

## SOMERTON CASTLE.<sup>1</sup>

By the RIGHT REV. THE BISHOP SUFFRAGAN OF NOTTINGHAM.

The history connected with this ancient castle was but little known until 1857, when it was elicited through a visit of the Lincoln Diocesan Architectural Society; and now I have much pleasure in laying the result before the members of the Royal Archæological Institute.

The remains of the Castle of Somerton lie two miles westward of the village of Boothby Graffoe, and eight miles south of Lincoln. It was erected by Anthony de Bek, or Bec, in 1281, two years previous to his elevation to the Bishopric of Durham, who then obtained a license from the Crown "to crenellate his dwelling house at Somerton." Rot. Pat. 9, E. 1. Subsequently he presented it to Edward I, who committed its custody to Henry Lord Beaumont. It consisted of an irregular parallelogram 330 yards long from north to south, and 180 yards from east to west, having a circular tower, rising from a plain battering set-off or footing, at each of its angles, with walls of the same height between them. It was to the height and thickness of these walls that its builder trusted for its defence in combination with water; because, owing to the flatness of its site, he had none other at his disposition, except the bravery and endurance of its garrison. Taking advantage of this he surrounded it by the existing inner moat, enclosing a considerable space, or baily, beyond what was strictly necessary on the north, and in part at least by a much wider outer moat, still remaining on the east, south, and west of the castle site. The approach to it was, no doubt, by means of one or more drawbridges, defended by a barbican or gate-house. Of the angle towers most fortunately the south-eastern one still remains quite perfect, including even the roof. This consists of a ground-floor plainly vaulted, and lit by four small slits; a first floor similarly lit, having a fire-place; and another above this, lit by larger lancet-headed lights, and also having a fire-place, the chimneys of these two rooms still remaining quite perfect. Adjoining the ground-floor room is a little one, lit by a slit, the entrance to which is without that of the principal room. On the north and west of this tower there are remains of the walls which originally stood between the towers, whence we gather that these were as high as the towers and similarly finished above. In the northern piece of wall is a curve containing doorways, now stopped up, but formerly giving access to other portions of the castle. This curved feature is arched above and covered with lead. The lower portion of the south-west tower alone remains. The room within was lit like the one in the south-eastern tower,

<sup>1</sup> Read at Somerton Castle, August 1, 1880.

and also had a little room adjoining it on its eastern side. The north-eastern tower was destroyed in 1851; and of the north-western one, the interior walling of the ground story alone remains; but this is one of the most interesting of the remaining fragments of the castle, from the careful way in which it is vaulted. This vaulting consists of twelve arched ribs, springing from a central pillar and twelve brackets. It is lighted by five little slits, and had a small room adjoining it, which has a single slit on the right hand side of its entrance.

A farm house, built in the reign of Elizabeth, now occupies a portion of the site of the once Royal Castle of Somerton. We have seen that Anthony de Bek, Bishop of Durham, built Somerton Castle. He was the brother of John, first Baron de Bek, and Thomas, Bishop of St. David's; but we must pursue his family history a little further until we arrive at another personage connected with the castle. Alice, the daughter of John de Bek by his wife Alice, the daughter of Lord Furnival, married Sir William de Willoughby; and, on the death of her brother Walter, second Baron de Bek, succeeded to all the Bek estates. Their son, Robert de Willoughby, married Margaret, the daughter of Lord D'Eyncourt, and as the heir of his great-uncle, the Bishop of Durham, became possessed of the united estates of the Bek and Willoughby families. Probably from this connexion, as well as from other causes, William ninth Baron D'Eyncourt of Blankney, was appointed the custodian of Somerton Castle in the reign of Edward III; and as such charged with the safe keeping of John, King of France, in the year 1359. Previously that unfortunate sovereign had been confined in Hertford Castle, but on the 29th of July in that year, he, accompanied by his son Philip, was removed thence by Lord D'Eyncourt, through the Royal command, assisted by four knights, viz.:—Sir John de Kirketon, Sir John D'Eyncourt, Sir William Colevill, and Sir Saier de Rochford. He arrived at Somerton on Saturday evening August 4th, where he was received by the Constable of the Castle, Sir Henry de Greystock. He had been obliged to part with forty-two of his attendants in Hertfordshire; but he brought with him nearly the same number, including two chaplains, a clerk of the chapel, a secretary, a physician, a minstrel, a *maître d'hôtel*, three pages, four valets, three wardrobe men, three furriers, six grooms, two cooks, a fruiterer, a spiceman, a barber, a washer, and a jester or fool, called "*Maistre Jean*." Some ladies also resided in Somerton Castle during the king's captivity there, viz.:—Lord D'Eyncourt's wife; Joan, Countess of Warren, granddaughter of Edward I; and Marie de St. Pol, Countess of Pembroke, who came there with her attendants in two carriages requiring eleven horses to draw them. The king provided extra tables, chairs, forms, trestles, stable fittings, and stores of firewood and turf. He also fitted up his own chamber, Prince Philip's and his jester's with hangings, curtains, cushions, coffers, sconces, &c., and provided furniture for the chapel. An order for the supply of beef, mutton, fish, wheat, barley, rye, oats, hay, and straw, was made by King Edward, and the captive was plentifully supplied with French wines brought to Boston by sea and thence to Somerton; also with sugar and spices, bought in London, Lincoln, and Boston, together with eggs to clarify sugar, and roses and cochineal, wherewith to manufacture comfits and bon-bons for the king's large silver-gilt bonbonniere. His table was supplied with silver-gilt and silver dishes and cups; one of these last

being set with emeralds, and another belonging to the jester "Maistre Jean le fol." He procured his drugs and "materia medica" from Boston, which included the following, viz.:—Rhubarb, senna, scammony, aloes, saffron, polipodium, sandal, spikenard, balsam, electuary, mastic, sugar of roses, electuary of roses, essence of violets, diaculon for plasters, and also another plaster called, "gracia dei," such appliances being no doubt often required when blows abounded far more frequently than at present; and we find that whilst "Master John" was treated to a dose of "golden cordial electuary" his valet, Michel Girart by name, required a plaster, lotion, and ointment on one occasion, perhaps as a consequence of some irritating jeu d'esprit on the part of the jester with him, or vicariously, suffered in person.

The king was well supplied with clothes when at Somerton by means of a master tailor, Tassin de Breuil, established in a shop at Lincoln, whose men had eight pence a-day for their wages. He made eight whole suits for the king whilst in Lincolnshire, besides many separate pieces of dress, and a suit presented to him by the Countess of Boulogne. We may presume that this M. Tassin was a favourite of the king's from his skill and taste, and perhaps on account of the news he brought from Lincoln, through an entry in his argentier's account shewing how he lost a "cote hardie" of frieze, or an out-doors coat worth 3s. 4d. at *backgammon* to Tassin the tailor. Even at Somerton the captive king indulged his taste for jewels, Johan de Mart, one of the jewellers he employed having sent in a bill for £323 6s. 8d. for jewels supplied to him at Somerton.

As John was the actual founder of the Bibliotheque Royal at Paris, having deposited therein twelve richly bound volumes, constituting the nucleus of that famous library, we naturally find references to books procured for him when at Somerton in his accounts, viz.:—A charge for a missal, its silver bosses and the embroidery of its cover; also for a psalter bought in Lincoln. He seems to have been fond of romances: having borrowed those of St. Graal and Sir Launcelot of Isabella, the Queen Dowager of England, when at Hertford; and, when at Somerton he bought those of Du Renart at a cost of 4s 4d., Guilon, Loherenc Garin, and Du Tournoient d'Antecrist.

For writing materials he paid from 6d. to 9d. for a quire of paper; 1s. each for envelopes; 3s 6d. for a dozen of parchments; and 1s for a pound of red wax.

He had a taste for music, as he brought an organ with him from Hertford, and sent for "Maistre Jehan l'organier" from London, to repair it. He lodged at Navenby, and eventually took this instrument to London for the king on his return there. When the priest and clerks of Navenby came and sang "Ergo Laudes" before him, he gave them 3s. 4d.; and he had in his employ a minstrel called "le roy de menestereulx," who bought two harps for the king when at Somerton, and was a maker of musical instruments and of clocks, as well as a musician. He also duly appreciated the sister art of painting, especially as applicable to ornaments and furniture. He brought with him to Somerton Maistre Girart d'Orleans, who had decorated his castle at Vaudreuil in Normandy, and pursued his vocation in Lincolnshire; so that possibly we are indebted to him for the curious portrait of King John painted on a panel, still preserved in the Louvre, of which a fac-simile copy was taken for the late Right

Hon. C. T. D'Eyncourt, of Bayons Manor, as an illustration of my own memoir of the captivity of the French king at Somerton.

That captivity lasted for six months and seventeen days, or until March 21st, 1360; when, by order of the King of England, a guard consisting of twenty men-at-arms and twenty-four mounted archers was sent under the command of William Armyne, John de Bussy, and Thomas de Meaux to conduct the French king, as secretly as possible, *via* Grantham and Stamford, to London, which he reached on the 28th of that month. Before leaving he took care to pay the amount due for his daily alms to the Priest of Boothby, and did not forget to do so at Grantham on his way to London. After his departure there was a sale of the effects he left behind, of which the following are items, viz.:—Two chairs sold for 20d. to “la Demoiselle de Nainby;” three tables and two forms sold to Thomas Spolin, Lieutenant of the Household, for 6s. 8d.; also two chairs sold to him for 12d.; two trestles and two forms sold to William of Navenby for the same sum; and a similar lot sold to William Spaign for 2s. 8d.; to which was added the king's own bench. From Thomas Spolin, an officer of the castle apparently, the king received 16s. 8d. for the fittings of the stable in consideration of an acquittance for the forms, trestles, and doors, added to the castle on his account, and for loss or injury to its furniture, for which the said Spolin had at first demanded a considerable sum. Finally, the king politely presented to “Madame D'Eyncourt” half a tun of wine, and other articles, as a souvenir of his stay at the castle.

With the departure of the Royal captive closes the interesting portion of the history of this old stronghold; and, indeed, but little more is known of it; but in the time of Elizabeth part of its materials were used in the construction of the farm-house still occupying a considerable portion of its site, and what remained has gradually passed away, except those features which I have described, serving as a memorial of a remarkable incident in our English history, which I trust may never be lost sight of.