

SOME NOTICES OF RECORDS PRESERVED AMONGST THE CORPORATION ARCHIVES AT SOUTHAMPTON.

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AMONGST the miscellaneous records and accounts relating to the administration of affairs in the corporate towns, much curious information may be gathered, in reference both to local history and customs, but not less illustrative of the gradual establishment of the commercial greatness of our country, the progressive extension of its manufactures, and of numerous points of statistical enquiry, important both to the historian and antiquary. Municipal archives, in too many instances, have suffered from the want of a due appreciation of their general interest; the apprehension of some improper use being made of information gained by their perusal, and still more the difficulties of decyphering and interpreting the antiquated writing or obsolete expressions, which they present, have often proved insurmountable impediments to the prosecution of enquiry. It may, however, confidently be anticipated that the Annual Meetings of the Archæological Institute in the great towns of the empire will hereafter tend to arouse a more lively care for the preservation of such memorials, and that having been classified and arranged they may become readily available for any object of useful investigation.

There is no ground of complaint of neglect, or any difficulty in obtaining access, as regards the muniments of the town of Southampton. Mr. Rushworth Keele has kindly placed in my hands a large collection of extracts from documents preserved in the corporation chest, and from these I have compiled a few brief notices and particulars, which I have thought might prove not altogether uninteresting to the readers of the Archæological Journal.

I propose to give a concise account of the records themselves, and to make a few extracts illustrative of manners, prices, and peculiar customs in use at different periods in the town.

The most ancient charters are those of 1 John, and 36 Hen. III. The first contains the earliest evidence of mercantile prosperity, in a permission to the burgesses to pass unchallenged through all territories subject to the king.

The second granted to them freedom from arrest, (except in certain peculiar cases,) the return of all writs touching Southampton and its liberty, with permission to choose their own coroners, subject to the justices in Eyre. Many other charters were granted by subsequent kings, that of the 25 Hen. VI. being chiefly worthy of note, on account of the license given in it to the citizens to purchase lands, notwithstanding the statute of mortmain, and of the statement that Portsmouth was at that period within the liberty of Southampton.

The corporation is very rich in documents, rolls, and registers, and of these the following may be enumerated as the most deserving of notice.

The first, entitled "*Liber Niger*," commencing 16 Rich. II. A.D. 1393, and ending 1620, contains enrolments of private charters, with a deed for a free grammar school in the town.

The second, entitled "*Liber Remembranciarum villæ Suthamptoniæ*," A.D. 1455, is full of miscellaneous matters of considerable value to the student of the local antiquities of the town, but of little comparative interest to the general reader.

The third is entitled "*A Book of Fines, Amerciaments, &c.*" from A.D. 1489 to A.D. 1593."

The fourth is a book endorsed, "Entry of Burgesses from 1496 to 1704," at the end of which is a census of the population, taken Sept. 20, 1596, from which it appears that the total number of residents at that period was 4,200, of whom 784 are rated as able men, while the aliens and their families amount to 297.

The fifth is entitled "*A Book of Remembrances*" for the town of Southampton, from 5 Hen. VIII. to 1601; the information, however, contained in it is of a purely local nature.

Besides these, which are perhaps the most important, there are many other volumes containing a vast amount of miscellaneous information, relating to the medieval history of the town, such as *Enrolments of the Statutes Merchant* from 39 Eliz. to 2 Jac. II., the *Steward's Book* of accounts from 1432 to 1699, *Journal of the Corporation Proceedings* from 1602 to 1642, *Books on the Brokage and Assize of Bread* from 1440 to 1694, and others belonging to the *Linen and Woollen Halls* from 1552 to 1576. There are also the *Muster Books* for the years 1544, 1555, 1567, 1579, 1583, 1589, and one without date, at the end of which is a census of the inhabitants able to bear

arms, from which it appears that there were, in all, 495, of whom 421 were considered *able* men, including 208 furnished with *callivers*, 33 pikemen with *corslets*, 54 archers, and 125 billmen.

There are also a large collection of *Books of the Court Leet*, from the presentments at which I have made several extracts; *Town Court Rolls* of the time of Henry VI., *Admiralty Court Books* from 1556 to 1585, and one very curious book containing matters of the times of Edward I., II., and III., with brief notices of charters granted to different cities and towns in England, and the laws of the guild of Southampton in Norman-French.

I now propose to give a few extracts, chiefly from the Court Leet Books. I cannot but notice the jealous care with which the jury of the Court Leet watched over the general interests of their fellow citizens, checking all encroachments on the common lands, lest, though originally of small importance, they might grow up into a prescriptive right, and removing obstructions and nuisances in the highways and streets. Thus, under date 1567, we find a long presentment regulating the period of the year at which cattle should be placed on the commons of the Salt-marshes, Houndwell, and Hoglands, respectively. The brewers are ordered to dig no clay in the Salt-marsh, because it is town land: a man named Rock is presented for having encroached with his garden "the value of half a yard" into Houndwell Fields: and a remonstrance is entered against the *sowing of woad* in Hogland, because "the common sort of the people find themselves greatly grieved withal, for that after *woad-sowing*, there will grow no grass or any thing else, for the cattle to feed on."

Nor do they appear to have been less attentive to the moral condition of their town, than to their manorial rights. The presentments at the Courts Leet bear constant testimony to the desire of promoting, as far as possible, good order and good manners. Thus, in 1607, three "*churmagdes* were presented, two of them because they had no present employment; both were required to put themselves immediately to service, or to leave the town." In 1608, a person named Warde was presented "for letting his apprentice go up and down the street, and was ordered to take the boy into his service, and do him reasonable correction as the law requireth." In 1609, three men are ordered to pay each 3s. 4d. for tipping

all the afternoon, and the host to pay 10s.; and in 1632, the innholder of the Crown was fined 10s. for entertaining a *dancer* and some *servants of the town* late at night, and in a disorderly manner. In cases of *slander* and *evil speaking*, a similar authority was exercised. Thus, in 1608, a woman was ordered to leave the town who had been guilty of slander; and when, a few days later, it was discovered that she had not gone away, and had repeated the offence, she was condemned "to be set in a cage with a paper before her." In 1633, Mrs. Knott was committed to the workhouse for scolding, brawling, and fighting with the wife of another man; while there is a presentment in more than one year, that "there is sad want in this town of a *cacing stool*, for the punishment of scowlds and such like male-factors;" a method of punishment now altogether obsolete, and, owing to the change of manners, less salutary and necessary than in former ages; but one which from more than one occurrence of the name among these papers, we presume to have been a formidable object of terror.

Nor was the enforcement of necessary discipline the only instance of a direct control over the town. We find many instances in which the mayor and corporation interfered directly with the prices of different articles of consumption. Thus, in 1606, "the Mayor and Justices of the Peace, finding that the price of malt is now sold after *two shillings the bushel* and not above," order "that, from and after Easter Day next, the beer-drawers of this town shall not make nor sell but two sorts of beer; and shall sell the double beer at 3s. 4d. the barrel, and their ordinarie at 2s. and not at anie other price whatsoever." A few years later, on the humble suit of the brewers, stating that malt was at 2s. the bushel, and hops at 8l. the hundred, order was given that they should brew and sell their double beer at 4s. and ordinary at 2s. A similar order is laid more than once upon the chandlers, and, in 1631, the vintners are enjoined not to sell their Gascoigne wine at more than 6d. the quart. Again, we find regulations as to the price of horse-hire, which throw considerable light on the value of money and the price of labour at the period. Thus, in 1577, there is an order, that none keeping horses or beasts for hire shall take for a journey of eight days or under, to London or Bristowe above 6s. 8d., and for every day after the said eight days be expired, not above

10*d.* by the day ; while for a ride to Sarum, and home again in one day, he was to receive 16*d.* for that day and not above.

Many other curious notices deserve attention, and I may mention a few items of expenditure, of peculiar interest from the occasions on which they occur or the names with which they are associated. Thus, in 1462, there are entries of 1*s.* having been paid to a man for riding to Winchester "to warn the mayor of the fleet of schyppys that were under the *Wyth*, (Wight) ;" of a pipe of wine sent to the "erle of Kent, that time he hied to seaward," (towards the sea,) which cost 3*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.* ; of the cost of a guild dinner, in the early part of the reign of Edward IV., which amounted to 2*l.* 2*s.* 10½*d.* ; and of various presents made to the king (Edward IV.) and principal nobility, to the former a hogshead of red and white wine, which cost respectively 1*l.* 3*s.* 4*d.* and 16*s.* 8*d.*, a gallon of Ypocras 2*s.* 8*d.* ; to Lord Rivers, two gallons of white wine and the same quantity of red wine, which was valued at 2*s.* 8*d.* There is also a note, that 2*l.* 12*s.* 6*d.* was expended by the mayor and his retinue when, in 1469, "he rode to London, to reckon with the erle of Warwick, and was there twelve days."

I will add only the following notices, extracted from some of the miscellaneous papers, which do not seem strictly to fall under any of the heads under which I have arranged my previous selections.

One of them relates to the suspicion, against a widow, of witchcraft, 1579, on which occasion an order was given "that five or six honest matrons doe see her stripped, to the end to see whether she have any bludy mark on her body, which is a common token to know all witches by." In 1577, a charge is preferred against the brewers, and they "are commanded to use no more iron-bound carts, for that it is great decay not only of the paved streate, but also causeth his beere to work uppe, in such sort that as his barrel seemeth to be full when they are brought, and when they are settled, they lack, some a gallon of beer and some more, to the enriching of the brewers, and the great defayte and hindrance of the town." And there is a singular order, "that the barbers henceforth shall not trym anie person on the Sabbath day, unless it be such gentlemen-strangers as shall on that day resort to the town."

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