

The Derby Municipal Muniments.

BY C. E. B. BOWLES, M.A.



THE writer was recently permitted to examine the interesting collection of MSS. which constitute the Records of the Corporation of Derby—or rather, all that is left of them, for some sixty years ago, the greater portion was consumed in the fire which utterly destroyed the Town Hall. The remnant, which dates back to the time of Queen Elizabeth, was conveyed to Tenant Street, when the office of the Town Clerk was removed thither from the existing Town Hall. When Mr. G. Trevelyan Lee was appointed to the office of Town Clerk, he found them tied up in parcels, but unsorted, and in no measure arranged either according to date or matter, and, worse still, utterly uncared for. In such a condition were they eighteen years ago in the Town Hall, and in such a condition they had been removed to Tenant Street. The town of Derby is, however, now to be congratulated upon the keen interest which Mr. Lee, who at once saw that this valuable collection was suffering from neglect, has taken in the matter, and upon the happy accident that at the time, Derby's Chief Magistrate, the Hon. Frederick Strutt, was an antiquary, and a Vice-President of this Society.

The Books, MSS., and Parchments, as Mr. Lee found them, were lying, just as they had been brought from the Town Hall—a bewildering chaotic heap of heterogeneous

historical matter, but, for many reasons, most valuable to the Borough of Derby. Having looked them through, and roughly sorted them, he tied them into neat parcels. Mr. Strutt then drew the writer's attention to their wretched condition—that of damp, excessive and long standing—which was fast reducing this valuable collection to a rotten mass of worm-eaten and decaying rubbish. They consist of Court Books, Court Rolls, Freeman's Rolls, Fair Books, Chamberlain's Accounts, and other like matter.

The Court Books and Rolls contain the records of all the cases which have been tried in Derby. The depositions are given in full, as well as the names of those impanelled on the grand and petty juries. These muniments would, without doubt, provide the historian with a large amount of material, both instructive and interesting.

The Court Book, containing the records in the time of Queen Elizabeth, is in such a state of decay that it is very questionable whether it could be handled without falling to pieces. Certainly, nobody but an expert should be allowed to touch it. Another, of the time of "The Lord Protector," dated 1658, has also been rendered almost unreadable from decay, although that of the preceding year "before Gilbert Ward, Mayor, and James Chadwick, Recorder," is in very fair and readable condition.

There are numerous lists of Burgesses and Apprentices, sworn in during the eighteenth century, which are most useful to genealogists and compilers of family histories. For the same reason, perhaps, the *Capias* Books of 1712 and 1727, etc., would prove valuable. These books, which are in good preservation, contain the writs, or warrants, of *Capias*. The writs, named from the Latin word "*Capias*," with which they commenced, were of various kinds, and were issued to compel attendance at court, to arrest an outlaw, or to imprison a defendant until a plaintiff's claim was satisfied, etc.

There are also huge bundles of Court Rolls, with writs included, and miscellaneous parchments which would probably

entail some months of hard work to properly collate. But, after all, this is only the common experience of those who delve into the depths of the buried past. Among the most interesting of the MSS. are the Toll, or Fair Books, which were evidently at one period carefully kept, and as carefully preserved, for they are in excellent condition and very readable. There are four of them. These books contain the record of Custom duties or tolls levied on all foreign goods—foreign, that is to the Borough—which were sold at the fairs from the year 1638, the date of the first, down, at any rate, to the year 1655, the date of the fourth.

The existence of the Derby Fairs dates as far back as, at least, 1330,* when among other privileges, the burgesses claimed and were allowed to hold two Fairs, one on the Thursday and Friday “in Whitsun-eve,” and the other to last seventeen days, beginning eight days before the Festival of St. James. By a Charter of the time of King James I., however, permission was granted for four Fairs to be held, the dates of which were to be: Friday in Easter week, the 4th of May, the Thursday before Midsummer, and the 26th of September, two days only being allowed for each fair. In the following reign seven fairs were allowed, those additional being held on the Friday after the Epiphany, the Friday in Whitsun week and that on St. James’ Day, which was revived. In 1732 two additional fairs were added, making nine in all, which was the number in 1817, when Lysons wrote his *History of the County*.

A statement by Woolley in 1712 is quoted by Glover†, in his *History of Derbyshire*, to the effect tht the tolls belonged to the Mayor, for which he paid yearly about £70. This would account for the careful way in which the Toll Books have been kept. Glover further states that in that year, 1732, “the Corporation possessed about £500 a year to support their dignity, as well as Charities arising out of lands at Little

* *Lysons*, p. 102; and this *Journal*, xxiv., pp. 83, 141, 142, 147.

† Vol. ii., p. 433.

Chester, the Rowditches, and several large Closes between Derby and Mickleover," a portion of which land had been purchased by Mr. Crowshaw about 1630, who left it to the Corporation of Derby for charitable uses. The Rent Rolls of these lands exist from the first year of James I., and are among the Municipal MSS., as well as a survey of their lands at Little Chester in 1664. These are fortunately in a good state of preservation.

According to the Charter of King James,* before alluded to, the Corporation was constituted of two Bailiffs and twenty-four Burgesses, with a Recorder, Chamberlain, and other officers. Now, in addition to the complete list of the Bailiffs and Mayors from the year 1513, which Hutton, in his *History of Derby*, gives us, a fairly consecutive list of the other officials connected with the Borough could certainly be obtained from these Records, as well as much other important and interesting matter, from the period of the Early Stuarts down to the present time, which would not only be valuable, but would make Derby's history far more complete than it is at present. The Town Council had before them not very long ago, a suggestion that an expert should be employed to sort and arrange these MSS., and obtain from them a permanent record of the doings of their predecessors.

It is very much to be desired that this suggestion may be carried out, and that such a History of the Corporation of Derby as would be worthy of our County Town may before long see the light of day.†

* Glover's *Derbyshire*, p. 379.

† There is a general movement throughout the country to preserve and permanently place on record such valuable muniments as the town of Derby evidently possesses in these perishable documents. The neighbouring Corporation of Nottingham, a few years ago, were similarly able to rescue and record theirs.—ED.