

**THE OLD TOWN HALL
LIBRARY OF LEICESTER.
A CATALOGUE**

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The Old town hall library of Leicester. A catalogue 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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**The Old Town Hall Library
of 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

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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 Shakespeare'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 BURNALL & ALEXANDER BAKER LATE CHAMBERLYNS OF THE BOROUGH OF LEICESTER . . . IN THE SECOND MAIORALTYE OF M^r 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 screws 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 nayles used about the Librarie	ij	xj	
" " Mr Twisleten that he payed for the drought of a forme of the Librarie	i	vj	
" " Richard Berrisford for payninge the Librarie	v		
" " Robert Bradshaw for drawing the table in the librarie	vij		
" " Robert Ludlam for Thirty iron rodde 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 Librarie	xvj		
" " for five Locks rodde & 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 apcece 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		