

YARMOUTH TOLHOUSE HALL.

The Tolhouse dates from early in the 13th century, and is approached by an open external staircase, leading from the street to the first floor, where is situate the chief apartment or hall. This was used for all purposes of state, and for the administration of justice. Underneath is the ancient "hold," or common prison, into which all prisoners were formerly thrust indiscriminately, and chained to a beam in the centre. It is poorly lighted and badly ventilated.

The name Tolhouse is, of course, the same as Toll-booth. The Saxon word is "thol," and means the liberty of buying and selling or keeping a market, which was conferred on the borough of Great Yarmouth by King John, and the town house was thereupon known as the Tolhouse. This was the old Borough Gaol for many a century, and much strange company has been lodged in it, drunkards and thieves, robbers and murderers, English and Flemings, Royalists and Roundheads, all were chained to the same beam.

The Tolhouse was also the Palace of Justice and the Council Chamber, but this having been superseded by the new Town Hall, the old building, though henceforth employed for other purposes, will happily be preserved.

Several gentlemen having exerted themselves to effect its restoration, arrangements were made for a formal opening of the Tolhouse Hall.

The time fixed for this ceremony was 4.30 p.m., but the proceedings were delayed half an hour, till the arrival of the members of the Suffolk Institute, after their long day's excursion.

The Mayor (E. W. Worlledge, Esq., son of the late County Court Judge, John Worlledge, see "Public Men of Ipswich, pub. 1875, p. 237), wearing his chain of office, presided, accompanied by the members of the corporation.

The vicar, Rev. G. Venables, s.c.l., having been called upon by the Mayor to address the company, did so in these words:—We are assembled within the walls of a building, in which, through many centuries, the affairs of the borough have been considered and discussed with the keenest and deepest interest. Since the reign of King John, 1199, who gave its first Charter to the borough—or certainly very soon after that date—down to 1883 (the 46th year of the reign of her most gracious Majesty Queen Victoria), this Tolhouse has been used for Municipal purposes and for a Court of Justice. It was used also as an Admiralty Court for some centuries, an Admiralty jurisdiction having been conferred upon the borough. King Henry III. (1216) in the 45th year of his reign (1261) granted the Charter by which a *Gaol* was provided beneath this building. . . And another Charter of his, eleven years later, first calls the borough "Great" Yarmouth. These Charters would be, without doubt, promulged within this room. Half a thousand years ago King Richard II. visited this town with great interest, and under conditions which render it almost certain that he sat in this hall. The like may

be said of King Charles II. in 1671. It has been felt by some inhabitants of this ancient town that the destruction of a building so abounding as this building is with the history of almost all that concerned the well-being of the place, was a thing to be avoided if possible. Our difficulties in restoration are very great, but wholly of a pecuniary nature. Every step taken in the way of careful restoration has revealed fresh objects of antiquity and of interest, some of which have compelled an immediate outlay, while others await the careful treatment which they require, but which cannot be secured until our financial condition has been greatly repaired and strengthened. As we have the honour to-day of the presence of two learned Archæological Societies, I hope I may obtain from them especial attention to the early English doorways, and particularly to the doorway within the hall. One would like to know, if possible, the date of the doorway. It will probably be concluded (and of course one wishes for truth, and not for fancy or for fiction) that the date will be about 1240, and that the corbels may have been intended to represent King Henry III. and his wife, Queen Eleanor (of Florence, married 1236). Very probably this is so. I greatly prefer to regard them as of a rather earlier date, and as representing King John, the donor of the first Charter, and his wife, Queen Isabella (married 1200). Let me remind you that Saint Hugh, of Lincoln, began his cathedral in 1185, and that the early English style of which that part of the minster is so lovely a specimen, sprung into its perfection at that period. King John began his reign 1199, and it seems to me by no means impossible that this building and these doorways were erected in his day, and in connection with his gift of the Charter. Much can be said, I know, in favour of a later date, and all we ought to desire is to ascertain the truth on this or any other subject. I have now to ask you, Mr. Mayor, to declare this building open to public inspection, so far as is consistent with further renovation, and with such regulations as prudence may dictate. My own opinion, expressed before we became possessed of the Tolhouse, is unchanged, that the proper use to make of this hall would be to fill it as a museum, as a repository of things interesting and ancient connected in any way with the history of this borough; and I have little doubt that it may be speedily filled with a really valuable collection. And if, by and by, rooms can be added, as I believe they can be quite easily, and a good library provided, we shall thus secure a place abounding in interest to the thousands of strangers who visit Yarmouth (and whom it is our interest to attract hither), and shall also furnish the dwellers here with an important means of self-improvement. I trust that our proceedings to-day will prove to be the beginning of nothing less than this.

The Mayor then addressed the assembly. He said:—It gives me much pleasure to attend here to-day in order to take part, in my official capacity, in the ceremony for which we are now assembled. This ancient hall, as Canon Venables reminds us, is of great interest, not only from its architectural features, but also from its historical associations; and it

appears to me strictly appropriate and in harmony with its past history that this old chair should once more be occupied by the Mayor of the borough, whose predecessors in days gone by were here accustomed to administer justice and direct the municipal business of the town. In the presence of so many learned antiquarians it would be superfluous, and indeed presumptuous, for me to make any remarks upon the architecture or the history of the building, but I do desire, on behalf of the corporation and the town, to congratulate the Trustees upon the work of restoration already accomplished. I am sure that everyone who knew the place in its former condition, and who sees it to-day, will agree with me that the work of preservation and restoration has been carried out in a most careful and satisfactory manner, under the able supervision of Mr. Olley, our local architect, and of Mr. F. Danby Palmer, the indefatigable secretary to the Trustees, whose interesting history of the building is well known to us all, and whose share in the work is certainly entitled to grateful recognition upon this occasion. I venture to express the hope that the ceremony of to-day may once more call the attention of the public to the Trustees' efforts, may arouse increased interest, and evoke fresh support from some who have perhaps hitherto looked coldly on their endeavours, to preserve this venerable relic, especially when they discover that the Trustees are not merely animated by a reverence for antiquity, but also by a desire to benefit their fellow townsmen, by fulfilling the conditions under which the hall was entrusted to them by the corporation three years ago, namely, that it might be maintained *for purposes useful to the general public*. Two suggestions which have been very generally made, that this hall should be used as a small museum for local curiosities, and as the ante-chamber and reading-room for a free library to be erected in the rear of the building, seem desirable and appropriate objects; and I sincerely hope that some practical steps in this, or a similar direction, may be made without delay. I may just mention that I have on the table before me, for your inspection, the original Charter of King John, granted to the town in the year 1208, which I had the honour of showing to H.R.H. the Prince of Wales a few weeks ago. It only remains for me to comply with the request of the Trustees, and formerly to declare the Tolhouse Hall to be now "open;" open not merely for show, but also (before very long I hope) for practical use.

Rev. C. H. E. White then addressed the assembly, and expressed the pleasure the members of the Suffolk Institute had experienced in having been present on that interesting occasion. Dr. Raven proposed a vote of thanks to the Mayor, which was seconded by Dr. Bensley, who spoke on behalf of the Norfolk and Norwich Archæological Society.

Members were subsequently entertained by Dr. and Mrs. Raven, at the Grammar School.
