

THE SHIRE HALL, NOTTINGHAM,
IN THE
17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES.

BY MR. H. HAMPTON COPNALL.

King Henry VI., in 1448, gave a charter to the town of Nottingham, in which it was enacted that, from a date mentioned in the charter, the town of Nottingham was to be for ever separated, distinct, divided, and in everything utterly exempt, as well by land as by water, from the county; and that the town of Nottingham so exempted was to be a county by itself, and not a parcel of the county of Nottingham. But the king excepted from this charter "our Castle of Nottingham and our Messuage called the King's Hall wherein is our Gaol for our Counties of Nottingham and Derby."

The King's Hall was the County Hall or Shire Hall, and stood on part of the site of the present Shire Hall. It is still in the county and outside the town of Nottingham, and for parochial and other purposes is part of the parish of Wilford. It was the building in which assizes and quarter sessions were held. Here also the county court was held, and here, by the suffrages of the freeholders, the knights of the shire were chosen to serve the county in parliament. Here coroners of the shire were elected, as well as the verderers for the forest of Sherwood.

The gaol was at the back, overlooking Narrow Marsh, and is believed to have been a building in the form of a tower, with cells or dungeons underneath and

a keeper's house above. Some of the cells were hewn in the rock, and are still in existence.

The date when the High Pavement site was acquired for county and judicial purposes is lost in the mist of antiquity. So far as is known there is no record of its acquisition, though probably something might be found if a search were made at the Public Record Office. Suffice it that in the middle of the 15th century, in the reign of Henry VI., there was a King's Hall, or Shire Hall, on the site of the present Shire Hall, of such importance that it was specially excepted from the charter constituting the town of Nottingham a separate county. It may be assumed that there had been a hall on the same site for years, perhaps for centuries, before that.

The county records in reference to the Shire Hall begin in the reign of James I. At that time there appear to have been on the present site—

- (1) The building known as the Shire Hall or King's Hall ; and
- (2) Two houses adjoining it, on the west, belonging to Mr. John Boun, one of which he gave to the county, and the other he sold to Sir Thomas Hutchinson.

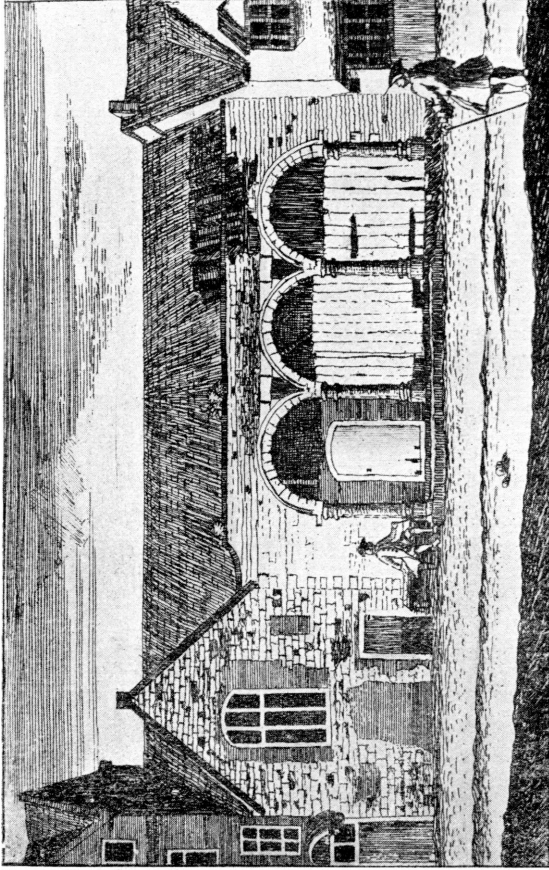
Mr. John Boun was the father of Mr. Gilbert Boun, a sergeant-at-law. Mr. Gilbert Boun was a county magistrate, Recorder of Newark, and the father-in-law of the famous Doctor Thoroton ; in fact it was Mr. Gilbert Boun who commenced the history that was afterwards completed and published by his son-in-law, Doctor Thoroton. The Bouns are referred to by Cox as being "not only men of eminency, but great benefactors to the Town."

Sir Thomas Hutchinson was a county magistrate,

the father of Colonel Hutchinson of Nottingham Castle and Civil War fame.

The gift of a house to the county by Mr. John Boun is recorded by Thoroton, who informs us that some years before the Civil War, Mr. John Boun gave the house between the common hall of the County or King's Hall and Sir Thomas Hutchinson's house to be used by the country people for the more convenient trials of *Nisi Prius*. It may be assumed that before this there had been only one hall for both crown and civil purposes. Mr. John Boun's gift enabled the erection of a second hall, a *Nisi Prius* court for civil trials. Deering gives the date of the gift as 1618. This is probably right. A document, dated 1622, has recently been found among the County Records, signed by a number of county magistrates (including Lord Haughton, who was afterwards created first Earl of Clare), referring to the fact "that the new Hall lately built is very inconvenient for the Freeholders in respect of the straitnes thereof," and it goes on to say that "Mr. Boun, who afforded the place whereupon it is built, had so far endeavoured with the Town of Nottingham that it may be enlarged twelve foot into the street upon pillars which, as his paynes hath contrived the matter, will be performed for the sum of £100, or thereabouts." This sum was afterwards collected in the county. Thoroton states that the new hall "was made with arches to the street."

Deering tells us that Sir Thomas Hutchinson's house continued in the family of the Hutchinsons till Mr. Julius Hutchinson sold it to the county justices at the persuasion of Sir Thomas Parkyns, Bart., of Bunney, who had a scheme for pulling it down to enlarge the County Hall. The house was called the "County House," and for some years was let at a rental by the county justices.



A PROSPECT OF YE COUNTY HALL AS IT APPEARED
IN THE YEAR 1750.

Referring to the purchase of it, Sir Thomas Parkyns, in a printed document published by him in 1724 (more particularly referred to later on), says "he is ready to be a lunatic and Felo de Se when he considers that he had buried part of his Talent £4,000 under his Park Wall, while some as South Sea Merchants have amassed prodigious Estates, but he is pleased in his thoughts as being well assured that his County cannot say he was extravagant 17 years ago or bought a bad bargain for them in his purchase which cost £300 and now [in 1724] is worth £500." This fixes the date of purchase about the year 1707.

Appended hereto is a copy of an old print which shows the Shire Hall that existed before the present building was erected, and the arches mentioned by Thoroton. The house called the "County House" would probably be that partly shown on the right hand side.

The alterations and additions to the old King's Hall in 1618 evidently caused a confusion in regard to county boundary. Sir Thomas Parkyns, Bart., writing in 1724, states—

"At this very day the Judge on the Nisi Prius side for the County of Nottingham sits in the County and all the Counsel and Jury sit in the Town and County of the Town of Nottingham. In truth the Judges had need be as upright and good men as they all are; for as oft as any one of them stands up in that Court and leans over his cushion to direct the Jury, his head is out of the County of Nottingham and within that of the Town."

The question of rebuilding the County Hall was apparently the subject of discussion for years after the purchase of the County House.

Sir Thomas Parkyns tells us that he was entrusted

with projecting and contriving the design and plan for the new hall, and he attributes it to the opposition of the "Gentlemen of the North Clay Hundred" that the plan was not proceeded with.

Matters were brought to a crisis in 1724 by an incident, of which the following account appears in the *Nottingham Courant* :—

"On Friday last [March 17th, 1724] Sir Littleton Powis, Judge of the Assize, came in here, being met as usual by the High Sheriff, attended by a good number of gentlemen on horseback, though a very rainy day.

"On Saturday was Commission day for the County of the Town but there was no business worth mentioning.

"On Monday morning after his Lordship had gone into the County Hall, and a great crowd of people being there, a tracing or two that supported the floor broke and fell in and several people fell in with it into the cellar underneath, some of whom were a little bruised; but one Fillingham was pretty much hurt, and skin and flesh of one leg being stript up from the bone and thought to be in danger. This occasioned a great consternation in Court some apprehending the whole Hall might fall, others crying out fire &c, which made several people get out of the windows.

"The Judge being also terribly frightened, cried out 'A plot,' 'A plot,' but the consternation being soon over, the Court proceeded to business: however his Lordship told the Grand Jury and gentlemen he would lay a fine of £2,000 on the County for not providing a better Hall, not doubting but if they built a new one, or got the old one well repaired, but on their Petition His Majesty would remit the fine. At the request of the hon. foreman of the Grand Jury, we are told, the fine was suspended."

The county magistrates met in quarter sessions at Nottingham on the 13th April, 1724, and decided to hold a public meeting on the 24th April, 1724, at the house of Mr. William Parkinson at Rufford Inne, "that place

being thought the most proper place in the middle of the County.”

The Mayor and Burgesses, in the 17th and early in the 18th century, owned some property in the High Pavement, *viz.* :—tenements on both sides of the house now known as the Judges’ Lodgings on the north side of the street, and opposite (on the south side of the street) premises known as the Castle Inn, adjoining the County House.¹

It is evident the Mayor and Burgesses desired to increase their estate in the High Pavement, and to acquire the property granted to the county by Mr. John Boun and Mr. Julius Hutchinson.

In the fifth volume of the *Borough Records*, we are told that on October the 10th, 1698, the following resolution was carried by the Mayor and Burgesses of Nottingham :—

“Ordered that Francis Salmon, Alderman, Thomas Collin, Alderman, Master Joseph Briggs, Master Francis Armstrong and Master John Reynolds doe View and measure a parcell of ground near the Market-wall in order to retorne answer to several gentlemen about their proposals of Building a County Hall and that they with Master Mayor do treat with them about the same.”

In the sixth volume of the *Borough Records*, we are told that on the 22nd April, 1724, the Nottingham Corporation deputed the Mayor, Alderman Pennell, and Mr. Morris to attend the meeting at Rufford to treat with the county justices and gentlemen about building a hall

(1) The Castle Inn premises were subsequently pulled down, and the site of same became the large garden or piece of ground called the Vista, with a summer house thereon, which in 1771 passed into the possession of the Fellows family, who held it until 1833, when it was sold to the county justices. It is now the site of the County Police Station in the High Pavement.

as well for the use of the town as for the county of Nottingham, and they were invested with discretionary power to agree with the county justices and gentlemen on reasonable terms.

The Mayor (Mr. Thomas Trigg) and Mr. Alderman Pennell attended the meeting at Rufford, two days later, on the 24th April, 1724, and asked the county justices to build the new County Hall in the Market Place, at Nottingham, with the front of the new building facing Chapel Bar.

Between the back of the new County Hall and the Shambles there was to be "a large alley or vacancy" (in other words, a street), "for the conveniency of people passing and repassing between the new Hall and the Shambles."

The town was willing to give to the county as much ground to build the hall upon as the county justices would require.

The conditions upon which the Market Place site was to be given were :—

- (1) That the town should have the free use of the new County Hall for assizes, sessions courts, and other public assemblies when the business of the county did not interfere and employ the hall.
- (2) That the old *Nisi Prius* Hall in the High Pavement (*i.e.*, the site given by Mr. John Boun) and the County House (purchased from the Hutchinsons) should be conveyed to the town; the town paying therefor either £1,000 down or £300 more than the best bidder, whichever alternative the county may select. The county gaol and entrance to it were to remain the property of the county.

The town authorities were also willing to pay half the cost of all manner of repairs that "should ever hereafter be necessary or thought requisite by the County

for repairing, altering, or amending the Hall in the Market Place;" and they were also willing to pay half the cost of sweeping and cleaning.

The county justices, in order that the fine may be taken off the county, made an order that the County Hall, *Nisi Prius* Courts, &c., be new built, the old hall in the High Pavement, in their opinion, not being capable of being repaired.

They also considered whether the ground on which the old hall then stood would be a proper place for building such new hall upon, or whether a more proper and advantageous place might not be proposed. Thereupon they agreed to the proposal of the Mayor of Nottingham.

The order was signed by the following county justices:—

“ Sir Fr. Molyneux, Bt.
 Sir H. Wastenys, Bt.
 Sir Thomas Hewett.
 Hon. Richd. Sutton.
 J. Plumptre.
 Julius Hutchinson.
 L. Pinckney.
 J. Acklom.
 Langford Collin.
 Thos. Stowe.
 J. Mellish.
 John Sherwin.”

This meeting at Rufford was attended by Sir Thomas Parkyns, Bart., but it will be noticed that he is not one of the signatories to the order.

Sir Thomas Parkyns was a real old English worthy. It was said of him that he was equally at home in the wrestling ring or on the magistrates' bench, that he

could throw an antagonist, combat a paradox, quote the classics, and lay down the law with any in England.

Evidently at this Rufford meeting he was a keen opponent of the Nottingham proposal to remove the County Hall from the High Pavement to the Market Place. He tells us that "the proceedings were rapid. Some readily signed the resolved Order before us, whilst others at length were prevailed upon to follow their example," and he goes on to say:—"I appeared to be the only single Ten that refused to set my hand to that plough lest my reasons should have obliged me to look back to the thwarting of the proverb."

His reasons are set forth in a printed document published by him. There are two copies of this document in Nottingham that can be seen, one in the Belper Library at the Shire Hall, and the other in the Bromley House Library. It is a quaint and humorous document.

It is described by the author as—

"Queries and Reasons offer'd by Sir Thomas Parkyns of Bunny, Bart. Why the County Hall, Gaol &c. should be built in the County of Nottingham and on the new purchas'd ground for that very purpose, and not in the Market Place of the Town and County of the Town of Nottingham and out of the County at large. And why he could not join with his Brethren the Justices of the Peace in signing the Order of Sessions at Rufford, April 24th, 1724."

It is dedicated:—

"To the most Noble Evelyn Duke of Kingston.
Thomas Duke of Newcastle, Lord Lieutenant and
Custos Rot. for the County of Middlesex,
Westminster and Nottingham &c.
William Duke of Devonshire, Lord Lieu: Derby.
John Duke of Rutland, Lord Lieu: Leicester.

The Right Hon :

Philip Earl of Chesterfield.

Thomas Earl of Strafford.

William Lord Byron.

Thomas Lord Middleton.

Scroope Lord Visc : Howe } our present members
 Sir Robert Sutton } of Parlt.

and to all Justices of the Peace and other gentlemen of the County of Nottingham the Freeholders and Terre Tenants of the same."

Sir Thomas states " that he hath ever studyd the general good of the County of Nottingham. Next to it he hath had the benefit and welfare of the Town and County of the Town of Nottingham much at heart," and he suggests that his reasons may be "thought natural and free, not proceeding from any sinister motive, or induc'd thro' self interest, but meerly flowing from an earnest desire to do the best service he can, as well for the County, as for the Town and Corporation of Nottingham, as having therein neither Lands nor Houses, but ever strenuous of serving, and never slipping any opportunity of shewing and expressing his willingness and readiness to oblige them to the best of his Power."

He objected to the erection of the County Hall in the "spacious and well adorn'd Market Place," and he considered it would "streighten spoil and lessen the fine and unparalleled Market Place."

To do this he considered would be to the corporation's great prejudice. He refers to the "gentlemen's, Gentlemen Traders' Houses and Publick Inns," and says that there is "scarce sufficient room now for entertaining the great concourse of people to that Market," and for "accommodating such as deal with the merchants and other Shopkeepers all the rest of the week through the Navigable and Beneficial River of Trent."

He asks whether a great influx of the County to the Town "on Market Days especially at an Assize time when the greatest part of the gentlemen in the County and freeholders are called together on the Grand and other Juries not to say one word of the innumerable Evidences" (witnesses) "on some Tryals," would not call for a "large addition of publick houses in and near the Market and Double Hall."

He gives arguments in favour of the High Pavement site, and, incidentally, of the undesirability of the Market Place site.

He considered "the Judges would much rather chuse to lie in the open free and wholesome airy part of the Town as now" (*i.e.*, on the High Pavement), where they have, on the one hand, the prospect of "The Duke of Kingstons Holme Pierepoint with those ancient gardens yet much in fashion, and Mr. Musters House at Colwick and useful modern gardens;" and on the other hand "The Duke of Newcastles well furnished Castle with Lord Middletons Woollaton Hall;" and, in a direct and straight line in their view, "the pleasant flowery and fragrant meadows and the situation of fine Clifton with those elegant gardens."

He refers to the nearness to the High Pavement of St. Mary's large church, "fit to receive a congregation at an Assize Sermon. When the Sermon is no sooner over but the Judges step out of the Church into our Courts of Judicature."

Another reason given was the difficulty of conducting and carrying prisoners from the gaol to the hall at so great a distance without running great hazards of many escapes and rescues by their friends and accomplices, and he points out the advantage of the hall and gaol being near together.

Apparently the proposed hall in the Market Place

was to be built on pillars, with space for the Market underneath, for Sir Thomas says there would be “twenty steps to labour up to the top of the Columns.” At the High Pavement hall there would be not more than half a dozen steps to ascend.

He strongly condemned the proposal to have the county and town occupying the same building, or, as he puts it, having two halls in one building. He contended there would be difference between the town and county about the repairs, and that the town “would expect the county to do the whole though they use it twenty times for our once. And upon a difference, since what has been may be again, may not some of the Gentlemen of the County be fin’d upon an Indictment for Riot?”

He called attention to a difference then existing between the town and county in regard to the Trent Bridges. “The Corporation had lately set up a toll-house there” (on Trent Bridge), “and unreasonably exacted a Toll on County people—though they themselves cannot get into their own Town without going over our Leen Bridge of 32 arches repaired by the several Hundreds of the County.” He hoped the king and parliament would give the county leave to erect a toll-house and demand a pontage for the repairs of the Leen Bridge.

He complained that the corporation had undermined “our Hall and Gaol in the Narrow Marsh by cellars for their own use.”

Finally, he resolved ne’er to go into the hall in the Market Place, that he may avoid all occasions of difference. He desired to live in amity with the townspeople of Nottingham as their most faithful humble servant.

The opposition of Sir Thomas Parkyns was ultimately successful.

On the 20th October, 1724 (six months later), another meeting was held at Rufford Inn, at which Sir Thomas Parkyns was present.

A representation was made that Mr. Julius Hutchinson had since the sessions on 24th April, 1724, "viewed the Old Hall and the house adjoining thereto belonging to the County and taken a survey of the same and he this day declared to the Court upon ye said view:—That he found the foundation walls and roofs belonging to ye said Hall firm and strong and that ye said Hall with ye said House and gardens are capable of being repaired and made useful and convenient with Grand Jury Rooms, Petty Jury Rooms &c. for Courts of Judicature and other ye County's business."

This representation was confirmed by Mr. Edward Becher, J.P., and "by the report of a skilful workman."

The court thereupon decided that the new hall should be on the old site, and an order was made to apply to parliament for an Act to carry out the work and raise the necessary money.

This was carried *nemine contradicente*, but nothing further was done.

Instead of rebuilding the hall, the county justices disputed the judge's power to impose the fine. Ultimately they were successful in this; but they spent half as much money in their appeal to the Privy Council as the new hall would have cost.

The question of rebuilding was revived in 1767, when the justices at East Retford proceeded to examine the old records of the county relating to the repairing of the County Hall.

On the 27th October, 1768, twelve months afterwards, the gentlemen and freeholders of the county met at the Swan Inn at Mansfield, and resolved that it was necessary a new County Hall should be built, and they

signed a petition to the next session of parliament for obtaining an Act of Parliament for that purpose. The Act of Parliament was obtained in the year 1769. It provided for the raising of a sum of £2,500.

Henry Sherbrook and William Coape Sherbrook, Esquires, were appointed to wait on the Corporation of Nottingham for their consent to the holding the assizes and the general quarter sessions for the county within the Town Hall during the time of rebuilding the said new intended County Hall. This consent was given.

On the 23rd April, 1770, the county quarter sessions were held at the Guildhall, Nottingham, and the justices continued to meet there until the 13th January, 1772, when they again met at the Shire Hall.

On the 13th July, 1770, it is recorded that Lord Chief Justice Wilmott, the judge on circuit, pursuant to the Act of Parliament, had desired the high sheriff (Urban Hall, Esquire) to procure leave for the erecting of a temporary court within St. Mary's Church, for holding the assizes, and leave for this purpose was ordered to be obtained from the diocese and from the vicar and churchwardens.

Whether the assizes were so held in the church is not recorded in the county records. But in the *Nottingham Date Book*, page 83, the following entry appears :—" 1770 July. The Assize trials for the County were heard in the Guildhall and the Exchange Room. Prisoners were tried in the former and the Cause list was disposed of in the latter." Probably, therefore, it was not found necessary to use the church.

The rebuilding of the Shire Hall began immediately after the Lent Assizes in 1770, and the present building came into existence. The inscription upon it is as follows :—

“ This County Hall
was erected in the year MDCCLXX
and in the tenth year of the Reign
of His Majesty George the III

J. Gandon Archit.

The Builder was Mr. Joseph Pickford of Derby.”

Sir Thomas Parkyns died in 1741, and, consequently, did not live to see the county justices firmly established in their new quarters on his favourite site.

Were he living now he would be gratified to find the Shire Hall still in the High Pavement, and the fine, unparalleled, and well adorned Market Place still unbuilt upon.

He might not approve of the present Shire Hall from an architectural point of view, and he would probably print further reasons why it should be pulled down and again rebuilt—of course, upon the same site—near St. Mary's Church, though now far away from the gaol. He would miss the lovely view from the windows over the pleasant flowery and fragrant meadows. He would probably be amazed to find that the city, as well as the county assizes, were held in the same courts at the same time, without any friction or “Riotting” between city and county people as the result thereof.

It is interesting to realise that the Shire Hall has occupied the same site for so many centuries. Fronting to one of the main streets in the town of Nottingham, along which in former days king and commoner necessarily must have passed when visiting Nottingham, it has been a conspicuous, though not, perhaps, a picturesque object. It has been the centre of the county from time immemorial, and the place of assembly, in Nottingham, of county people at sessions, assizes, and at elections.

Judges, whose names are familiar to lawyers and

historians, have sat and administered justice there, and, until quite recent times, culprits were executed in front of the present entrance.

Its old associations, if nothing else, must appeal to us, who, like Mr. Hardcastle, admire everything that is old, and the historical incidents here mentioned will be of interest to many members of this society.

NOTTINGHAM CHURCH BELLS.

BY MR. J. BRAMLEY.

With the exception of certain bells in St. Mary's Church, the majority of the bells in the three old churches in Nottingham can scarcely be termed old. As Nottingham was noted as a bell-founding centre for many centuries, this is a disappointing fact. The usual reasons assigned for the absence of old bells are (1) wear and tear, (2) accidents to the fabric which caused injury to the bells, (3) remodelling to adapt for change ringing, (4) removal at the time of the Reformation.

The bells in St. Mary's Church date from 1595 to 1856; those in St. Peter's were all recast in 1771, and two of them again recast later; while the present St. Nicholas' Church bell was recast in 1899. These bells I will deal with in detail later on.

The scope of my paper will not allow me to dwell on the bell-founding industry in Nottingham. It is dealt with fully in the Victoria History. Suffice it to say that bell-founding was carried on from late in the 14th century through Wm. de Norwyco, who was probably identical with Wm. Brasyer de Nottingham. There was litigation in Nottingham about bells in 1433, and four years later we find William Bellyetter in business in this line in the town. Later on we come to the Mellers