

Although Bishop Alexander may have preferred a shell keep at Banbury because it was cheaper (and quicker) to build than a tower keep, his ideas were grand enough for us to be quite sure that he planned a building that would be fit for the entertainment, not only of Bishops of Lincoln, but also of the King himself. The Bishop, obviously, was a frequent visitor; of the best-known holders of the bishopric, the saintly Bishop Hugh lodged in the Castle in 1191, as did the learned Robert Grosseteste in 1240. Nor were royal visitors infrequent, as Banbury was included in the annual itinerary of the medieval kings, who passed through on their way from Chipping Campden to Northampton. Henry II visited the Castle no less than six times between 1218 and 1266, which is sufficient recommendation for the accommodation and entertainment provided, as indeed is the fact that Edward I, on his second visit in 1217, stayed for a week. Edward III was at the Castle in 1328, 1329, and 1348, Richard II in 1397, Henry VI in 1438 and 1457, and Edward IV in 1470 and 1474. A Royal Council was held at the Castle on 5<sup>th</sup> February 1501. The last monarch to visit the Castle was Charles I, a fleeting visit in 1645, long enough to dine at the Castle before continuing on his way to Oxford.

The statutes of the Council of Lambeth of 1261 required that every bishop should provide himself with one or two prisons in his diocese. Banbury Castle was the Bishop of Lincoln's prison, and Leland in his 'Itinerary' mentions "a terrible Prison for Convict Men" in the outer bailey of the Castle. It is safe to assume that conditions in this prison were pretty grim and uncomfortable, for it was generally considered that it cost only a farthing a day to keep a clerk in prison, which suggests the lowest of low diets when one remembers that the recognised rate for the support of the Friars Minor was fourpence a day! In 1510, when nineteen convicted clerks were imprisoned in the Castle – ten of them for the whole year – the cost of their maintenance was also a farthing a day. Only once a year – on Maundy Thursday – was the prison cleaned, by two men who were paid 4d. apiece. Fresh straw for the upper part of the prison and the dungeon cost 17d., and during the cleaning process the prisoners were allowed out in the town, under guard, to beg for alms in wallets specially provided by the bailiff at a cost of 12d. each. After this spell of fresher air they returned to the care of five warders, and the attention of Thomas Langley, who received 13s.4d. in the year for "serving ... and cleansing nature of said convicts." But the Castle prison was not escape-proof, however "terrible" it may have appeared. Some