

A HISTORY OF THE NEWCASTLE SOCIETY OF  
ANTIQUARIES, 1813 TO 1913.

A people which takes no pride in the noble achievements of remote ancestors will never achieve anything worthy to be remembered with pride by remote descendants.—MACAULAY.

On Saturday, the 23rd of January, 1813, seventeen gentlemen met in the Long Room of Loftus's inn at Newcastle, on the invitation of Mr. John Bell, a bookseller in the town, for the purpose of adopting the best measures to promote an enquiry into antiquities in general but more especially into those of the North of England, and of the counties of Northumberland, Cumberland and Durham in particular. It was resolved to form a society to be denominated the Antiquarian Society of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and seven of those present were appointed to be a committee to prepare rules and regulations to be presented at the first meeting of the new-born Society to be held in the same room on the 6th of February.

A code of statutes was accordingly drawn up and presented to the first meeting, but, before proceeding to adopt them, it was resolved that the names of certain other gentlemen, twenty-nine in number, should be admitted as ordinary members previous to any rules of balloting being put.

It was resolved to petition the Mayor and Corporation for a room in the Castle of Newcastle-upon-Tyne in which the Society's meetings might be held and its property deposited. Pending the decision of the Corporation, the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society were solicited to accommodate the Society with a room in the Old Assembly Rooms, Ridley Court, Groat Market, then occupied by them.

The statutes adopted were twelve in number. By the first of them it was resolved that the Society shall consist of ordinary, corresponding and honorary members—the number of ordinary members limited to one hundred: the number of corresponding

and honorary members unlimited.' By the fifth, the annual subscription was fixed at a guinea, ordinary and corresponding members being required to pay an admission fee of two guineas. By the sixth, it was resolved to hold a meeting at six o'clock in the evening on the first Wednesday of every month. By the eighth it was resolved that 'three censors be annually chosen by the officers out of the ordinary members to whom shall be intrusted the charge of revising and printing all such papers and communications as the officers may admit into the transactions of the Society.' By the eleventh statute it was ordered that no alteration shall be made in the statutes except at the anniversary meeting in January and every alteration to be then proposed must be publicly announced and inserted in the transactions at a meeting previous to the general meeting.

On the 5th of May the Rev. John Hodgson, who had been elected to be one of the two Secretaries, read a paper on 'The Study of Antiquities,' being the first of the long series of valuable papers presented to, and printed by, the Society, as enumerated in a later chapter of this volume.

At the September meeting Sir John E. Swinburne, Bart., who had been elected the first President of the Society, presented a very elegant Seal designed by Mr. Howard of the Royal Academy and engraved by Mr. Wyon of the Royal Mint. 'The female figure is supposed to be recording the proceedings of the Society, seated on the fragment of a column opposite to an altar found near Newcastle inscribed *Lamias Tribus*. Beneath is inscribed *Scripta Manent*, and round the seal is *Sigillum Societatis Antiquariorum Pontis Aelii MDCCCXIII.*'

The Mayor and Corporation having been pleased to grant the petition of the society for the use of a room in the Castle, the first meeting of the Council was held there on the 13th of October, when it was ordered that the walls be coloured, and that a chair, a table and two forms be procured,

On the 3rd November, 1813, the monthly meeting of the Society was held in the Castle for the first time.

Notwithstanding the appropriate and picturesque setting of the place, the room, said to have been the King's Chamber, proved to be uncomfortable and unsuited to the purpose: and, on the 5th of November, 1817, the monthly meeting was held in the office of Mr. John Adamson, one of the Secretaries. Before the 7th of July, 1819, a room had been hired in Farrington's Yard in the Bigg Market, in which the Society continued to meet until 1824, when the use of a room was obtained from the Literary and Philosophical Society in the rear of their newly erected library in Westgate Street. This room was used for the first time on the occasion of the twelfth anniversary meeting held on the 5th of January, 1825.

Although housed elsewhere, the Society continued to regard with longing eyes the Castle, then in a somewhat ruinous condition, and in 1847, after much consideration, it was resolved to petition the Corporation for the use of that building. At a special meeting held on the 16th of March, in that year, the following petition was adopted, sealed and signed, and on the following day was presented to the Town Council:—

That the attention of the members of the Society has been particularly called to the alterations making at and near to the site of the old Castle, in consequence of the Railway operations, by which the building will now become isolated.

That as this Castle, from which the town derives its present name, is a monument of great antiquity and one of its principal ornaments and objects of interest, the members feel desirous of making an effort towards its restoration, and to preserve from further decay the beautiful remains of Norman masonry with which it is decorated.

That the members of the Society entertain confident hopes of being able to raise a fund sufficient for the purpose, if leave be given by the corporate body, to whom the Castle belongs, to take the requisite measures for such restoration.

That the intended restoration shall be made under the inspection of the architect of the Corporation, and that the chapel and principal doorway, or entrance, shall be first proceeded with.

On consideration of the petition and the examination of the plans prepared by Mr. John Dobson, the eminent architect, the Corporation resolved to grant the application of the Society, and at the anniversary meeting held on the 7th of February, 1848, there was carried by acclamation 'a vote of thanks to the Corporation for so readily having granted a lease of the castle and for the munificent donation of £250 towards the restoration of the building.'

The repairs advised by Mr. Dobson to be immediately necessary were carried out by Mr. Hogg as contractor, and the tenancy was inaugurated by a banquet held in the Great Hall on Thursday, 3rd August, 1848, and presided over by the Duke of Northumberland. As stated in the minute book, 'there were 85 persons dined, viz., 49 members and 36 visitors (the number which the hall would hold). The party broke up after a splendid repast shortly after 11 o'clock.' On the succeeding evening and on that of the following Friday, promenades took place under the direction of Mr. Bruce, who each evening gave a descriptive lecture to the parties attending. The first evening realized £25 13s., and the second £18 1s.

The collections and property of the Society having been transferred, the Society was able to hold its thirty-sixth anniversary meeting 'in the castle of Newcastle on Monday, the 5th day of February, 1849,' when a vote of thanks to Mr. Dobson 'for his having superintended and attended to the restorations in the castle' was carried.

In this historic and ideal abode by favour of the mayor and corporation, the Society has since rested.

The keep, being thus captured, the acquisition of the gatehouse was but a work of time. At a meeting held on the 3rd of October, 1855, the question was raised of the restoration of the Black Gate as a muniment room for the two northern counties. The structure was at that time let out in tenements to twelve fami-

lies, comprising sixty persons, producing a revenue of £60 per annum. Many years were to pass before the society's desires were realized, and it was not until 1882 that a tenancy was granted at a nominal rent. The sum of £1,600 was expended by the society in placing a new roof on the structure, and adapting it to the purposes of a museum, the work being executed under the direction of Mr. R. J. Johnson, an eminent architect of his day. The work was completed in 1884, and the museum was formally opened on the 4th of March, 1885.

The migrations of the society having thus been set out, its work must be noticed. During the first forty-two years of its existence, four quarto volumes of *Archaeologia Aeliana* sufficed to contain the papers which were thought worthy of being printed. The quarto series was abandoned in favour of the more convenient octavo, in which form, between the years 1857 and 1865, six volumes, containing many admirable papers, were issued. During the somnolent period of seventeen years which followed, the society produced only two volumes of *Archaeologia Aeliana*, besides the really important *Lapidarium*, edited by Dr. J. C. Bruce. The minute books of this time of repose are indeed meagre. But since 1882 the society has been conscious of its responsibilities as it never was before, with the result of an increased membership of keen and enthusiastic antiquaries, and an output of volumes of which any society might be proud.

Nor has the usefulness of the society ended here, for its members have bulked largely amongst the founders, members and contributors of the following:—

The Surtees Society, founded in 1834.

The Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland, founded in 1861.

The Northumberland County History Committee, formed in 1891.

The Durham and Northumberland Parish Register Society, founded in 1898.