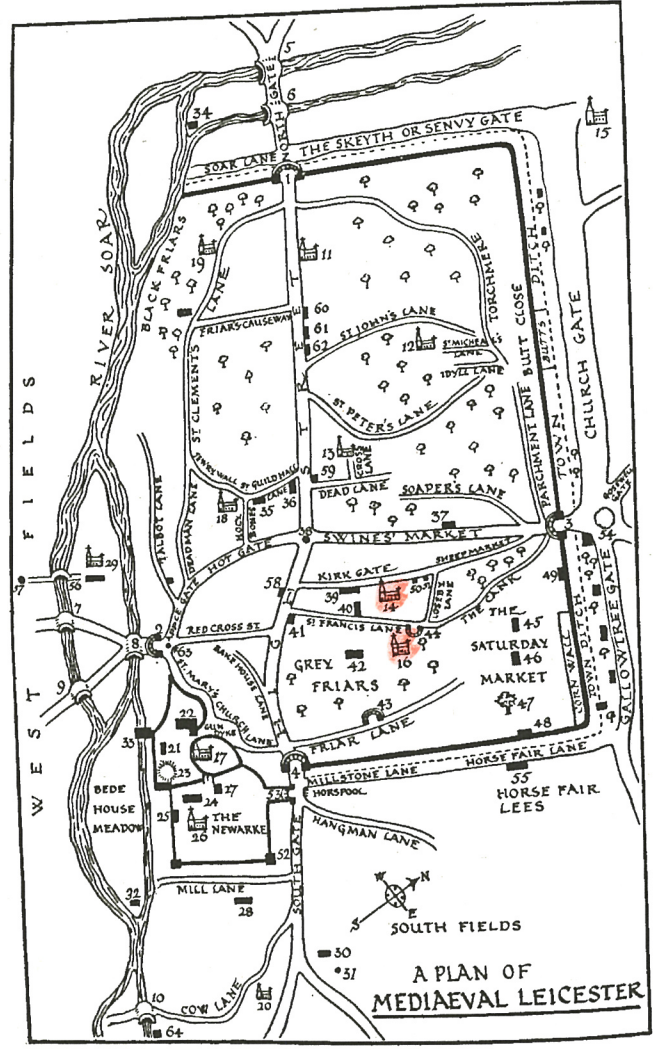


\* Bilson (1920) \*

# MEDIAEVAL LEICESTER.

## I. THE STREETS.

THE little mediæval town of Leicester comprised about 130 acres. It was guarded on three sides by walls, which occupied, at least approximately, the site of the ancient Roman walls, or earthen ramparts. On the West lay the river Soar, and on that side no trace of any town wall has yet been found, although there was a gateway and a gate house, like the others, which stood in front of the West Bridge. The four gates of the town, over which, as early as 1322, hung the arms of the Sovereign, stood nearly at the North-West, North-East, South-East, and South-West points of the compass. The main road entered the town at the South Gate, and passed out at the North Gate, and the only other streets of importance were those which intersected the main road at the High Cross and ran to the East and West Gates. Other ways were mere lanes. The Borough Records sometimes describe the four chief streets leading to the four Gates as the four high streets, "quatuor altas stratas Leycestriae," but the High Street, *par excellence*, was that part of the King's highway which ran from the South Gate to the North. Of the two intersecting streets, that which led to the West Gate was called in part Hot-Gate, and in part Apple-Gate, and that which led to the East was known from an early date as the Swinesmarket. There were two suburbs beyond the walls, the North Suburb and the East. Outside the West Gate the Priory of the Austin Friars lay between the two arms of the river, and beyond it stretched the West Fields. The common lands of the town, known as the South Fields, or South Crofts, lay without the South Gate.



Silverun, a silverer or silversmith. The name is not so common as Goldsmith, but John Silver was one of the Town Chamberlains in 1500, and in the 13th century several Silveruns are mentioned, who, as might be expected, inter-married with the Aurifabers, or Goldsmiths.

In the 15th century there was a street leading out of, or close to, the Sheepmarket, which was known as Gentil Lane.

SAINT FRANCIS LANE was described in the Coroner's Pleas for the year 1300 as "the lane which leads to St. Martin's Church and towards the Church of the Friars Minors." A house conveyed in 1368, which had once belonged to the well-known Leicester merchant, Henry Costeyn, was said to be in the High Street, "at the corner of the lane leading to the Church of the Friars Minors," and the property extended from the High Street to the garden of the Friars Minors. This lane must be the "St. Francis Lane" referred to by Mr. Carte, the 18th century antiquarian Vicar of St. Martin's, as lying between Wigston Hospital and the Grey Friars. It was afterwards called Peacock Lane, taking its name probably from the piece of land known as the "Peacock," which lay "at the Red Cross," west of the old High Street. There was a Peacock Inn in Southgate Street, from which it might have taken its name, but it seems more likely that both Inn and Lane were christened after the old Peacock ground.

THE CANK, or CANK STREET, which still bears its old name, was named after the public well, the Cank well, which lay there. An apple-orchard (pomerium), which was situated in the "Cank," is mentioned in 1352. On the division of the Wards in 1484, the ninth Ward was to begin "in the Cank at Thomas Phelips on both sides the Saturday Market unto the East Gate." At the division into ten Wards in 1557, the eighth Ward comprised "all the market-place, Cank-well, and to the East Gate." A yearly payment was given in 1563 to St. Martin's Church "out of an house at the Cankwell." The site of the old well is still marked on the roadway at the junction of Cank Street and Hotel Street. The name might possibly be derived from

the old word "canch," which is used in Yorkshire and Norfolk to denote "a sloping trench, a water channel, cut on a road." In Leicestershire this word is generally used in the form "kench," e.g., to "kench" potatoes is to make a pit for them to lie in, to camp them. But there seems to be no evidence of an artificial conduit in the Cank. The conduit in the market-place was not put up till 1612.

LOSEBY LANE, the short street still so called, is said to date from the 13th century, and to derive its name from John de Loseby. It is perhaps more likely that it was named after Henry of Loseby, a Leicester burgess, who held a considerable quantity of land in the Parish of St. Martin and elsewhere in the Eastern quarter of Leicester about 1300. Loseby Lane bounded one of the 1484 Wards. In the days of Throsby and Nichols it was called the "Pig-market."

FRIAR LANE, as it is still called, ran east out of the old High Street, by the south side of the gate and walls of the Grey Friars' precincts into the Saturday Market. It was so named in 1392, when a messuage was described as being "at the corner opposite the gate of the Friars Preachers," and bounded on the north side by "a lane called Frere Lane." In 1484 it seems to have been known as the Grey Friars' Lane.

?? same?

### III. THE SOUTH QUARTER.

The South quarter of the mediæval town was bounded on the North by the Hot Gate and Apple Gate leading to the West Gate and Bridge; and on the West by the river. On the East lay the old High Street, and on the South, until the middle of the 14th century, the South wall of the town, and after that time the Newarke.

There were few roads and few houses in this quarter, which comprised chiefly the Castle and its precincts, with St. Mary's Church, beyond which lay the 14th century Newarke, the whole enclosed by strong walls. Here too were butchers' shambles and bakers' ovens.

to him "one parcel of ground or croft, with the appurtenances, called St. Michael's church-yard, together with one lane at the west end thereof, lying and being together in the parish of St. Peter in the town of Leicester." St. Michael's churchyard was then in the parish of St. Peter, for it was not until 1591, the year of this deed, that St. Peter's parish was united with that of All Saints.

It is stated by Nichols that part of the land comprised in "this conveyance was sold about the beginning of the 18th century" to the parishioners of All Saints, "in addition to their church-yard." The site was identified by Throsby, whose friend Mr. Copley owned a house which had been built upon part of the old churchyard, and Copley had among his titled deeds the conveyance to Dethick. The church is believed to have stood near the present Vauxhall Street and Causeway Lane. The position assigned to it, near the Castle, in the Plan of Leicester that is published in the first volume of the Borough Records, is manifestly erroneous.

#### (4) THE CHURCH OF THE GREY FRIARS.

St. Francis of Assisi died in 1226. A year or two before his death, Friars of his Order, or Friars Minor, who were called sometimes, from the colour of their garments, the Grey Friars, came into England. Their Priory at Leicester is said to have been founded by Simon de Montfort, the second of that name, who was Earl of Leicester from about 1238 to 1265. The Priory church seems to have been built about 1255, for in that year Henry III granted 18 oak-trees in the King's Hay of Alrewas to the Friars Minors of Leicester "to make stalls and wainscote their chapel."\* They had certainly become established, and their church had been completed some time before 1292, when one of the boundaries of a messuage in St. Martin's parish was described as "the lane which leads to the church of the Friars Minors." The priory and church stood south of St. Martin's

\*Alrewas is in Staffordshire, and there is still an "Alrewas Hay Farm" near it. After a great quantity of timber had been blown down by the violent gale which swept over England in 1222, King Henry III. addressed letters of instruction to the officials of the Royal Forests. His Staffordshire forests were then described as "Kenifer," (Kinver), "Canoc," (Cannock Chase), "Alrewas and Hopwas." See J. C. Cox, "The Royal Forests of England," (London, 1905.) p. 6.

churchyard, and the large gardens and grounds belonging to the Order extended from the upper end of the Market Place nearly as far as the old High Street. One of the Gateways opened on Friar Lane, and there was another entrance from what is now called Peacock Lane. The church was destroyed soon after the dissolution of the monastery, and some of its old stones and timber were used for the repair of St. Martin's church.

Nichols has collected a few particulars of this Priory; but the most exciting event in its history happened in 1402, when two of the brethren were hanged at Leicester, for saying that Richard the Second was still alive, and the Prior himself was drawn and quartered in his religious habit at Tyburn for a similar offence.

After the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485, and the death of Richard III., his body was brought to Leicester, and interred in the church of the Grey Friars. Ten years afterwards, "a fair tomb of mingled-coloured marble adorned with his statue" was erected over his remains by his successor, Henry the Seventh. Leland states that "a knight called Mutton, some time Mayor of Leicester," was buried there, but no Mayor of this name is known. The tomb which Leland noticed was in all probability that of Sir William Moton, of Peckleton, Knight, who, according to Burton, was buried at the church of the Grey Friars in Leicester in the year 1362.

#### (5) THE CHURCH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY OF THE NEWARKE.

The collegiate church founded by Henry, Duke of Lancaster, in honour of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin, was an enlargement of his father's original foundation, which had provided a Hospital within the Newarke. In the year 1353 he obtained a bull for carrying out his design, and in the following year royal letters patent were issued, granting him license to build a monastery in honour of the Annunciation of Our Lady out of his father's hospital, and to ordain a college of dean and canons secular. The Statutes for the regulation of the new foundation were

## II. THE KING'S FATE.

On the evening of the day on which the Battle of Bosworth Field had been lost and won, both the protagonists of the drama arrived at Leicester; Henry riding in triumph with Richard's crown upon his head, and the body of the fallen King ignominiously thrown naked across a horse, with the feet hanging down on one side and the head and arms on the other. "The dead corps of King Richard was as shamefully caryed to the Towne of Leycestre," wrote Holinshed, "as he gorgeously the day before with pompe and pryde departed out of the same Towne." It seems certain that the conqueror allowed the corpse to be exposed publicly for two days, in order, probably, to advertise and demonstrate the fact of Richard's death. This exhibition was generally supposed by the historians of Leicester, Throsby, Nichols and Thompson, to have taken place at the old Guild Hall in Blue Boar Lane, but this has been disproved by Kelly, on the strength of a document from the Harleian MSS, published in Hutton's "Bosworth Field," which points to the Collegiate Church of Our Lady of the Newarke as the place of exhibition. "They brought King Richard thither that night as naked as ever he was born, and in the Newarke was he laid that many a man might see." Kelly might also have quoted the popular ballads which were composed after this event, and which may be considered respectable authorities on a point of this kind. In one of these ballads it is said that, after Richard had been "dungen to death with many derfe strokes," he was cast on a "capull," or horse (caballus, cheval), and carried to Leicester, "and naked into Newarke." Or, as the author of the ballad of "Bosworth Field" puts it:—

"Then they rode to Lester that night  
With our noble Prince King Henerye;  
They brought King Richard thither with might,  
As naked as he borne might be,  
And in Newarke Laid was hee,  
That many a one might look on him.  
Thus fortunes raignes most marvelouslye  
Both with Emperour and with King."

After this public exhibition, the body was buried, without any funeral solemnities, in the Church of the Grey Friars. The

account of this miserable episode written by a former rector of Church Langton in Leicestershire, who was a contemporary, is worth quoting. "Interea Ricardi corpus, cuncto nudatum vestitu, ac dorso equi impositum, capite et brachiis et cruribus utrimque pendentibus, Leicestriam ad coenobium Franciscanorum monachorum deportant, spectaculum mehercule miserabile, sed hominis vita dignum, ibique sine ullo funeris honore biduo post terra humatur." 1005.

Strange stories grew up out of this singular illustration of the irony of fate. One was told about the Princess Elizabeth, daughter of Edward IV, who afterwards became the wife of Henry VII. She is said by a balladist to have been in Leicester at the time of the battle of Bosworth Field, and there to have welcomed the arrival of the dead body of her enemy with derisive taunts.

"Thé carryed him naked into Leicester,  
And buckled his haire under his chin.  
Bessye mett him with a merry cheere;  
These were the words she sayd to him.  
How likest thou slaying of my brethren twaine?  
She spake these words to him alowde."

Another tale, not quite so impossible, is told about a son of Richard III, known as Richard Plantagenet, then sixteen years of age. On August 21st, 1485, it is said, this boy was instructed by his father to meet him in London after the battle, and the King promised that he would then and there publicly acknowledge him as his son. When the battle was over, therefore, young Richard set out for London. But before he had gone far, his progress was arrested by a tragic spectacle. "Just as I came into Leicester," he said, "I saw a dead body brought to town upon a horse. And upon looking steadfastly upon it, I found it to be my father."\*

It was not until after the lapse of ten years that Richard's successor thought well to erect any memorial over his remains. He then caused a tomb to be built "of many-coloured marble," adorned with a statue of the dead King. This tombstone,

\* On the truth of this story, which has been doubted, see the *Gentleman's Magazine*, July and August, 1767.

which Hutton, who had never seen it, called "a scrubby alabaster monument," cost £10 1s. od. A Latin epitaph, intended to be inscribed on the tomb, stating that it was put up at King Henry's expense, was never actually placed there. It will be found in Nichols' History, with an English translation.

Two contradictory stories are told about the fate of this tomb. According to one tradition, it was broken open by the crowd, when the church was destroyed after the dissolution of the monastery, and the bones of the dead King, after being carried through the town with jeers and insults, were thrown over the Bow Bridge. A spot near the western end of the Bridge was pointed out as their resting-place, and a watering-trough for horses, which stood at the White Horse Inn in Gallowtree-gate, was asserted to have been the coffin which once held Richard's remains. This old trough seems to have been an ancient stone coffin, and certainly not of a kind used in King Richard's time. It was long notorious. John Evelyn, in his Diary, records (9th August, 1654) that he visited the "old and ragged city of Leicester, famous for the tomb of the tyrant Richard III, which is now converted into a cistern, at which (I think) cattle drink." Hutton said that it had disappeared when he went to Leicester in 1758 in order to inspect it. But Crutwell wrote in 1806: "there is a little part of it still preserved at the White Horse Inn, in which one may observe some appearance of the fitting for retaining the head and shoulders." The trough is said to have been broken up in the time of George I, and used for steps to a cellar.

The supposed connection of Bow Bridge with the Plantagenet King owing to the prophecy of the "wise woman," and the subsequent fate attributed to his marauded bones, caused that structure to become known in later times as "King Richard's Bridge"; and, when the bridge was rebuilt in the year 1863, a tablet was placed over it bearing the legend, "Near this spot lie the remains of Richard III, the last of the Plantagenets."

The other story relating to the King's tomb occurs in the Memoirs of the Wren family, and is contained in some notes

written by Christopher Wren, Dean of Windsor (father of Sir Christopher), who was born in the year 1589. "The wicked and tyrannical Prince, King Richard III," he wrote, "being slain at Bosworth, his body was begged by the Nuns of Leicester (*sic*), and buried in their Chapel there; at the dissolution whereof the place of his burial happened to fall into the bounds of a citizen's garden, which being after purchased by Mr. Robert Herrick (sometime Mayor of Leicester) was by him covered with a handsome stone pillar, three foot high, with this inscription, 'Here lies the body of Richard III, some time King of England.' This he showed me (Chr. Wren) walking in his garden, Anno 1612." The future Dean was at that time 23 years of age, and tutor to the eldest son of Sir William Herrick, of Beaumanor.

The site of the Grey Friars, where Richard was buried, had been sold to Robert Herrick by Sir Robert Catlyn. Samuel Herrick, Robert's great grandson, sold it in 1711 to Thomas Noble, whose devisee, Roger Ruding, of Westcotes, after allotting a piece of ground throughout for a common street now called New Street, sold it to different purchasers. The mansion-house with its gardens, lying on the eastward side of the Grey Friars Estate, was conveyed in 1752 to Richard Garle, whose heirs, after his death in 1776, sold it to Thomas Pares. Thomas Pares enlarged the house, which was considered "the principal private residence in Leicester"; but in 1824, the year of his own death, he seems to have sold all the property, excepting the site of Pares' Banking House, to Beaumont Burnaby. Beaumont Burnaby, who died there, devised "the messuage or mansion house formerly called 'The Grey Friars' to his wife Mary Burnaby. It appears then to have been divided into two separate houses, one of which was occupied by Mrs. Burnaby, who died there on February 7th, 1866, having by her will devised the property to Trustees upon Trust for sale. The Trustees of her Will afterwards conveyed it for the sum of £6,400 to Messrs. Alfred Burgess, George Toller, George Baines, Richard Angrave and Charles R. Crossley. These gentlemen had taken the conveyance as Trustees for the Leicester Corporation, and

church of the Abbey, and most of the monastic buildings, were dismantled; the three great religious Houses of the town were levelled with the ground; the churches were stripped of their ornaments and images, and all other "monuments of superstition," and the lovely Collegiate church of the Newarke was utterly destroyed. Before the end of the century, the Berehill Cross, and most of the other Town Crosses, were pulled down, the ancient Hospital of St. John was converted into a Wool-Hall, and the property of all the religious Guilds and Colleges was taken away from them, and passed, in many cases, into the hands of speculators.

The effects of the 16th century cataclysm may be summarised thus:—

Two old churches had then already fallen into disuse; St. Michael's had disappeared, and St. Peter's was fast becoming a ruin. Five other parish churches in the town, those of St. Nicholas, St. Margaret, All Saints, St. Mary and St. Martin, survived the storm, stripped almost bare and impoverished, but structurally intact, and they still exist. The little church of St. Leonard survived for about a hundred years more.

The church of the Abbey, the church of the Grey Friars, the church of St. Clement, the church of the Austin Friars and the Newarke church were all dismantled or destroyed. The chapel of St. Sepulchre, or St. James, and the chapel of St. John in Belgravegate were left to decay, and fell into ruins. The little chapel on the West Bridge was converted into a dwelling-house. The Hospital of St. John, after the failure of the Wool-Hall, was replaced by new almshouses, and the adjoining church of the Hospital made room for a Town Prison. The fate of Wigston's Hospital has been related already. The Hall and Chantry Houses of the Guild of Corpus Christi were bought by the Town, and are still in existence.

Some parts of the ancient walls of the Abbey may yet be seen, and particularly the brick wall in Abbey Lane, built by Bishop John Penny, at the beginning of the 16th century, which still bears his initials, wrought in ornamental brickwork, and one lonely niche, long bereft of its tutelary image. And it is

probable that Penny's alabaster tomb, now in the chancel of St. Margaret's Church, was moved thither from the Lady Chapel of the Abbey, though on this point antiquarians differ.

The only existing relic of the Friars' houses may be a small portion of the boundary wall of the Grey Friars' monastery, to which Mr. Henry Hartopp has called attention. This is a red brick wall which stands in Peacock Lane, opposite the site of the chapel of Wigston's Hospital. It is of the same date as Bishop Penny's wall, or possibly rather earlier, and it must, therefore, it would seem, have formed part of the northern boundary of the Grey Friars' property. It is possible that some fragments of the southern wall may also survive, for it is only seventy years since Mr. Stockdale Hardy called attention to some "slight and dispersed portions of the boundary walls," and stated that "the chambers of a few houses in what is still called Friars' Lane now rest upon some of them." Fragments of St. Mary's College seem to survive about Bakehouse Lane.

Little of the ancient Newarke is now left. Throsby said that the foundations and ruins of the College were finally demolished about the year 1690. The following buildings are existing at the present day:—

(1) The massive 14th century entrance Gate of the College, now known as the Magazine Gateway, remains practically unaltered within, although the exterior has been recased. Until 1904 all the traffic to and from the Newarke passed under this archway, but in that year it was diverted to a new road on the north side of the Gate.

(2) The Turret Gateway, before referred to. A drawing of this Gateway was made by John Flower before its partial destruction in 1832, an engraving of which will be found in the Literary Remains of John Stockdale Hardy. Mr. Hardy, who died in 1849, occupied a neighbouring house, and he is said to have sustained "the structure of this ancient gateway at his own expense," thus preserving to Leicester "one of the few existing memorials of its former state."

(3) The Trinity Hospital. The original house was first restored about 1776. In recent years it has been almost entirely