

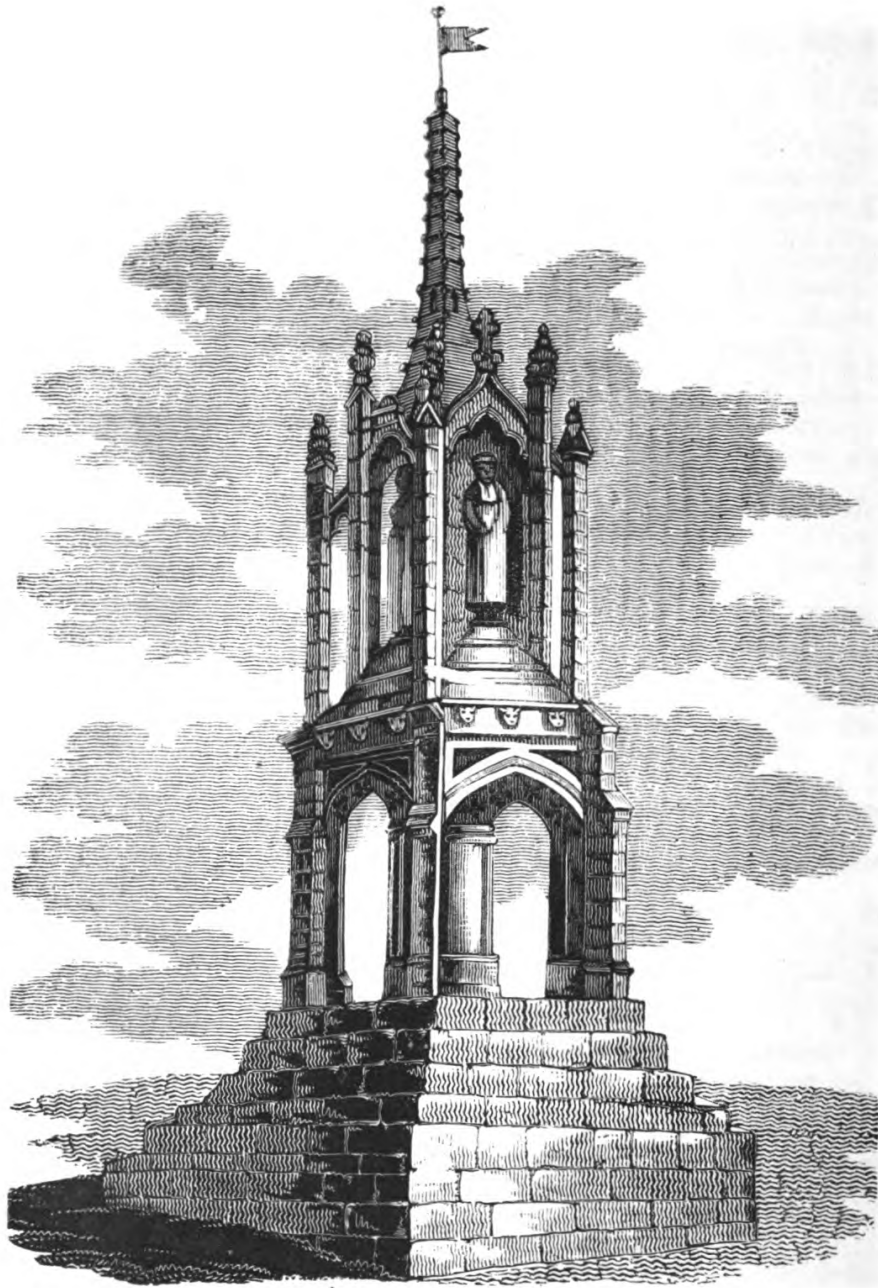
THE MARKET CROSS AT LEIGHTON BUZZARD.

BY DR. LAWFORD.

[In the report of the Annual Excursion of last year (1873), the word "Eleanor" before "Cross at Leighton Buzzard," page 212, line 28, ought to have been omitted. The Cross is a Market Cross. There were originally twelve Eleanor Crosses erected by Edward I., in memory of his beloved Queen Eleanor. At the early age of fifteen, Prince Edward was espoused to Eleanor of Castile, then only ten years of age. She remained in France till her twentieth year, when she came over to England and joined the Prince, and accompanied him in all his expeditions and wars. She died at Herdeby, County Notts., Nov. 18th, 1290; her body was moved for burial to Westminster Abbey, and took fourteen days in transit, from the 4th to the 17th of December. The widowed monarch accompanied the funeral procession on its route, which was circuitous, in order to include certain religious houses; and to show his affection for his Queen, he erected a memorial cross at Herdeby, and at every place where the corpse rested, viz., Lincoln, Grantham, Stamford, Geddington, Northampton, Stony Stratford, Dunstable, St. Albans, Waltham, West Cheap and Charing. Of these crosses, three only remain—one at Geddington, another at Northampton, and the third at Waltham.—ED.]

Among the fine old market crosses which the lapse of time has spared, is the Market Cross* at Leighton Buzzard, in Bedfordshire, supposed to have been erected in the reign of Edward III. In consequence of its having become very much dilapidated, a wish was expressed by the inhabitants for its restoration. By the liberality of Colonel Hanmer, of Stockgrove House, who purchased the manor, which had been held many years by the family of Lord Leigh, aided by some influential gentle men of the

* The accompanying illustration is from a wood-block kindly lent by Dr. Lawford.



LEIGHTON BUZZARD CROSS, BEFORE ITS RESTORATION IN 1852.

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town and neighbourhood, the restoration was commenced in November, 1852, and was completed in the following May, under the direction of Mr. Cox, architect, of Leighton, who faithfully carried out the design of the restoration. The figures of the old Cross, which were in a very dilapidated condition, have been placed round the Market House, and those on the present structure have been beautifully executed by Mr. Cox, who was the sculptor of the Martyrs' Memorial at Oxford.*

The Cross consists of two stories, the lower covered with a stone groining, which, in its turn, forms the base of the second story. The tracery of this lower portion is remarkably good. It rests upon five buttresses, and a centre shaft, with small shafts and caps at the angles internally; the cornice is charged with gurgoiles and grotesque heads, and is surmounted by a pierced parapet embattled.

The second story contains five statues, arranged in the following order:—Facing the chief street of the town, is the Virgin with the child; on her right, a bishop, possibly the bishop of the diocese for the time being; on her left, a venerable crowned and bearded figure, conjectured to be King Edward III.; on the right of the bishop, St. John the Baptist, with the Agnus Dei and a book; on the left of the King, the figure of Christ, having risen from the tomb.

The five outer buttresses are also affixed to the jambs by tracery work, forming flying buttresses at the angles. The centre of the cross is a large crocketed pinnacle surmounted, until recently, by a wrought-iron vane, over which stood a cross and crown; whether this formed part of the original structure is uncertain. Under the foundation-stone, which was laid by Colonel Hanmer, was deposited the following inscription:—

LEIGHTON BUZZARD.

This ancient Gothic cross is said to have been erected A.D. 1350. Temp. Edward III.

A.D. 1620, it was repaired by a rate of fourpence levied upon each inhabitant, and it has since received several imperfect restorations.

At the present date, 1852, its very dilapidated state being much deplored, the Lord of the Manor, aided by some of the wealthier inhabitants of the town, raised the following liberal subscriptions:—

* I am indebted for some of these particulars to Mr. H. Foster, who kindly sent me a newspaper of the time.

	£	s	d.
Col. Hanmer, K. H., Lord of the Manor	140	0	0
Mrs. Grant.....	52	10	0
Mr. Bassett	52	10	0
Mr. F. Bassett	26	5	0
Mr. Joseph Procter	26	5	0
Mr. C. Ridgway	26	5	0
Mr. E. Lawford	26	5	0
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	£350	0	0

And it was restored to its former beauty and original state. An additional £75 was subscribed for a new iron palisade by Col. Hanmer and J. D. Bassett, Esq.

The following extract is from a Lecture on the "Early History of Leighton Buzzard and its neighbourhood," by the Rev. Joseph Stevenson, the learned author of the Pre-reformation Period, who was in 1850 Vicar of Leighton. Speaking of the marriages which took place in front of the Market Cross, he says:—

"There are traces of a singular state of affairs which prevailed here once upon a time; and the register proclaims what strange sights our town must have witnessed two centuries ago. When the Commonwealth Parliament had succeeded in dethroning their rightful sovereign, and had put down the Church of England by a vote of the House, they set about framing a new code of laws in Church and State, better adapted to that novel condition of affairs which it was their pleasure to introduce into this kingdom. The Prayer-book having been superseded, then came the question, how were people to be married? They made a blunder, in my opinion, when they proposed that people might be married by a justice of the peace in a private house; and I apprehend that the greater proportion of the women of England thought so likewise. The banns of marriage might be proclaimed at any public place, at the Market Cross if you liked, and at the Market Cross they were proclaimed. The register contains the records of many of these marriages, which took place during the period of the Commonwealth, from 1650 to 1660. I will read you one or two of them, for they tell their own tale better than I can pretend to tell it for them. "Thomas Doggett,* the son of Ralph Doggett, of Laighton Beaudesert, was married to Elizabeth Edwards, of Biggleswade, the daughter Thomas Edwards, of Langford, county Bedford, by Samuel Bedford, Esq., their contract having been published in Leighton on three market daies, February 21st and 28th, and March 7th, 1653." I may mention, in passing, that these dates clearly establish the fact that the market was held in Leighton at that time on the Saturday, not on the Tuesday, as now.

"William Cooper, the son of John Cooper, of Alesbury, was married to Faith Gibbons, servant in this town, the daughter of Samuel Gibbons, of Little Gadsden, county Hartford, by Capt. Smith.

"The chief performers of marriages at this time were this same Capt. Smith and Francis Astrey, Esq."

About the year 1830, on the introduction of street

* Members of this family still reside in the town.

lamps into the town, it occurred to the authorities that it would be advisable to utilize the cross ; and, accordingly, five lamps were placed on the five buttresses. These escaped the shafts of criticism until the "Bedfordshire Architectural and Archæological Society" favoured us with a visit. On that occasion a member requested to be informed by some inhabitant of the town if the structure in the centre of the High Street was "an ornamental lamp-post." This just rebuke had its desired effect, and we are indebted to the visit of the Society for the removal of the lamps. It merely remains to be stated that the "Market Cross" is regarded with considerable interest by the town and neighbourhood ; its graceful outline is to be seen on China plates manufactured for the town, and the "Bedfordshire Architectural Society" depicts its image on their lozenge-shaped shield ; but it attracts not many pilgrims, probably because its beauties are unknown.

It is to be regretted that this beautiful structure has been surrounded by modern iron palisades, which, however useful they may be in warding off the attacks of the street Arabs, are, nevertheless, to be deprecated on the score of taste.
