

**THE OLD TOWN  
HALL LIBRARY OF  
LEICESTER**

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The Old town hall library of Leicester by Cecil Deedes & J. E. Stocks & J. L. Stocks

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**CECIL DEEDES & J. E. STOCKS & J. L. STOCKS**

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LEICESTER**





THE OLD TOWN HALL, LEICESTER

Front towards St. Martin's Church

(The Library is in a large room on the first floor)

# The Old Town Hall Library of Leicester

A Catalogue, with Introduction, Glossary of the Names of Places,  
Notices of Authors, Notes, and List of Missing Books,  
Compiled for the Corporation of Leicester by

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'A habitation sober and demure  
For ruminating creatures; a domain  
For quiet things to wander in.'

Oxford

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## INTRODUCTION

THE collection of books in Leicester which is commonly known there as the Old Town Hall Library is housed, as it has been housed ever since about the year 1633, in the upper story of that part of the Old Town Hall which faces the west end of St. Martin's Church. A bronze tablet affixed to the outer wall bears the following inscription:—

'This is the Town Library of Leicester, erected about the year 1632, at the instance of Mr. John Angell, Public Lecturer.'

On the north side of the whole group of buildings, over the passage which leads to the little quadrangle, another bronze tablet is affixed, with the inscription:—

'This building known as the Town Hall occupies the site of a building called "Corpus Christi Guild" and parts of the original fabric remain. It has been used for municipal purposes since the reign of H. VII.'

These tablets were placed in their respective positions somewhere about the year 1870. They represent the current tradition as to a group of buildings of more than common interest. They give the impression, to those who read them to-day, that, in the main, the buildings as a whole took the place of older buildings, once the property of Corpus Christi Guild, and that, in particular, the part used as a Library was erected at the date given.

When, however, the buildings themselves are allowed to tell their own story, and the accounts of the Corporation are searched to see if they throw any light on the matter, it is soon found that such an impression does not quite accord with the facts.

To begin with the witness of the building itself. If we pass through the passage over which the second tablet is placed into the quadrangle, the dwelling-house opposite is evidently of comparatively modern date and need not detain us. On the right hand we have the western side of the quadrangle—the beautiful panelled room, known as the Mayor's Parlour, on the ground floor, which has been recently described as 'a typical example of the manner in which the chief apartments of a fine

house were adorned in the early part of the seventeenth century'. On viewing this room and that above it we find, along with abundant evidence of the work of adornment done at that time, traces of earlier work, not only in the glass which fills the windows and contains many times repeated the cognizance of the Guild, but in some of the stonework, especially in the upper story. The general impression left, however, is that, whatever may have been preserved, the work of the seventeenth century practically amounted, in this part of the building, to a fairly thorough renovation.

But when we pass from the Mayor's Parlour into the Great Hall, once the place where Assizes were held, and still bearing signs of such use, the main features of the fabric tell a different story. The substantial part, the walls and the roof, belong to the middle of the fifteenth century. The panelling at the back of the dais is of about the same date as the Mayor's Parlour. The rail in front of the gallery at the East end—from which gallery a persistent, if rather unsubstantial, tradition says that Queen Elizabeth watched the performance of one of Shakespere's plays—belongs in character to about the year 1720, and the same date may be assigned to the gallery overlooking the dais in front of what was used as the Grand Jury room.

A staircase leads from the quadrangle to the upper story of the eastern part. We pass through a room now used by the Leicestershire Architectural and Archaeological Society into the Library, which is divided from this room by a modern wooden partition. Here the general characteristics are the same as in the western portion. The panelling of both rooms is of about the same date (1637) as that which is in embossed letters on the carved fire-place in the Mayor's Parlour; the beams were cased about the middle of the same century. Yet everything inside and out points not so much to 'erection' or even 'rebuilding' as to 'adornment' and 'improvement'.

The general indications of such a survey are, that substantially what is known as the Old Town Hall is the older home of the Guild of Corpus Christi, 'restored', as we should say in our day, but not rebuilt, the signs and results of 'restoration' being more marked and prominent in some parts than in others.

The Records of the Borough, especially the Chamberlains' Accounts, which are very clear and well kept, tend to confirm the story told by the building itself.

We find from a study of them, first, that while the Hall of the Guild of Corpus Christi was used, from time to time, by the Corporation even in the fourteenth century, it was not purchased until some time during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. One of the conditions of purchase was the continuance of a yearly payment of 7*s.* 9*d.*



This was continued year by year, and is entered almost invariably as 'for Corpus Christi Hall alias the Town Hall', at least until the year 1775.

Next, and chiefly, the actual account of what was expended on the Library in 1633 speaks for itself and may be given in full:—

THE ACCOMPTS OF THOMAS BURNSNALL & ALEXANDER BAKER LATE CHAMBERLYNS OF THE BOROUGH OF LEICESTER . . . IN THE SECOND MAIORALTYE OF M<sup>r</sup> NICOLAS GILLIOTT MAIOR . . . THAT IS TO SAYE FR. THE FEASTE OF S. MICHAEL THARCHANGELL 8 CHAS. I. 1632 UNTILL THE SAME FEASTE . . . IN THE YEARE FOLLOWINGE.

Charges about the Librarie.

Imprimis payed to Robert Ludlam for two screwes for the doore of the Librarie	li	s	d
			vj
Item payed to Thomas Sheene for worke done at the Librarie & for grease there used by him	ix	x	
" " payed him for other worke done there	i	vj	
" " " for a Lathe for the Librarie doore	ij		
" " " to Cockle for makinge cleane the librarie	i		
" " " Thomas Sheene for worke in the Librarie		vj	
" " " Alexander Inge for neayles used about the Librarie	ij	xj	
" " " M <sup>r</sup> Twistleten that he payed for the drought of a forme of the Librarie	i	vj	
" " " Richard Berrisford for payntinge the Librarie		v	
" " " Robert Bradshaw for drawing the table in the librarie	vij		
" " " Robert Ludlam for Thirty iron rodds for the librarie	ij	v	
" " " him for eight locks & furniture to them for the librarie	ij		
" " " Edward Coston for two locks & other furniture for the Lybrarie	xvj		
" " " for five Locks rodds & furniture for the Lybrarie	ij	vij	vj
" " " iron worke about the Librarie poarche	i	iiij	
" " " to Thomas Sheene for settinge on xiiij locks in the Librarie and for nayles there used	v	ij	
" " " him more for a Rayle apeece of wood & workmanship in the Librarie		v	
" " " Sheene Cockle & Reade for carrying the bookes out of the Chauncell into the Librarie	i	ij	
" " " Sheene for worke at the Librarie		vj	
" " " Cockle for makinge cleane the Librarie		iiij	
" " " to Alexander Inge for nayles there used	i	ij	
" " " for Bread & Beere there		iiij	
" " " to Isak Wynfeilde for Twelve firr boards used about the Librarie			i

The total is £10 15s. 3*d.*, or, perhaps, £60 according to present value—not enough for the erection of the building but enough for the necessary repairs and furniture, not forgetting the cost of removing the books from St. Martin's and the usual 'bread and beere' on the occasion.

The accounts for the work done in 1637 are too lengthy to be given here. The total amount expended was £224 14s. 3*d.*, equivalent to more than £1,100 of our money, and it is expressly said that this covers 'the Charges of newe-building the parlor of the Towne Hall and of the Chamber over it and the buildings adjoining to it'. At first reading this might seem to show that it was after all a work of erection which was carried out, not in 1633 but a few years later. But apart from the fact, about which there can be no mistake, that the books were actually removed from St. Martin's to the Library at the earlier date, the costliness of the work known to have been carried out in the Mayor's Parlour only allows for improvements and adornments to the other parts of the whole group of buildings, and not for their re-erection.

On the whole it seems clear that, no doubt unintentionally, both the tablets are rather misleading, and that the old Hall of the Guild of Corpus Christi is still standing, though in several parts, and notably in the Mayor's Parlour, it bears witness to the liberal improvements, adaptations, and renovations carried out, especially in the earlier part of the seventeenth century, by the Corporation, whose property it had become some half-century earlier. Tradition says that the room adapted and adorned for use as the Library had previously been occupied by the priests who ministered at the Altar of the Guild in St. Martin's Church.

In the list of 'Charges about the Librarie', reprinted from the Borough Accounts in the year 1632, there is a payment 'for carrying the bookes out of the Chauncell into the Librarie'. The Chancel meant is that of St. Martin's Church. The accounts of that church, still preserved, as well as the Accounts and Hall Papers of the Borough, show by many entries that books known as 'the Library' had been there for some years, first in the belfry and afterwards in the Chancel, and that the Borough authorities were in part, at least, responsible for the care of them. There are records during several years before 1632 of gifts of books, of the appointment of library keepers, of sums voted both for necessary repairs and furniture, and for the purchase of books, coincident in point of time with similar entries in the Church accounts.

Who first suggested the plan of removing the books from the church and of

preparing a room for them in Corpus Christi Hall cannot now be discovered. A board affixed to the partition between the room where the books now rest and the room occupied by the Archaeological Society ascribes its existence, rightly enough, to the Corporation, adding that what was done was 'upon the Motion of the Right Rev<sup>d</sup> Father in God John Lord Bishop of Lincoln and by the Promotion of Mr<sup>r</sup> John Angell Publick Lecturer of this Borough'.

It is, perhaps, somewhat hard to decide the relative value of 'upon the Motion' and 'by the Promotion', but there is ample proof that both Mr. Angell, resident in Leicester, and Bishop Williams, the Bishop of the diocese of which Leicester then formed a part, were zealous and active in bringing about the removal of the old Library and the preparation and furnishing of the new.

A Latin inscription on one of the books states that it was presented to the Library by John Angell, who for some time had been 'moderator juventutis Leicestriae', in other words, Master of the Free School there. In the year 1626 Angell was one of the candidates for the office of Public Preacher, and was eventually elected. A recommendatory letter in his favour was presented to the Mayor and 'his brethren' from 'the Ministers and Schoolemasters of the Town'. Among the signatures to this letter are those of Thomas Holmes, Francis Higginson, John Bonnett, John Ilyff, and Richard Richardson, names which are found written on volumes still preserved in the Library. Francis Higginson in particular has left sufficient notes in his own hand to show that he was both a lover of books and a generous donor.

At a meeting of 'Mr<sup>r</sup> Maior and his brethren' the v<sup>th</sup> day of September 4. Chas. I. 1628 'it is agreed by a generall consent that Mr<sup>r</sup> Angell shall have v<sup>th</sup> forth of the Chamber of the Towne for his Chardges goinge to London for the obtayninge of the Bishop's licence for the weekly lecture and buying books for the library'. Apparently he did not vacate the office of schoolmaster by becoming Public Lecturer, but held both until 1634, when he was suspended through the action of Laud. He remained in Leicester until 1650, and was afterwards Public Preacher at Grantham, where he died in 1655.

A charming letter from Anthony Cade, Vicar of Billesdon, also a very liberal donor to the Library, who was a friend of Bishop Williams and Chaplain to the Duke of Buckingham, gives an attractive picture both of the writer and also of Angell, on whose behalf it was written. The original, in a very beautiful hand, is preserved in the Hall Papers. Petitions had been sent from a large number of the citizens