep existed before the time of the Norman Invasion. Up to the time of Harold, the inhabitants of our towns enjoyed perfect liberty, and needed no defence in the shape of castles; but when the news of the invasion of William arrived, the dream of security was broken. Leicester, among other towns, was forced to submit to the Conqueror. The Normans and Saxons dwelt from henceforth in the same land as enemies, and from the disparity of numbers it became necessary for the Conquering Race to establish keeps in every part of the land. Such was the origin of Leicester Castle. It was not possible for us now to conceive the feelings with which our ancestors regarded the rising of its towers outside the city walls. After some fifty years the enmity between the races began to disappear, the proof of which, as it respected Leicester, was found in the Charter granted at that time by the Norman Earl, Robert de Bellomont, to the Burgesses, to elect a Council of twenty-four of their own number, and to gather wood in the Forest. This concession led to better feelings on the part of the people, and the garrison were no longer in danger of being murdered whenever absent after night-fall from the Castle, as formerly. The necessity of the solitary keep then no longer existed, and it became disused. The Castle, of which remains now exist, the Lecturer supposed, dated from the time of Stephen or Henry II. It was probable the building was founded in the former reign, that monarch having granted permission to his nobles to build castles, of which fifteen hundred availed themselves.

The Castle would no doubt share the fate of the Town at the siege of Leicester in 1173, when the city walls were undermined, and the keep would probably be overthrown. About 1240, Simon de Montfort became Earl of Leicester, and for twenty-five years the Castle was occupied by him and his retainers. In 1264, the first regal visit was made to the town, and no doubt the king would be entertained at the Castle. After the death of De Montfort in battle, the king conferred the earldom on his son, and this was the origin of the connection of the Castle with the House of Plantagenet, which subsisted for one hundred and thirty years, and during which period royal visits were frequently made to the town.

The Lecturer was of opinion that the whole of Saint Mary's graveyard must have been included within the Castle walls. On the site of the present Gate-house was probably a castellated entrance, approached by a drawbridge. At a very early date the Judges administered justice in the Hall of the Castle: the prisoners were confined within its walls, and convicts executed in the yard adjoining. Edward I. and Edward II. with their Queens were entertained in the Castle; and among other reminiscences, he remarked that Chaucer and Wycliffe would also be frequent guests. John of Gaunt probably died there, and Richard II. was brought

thither as a prisoner. Henry VI. held here his famous parliament, and in 1450 another parliament was held. In fact, during this period the Castle was more than a Baronial residence—it was the Palace of the Midlands. From the time of the Wars of the Roses the Castle ceased to figure in history. Its appearance was so reduced in the time of Leland, that he spoke of it almost contemptuously. In 1633, Charles I. addressed to W. Heyrick, Esq. orders to have the materials of the Castle sold, and the Castle-house repaired. He was charged, however, not to interfere with the vault, or the stairs leading to it. Mr. Heyrick, in reply, made a long return, in which, however, no mention was made of the ancient Assize-hall. The Castle house then included all the space between the south wall of St. Mary's and the present house. Ten years after occurred the famous siege, which no doubt considerably affected the remains of the Castle, though no record remained. After undergoing some other changes, to which allusion was made, in 1821 the division of the large hall was made for the purpose of legal trials, as it existed at the present time. This matter was left in the hands of a builder and his assistants, who had worked without anyone to direct them, and without any regard to the historical associations of the edifice. In drawing his remarks to a close, the Lecturer made some observations on the present boundaries of the Castle, so far as they can be traced. The Mount, he observed, still existed, as also the well which supplied the garrison when unable to leave the Castle. By far the most important remain of the Castle, however was the present Assize-hall, the only means of forming an idea of which, as it formerly existed, was a drawing made by Mr. H. Goddard, thirty-five years ago. The date of the building would be 1150. He proceeded to give some interesting architectural details, and in conclusion urged that the Hall, so eloquent in historic associations, should be preserved. He believed that if further mutilation were now proposed, even the Australian wanderer, who never hoped to see his native town again, would indignantly protest against it. It was, then, our duty to do all in our power to urge upon those in authority to save it from further spoliation.\*

\* "The Account of Leicester Castle," of which an abstract is here given, has been revised by the writer, and published in a separate form, with illustrations by J. H. Le Keux, one of which, by the kindness of Mr. Thompson, we are permitted to reproduce as a frontispiece to this volume. As very many changes have been made in the ancient Hall of the Castle since the above paper was read, and as many of its distinctive features are now destroyed, the memoir referred to, and especially its illustrations, are extremely valuable to all interested in the Civic Architecture of Leicester.—1862.

