The Epitaph of King Richard III

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Richard III has no surviving tomb. How, then, could he have an epitaph? Of course, Richard had a tomb once; a tomb provided for him (as the epitaph itself indicates) by Henry VII, and on which the text of his epitaph may originally have been inscribed. But a medieval royal epitaph was not necessarily inscribed upon a tomb. While some did form a permanent part of the tomb structure (like the epitaph for Henry VII which is considered below), others were placed ‘on a table [tablet] hangyng upon his tombe’ (Edward III), or ‘to be hanged over the place of his sepulture’ (Edward I). Some were simply ‘written on parchment and hung near the monument’.

Hitherto, Richard’s epitah has been neglected. Writers have cast doubts on its authenticity. Some argue that it was ‘never affixed to the tomb’, which may be true, but does not mean that the text has no significance. Others suggest that it was a seventeenth-century invention, on the basis of stylistic considerations founded not on the original Latin text but on the only previously available English translation. It has been generally assumed that no early manuscript copy of the epitaph survives, and that the earliest extant text is that of Buck (1619). Apparently no previous researcher has sought earlier sources. Yet two previously unpublished sources exist.

Although Richard III’s epitaph was not a document contemporary with his life, that does not mean that it is devoid of interest. Epitaphs are, by their very nature, rarely written by, or during the lifetimes of, the people they commemorate. Richard’s epitaph, dating, apparently, from about ten years after his death, is potentially informative. Our consideration of this inscription will be under three main headings: evidence relating to the date of the epitaph; the text of the epitaph, and the significance of that text.

Evidence Relating to the Date of the Epitaph

The text of Richard’s epitaph displays overt connections with the monument which Henry VII erected for Richard III at the Franciscan Priory Church in Leicester in or about 1495. It refers specifically to the 1490s, and to the belated honours paid by Henry to Richard’s corpse. Undoubtedly, whoever penned the epitaph was aware of the commemorative arrangements made by Henry VII. The epitaph cannot, therefore, have been written earlier than 1494. At the same time, the text displays close similarities, in terms of style, with another epitaph which was almost certainly commissioned by Henry VII (see below). Richard’s epitaph may well be contemporary with his tomb, comprising an integral part of Henry VII’s commission. Evidence of two kinds exists for the date of the epitaph: textual evidence and manuscript evidence.

3 L. Pickering, ‘Regal honours wait a king’s remains’, www.richardiii.com/, p. 2. Pickering quotes only the English translation of the epitaph, and then states that ‘it is not a prose style (sic) that was in vogue when Henry VII occupied the throne’. Buck’s (?) seventeenth-century English translation is certainly of its period, but that is irrelevant to the date of the epitaph.
4 Henry VII’s Leicester tomb post-dated Richard’s death by about ten years. The epitaph was unquestionably written within fifty years of Richard’s death (see below).
5 I am very grateful to all those who have commented on earlier drafts of this paper, or helped me in any other way: David Baldwin, Dr Lesley Boatwright, Annette Carson, Diana Courtney, P.L. Dickinson (Richmond Herald), Howard Doble (Senior Archivist at the London Metropolitan Archives), Dr Herbert Eiden, Ingrid O’Mahoney, David Perry, Dr Anne Sutton, Geoffrey Wheeler, Robert Yorke (Archivist at the College of Arms), and the staff of the British Library and of the Guildhall Library.
6 The account for the work seems to have been settled in 1495; R. Edwards, ‘King Richard’s tomb at Leicester’, The Ricardian, vol. 3 (September 1975), pp. 8-9. This does not exclude the possibility that the work itself was either planned or carried out a little earlier, perhaps in 1494, which is the year mentioned in the epitaph.
a. Textual Evidence

Richard’s epitaph can only have been written between 1494 (see above) and 1619 (when it was quoted by Buck). The epitaph ends with a request for prayers for Richard’s soul: clear evidence of a Catholic belief which was anathema to the Protestant reformers. With the exception of the brief reign of Mary I (1553-58), there is no period after the late 1530s when such a request for prayers for the soul of the deceased is likely to have been produced by an English writer, unless he happened to be a Catholic recusant. Thus the epitaph is most likely to have been written either between circa 1495 and circa 1540, or between 1553 and 1558.

The epitaph comprises sixteen lines of unrhymed Latin elegiac couplets. There are authentic extant examples of the use of such verse forms in English funerary inscriptions dating from the fifteenth century. Thomas, Lord Berkeley (died 1417) and his wife, Margaret de Lisle had a verse inscription on their tomb beginning with the following Latin elegiac couplet:

Nos quos certus amor primis coniunxit ab annis
Iunxit idem tumulus, iunxit idemque polus.

Inscriptions similar in structure and in length to the epitaph of Richard III are to be found among the recorded memorials of medieval English royalty. They include:

1. The epitaph of Edward, Prince of Wales (‘the Black Prince’) at Canterbury Cathedral. This is composed of twenty-eight rhyming lines of verse with four feet to a line (tetrameters), written in French.
2. The Latin lament for Edward IV.
3. The epitaph of Queen Katherine (widow of Henry V, mother of Henry VI and grandmother of Henry VII). Katherine’s epitaph comprises eighteen lines of Latin verse. This is very close in length to that of Richard, and like Richard’s epitaph it is composed in elegiac couplets. Moreover, it employs the device of directly addressing the queen’s father (… Carole sexte, tui) in the same way that Richard’s epitaph directly addresses Henry VII (Rex Henrice tibi septime succubui). Both epitaphs are couched in narrative form, and both epitaphs serve a dual purpose (combining commemoration of the deceased with praise of Henry VII). Both epitaphs refer to the kingdom as ‘Britanna’. It is clear that Queen Katherine’s epitaph was inscribed during the reign of Henry VII (and presumably on his orders) since it mentions him. It is therefore likely to be close in date to the epitaph for Richard III (which also probably dates from Henry VII’s reign, and may have been commissioned by him).
4. One of the epitaphs from the tomb of Henry VII himself, written in Latin hexameters.

These examples show that nothing in the form and structure of Richard III’s epitaph is inconsistent with its ostensible composition date of circa 1495.

b. Manuscript Evidence

Two independent sixteenth-century published sources exist for Richard’s epitaph: Buck and Sandford. The text was first published at the end of George Buck’s History of the Life and Reigne of Richard the Third. This history is extant in two versions: a posthumous edition published in London in 1647, and reprinted in facsimile with an introduction by A.R. Myers at Wakefield in 1973, (hereinafter ‘Buck 1647’) and an earlier and more accurate text which dates from 1619, but which was not published until the twentieth century, in the edition by Kincaid, (‘Buck 1619’). The epitaph was printed again, in a somewhat different version, by Francis Sandford in his Genealogical History of the Kings of England (London 1677).

7 Although the Buck family had the patronage of the Catholic Howards, and although George Buck had a younger brother, Robert, who was a Jesuit priest and living abroad, neither George Buck himself, nor the Buck family as a whole, were Catholics. A.R. Myers, introduction to Buck 1647 (see n. 14), pp. v, viii; G. Anstruther, The Seminary Priests, Ware and Durham 1968(?), p. 57.
8 ‘Dactylic hexameters and pentameters forming elegiac couplets’. I am most grateful to Dr. Lesley Boatwright for this and for her other comments on the verse structure of the epitaph.
11 Sutton, Visser-Fuchs, Griffiths, Royal Funerals, pp. 90-92.
was Lancaster Herald, and he derived his text of the epitaph from a manuscript at the College of Arms, which survives. He was aware of Buck’s publication, and noted that it differed in some respects from his own text. Clearly, therefore, Sandford was not simply quoting Buck: he had an independent source for the epitaph. Sandford’s text may be closer to the original than Buck’s.

At least two manuscript copies of the epitaph are extant. The earlier of these, British Library Additional MS 45131, f. 10v (figure 1), is from the collection of Sir Thomas Wriothesley (died 1534), and is probably in his handwriting. Thomas Wriothesley was one of the sons of John Wrythe, a herald during the reigns of Edward IV, Richard III and Henry VII. Wriothesley was a pursuivant in the private service of Arthur Tudor, Prince of Wales (1489), and he was later (1503) Garter King of Arms. At the time of Thomas Wriothesley heralds kept their own libraries and BL Add. MS 45131 is a compilation comprising some of Wriothesley’s personal reference material.

The inclusion of a copy of Richard’s epitaph in this collection securely dates its composition before 1534. Indeed, its context within the collection suggests a date prior to 1531, and it could well be earlier. Wriothesley’s copy of the epitaph was written before the Dissolution of the Monasteries, at a time when Richard III’s tomb in Leicester was still extant and undamaged. By this period heralds’ visitations had begun, and while no record of a visit by Thomas Wriothesley to Leicester survives, such a visit, either by Thomas himself or by one of his colleagues, is possible. Thus BL Add. MS 45131, f. 10v may be a copy taken directly from an inscription on or by Richard III’s tomb. The fact that the writer changed his mind about some of the readings suggests that he might have been working directly from such an inscription.

Sandford’s immediate manuscript source for his published text was the second of the extant manuscript copies of the epitaph: College of Arms MS I 3, f. 4 (figure 2). This copy is in the handwriting of Thomas Hawley, who became a herald in 1509 and died in 1557. The compilation in which it figures appears to consist of copies of material in Thomas Wriothesley’s manuscript (above), made by Hawley for his own use. College of Arms MS I 3, f. 4 is therefore a little later than BL Add. MS 45131, f. 10v, but still predates 1557. The Hawley text is basically identical to that of Wriothesley, but some of the problem readings of the earlier manuscript have been ironed out. In his published version of this text (1677) Sandford later made further minor amendments, possibly influenced by the text published by Buck (1647).

Buck’s text appears to belong to a separate line of transmission, distinct from the Wriothesley – Hawley – Sandford tradition. Buck reported his source for the epitaph as a text at the Guildhall, stating that in or shortly before 1619 a book which contained the relevant folio was ‘chained to a table in a chamber in the Guildhall of London’. Buck’s Guildhall source cannot have been identical with Sandford’s source at the College of Arms. Apart from any other consideration, differences in the two texts rule this out. The Guildhall copy of the epitaph has not been traced, and is probably not extant.

The Text of the Epitaph

a. Latin Text

While the greater part of the Latin text of the epitaph is agreed by all the extant sources, there are subtle variations. These make it difficult to establish a completely authoritative version. Sandford’s text may well

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17 ‘My opinion is that this is indeed the handwriting of Sir Thomas Wriothesley, or if not his own is the same as a contemporary hand to be found in manuscripts compiled by or associated with him’. Personal communication from Mr Robert Yorke, Archivist at the College of Arms, December 2006. I am grateful to Mr Yorke for his opinion on this point.

18 Thomas changed the family surname.


20 In the same gathering as the epitaph there is a text referring to an anniversary mass for Louise of Savoy, Regent of France, celebrated at Waltham Abbey in 1531.

21 For Wriothesley’s manuscript text (which differs a little from Sandford’s wording) see appendix 1a.

22 I am grateful to Richmond Herald (Mr P.L. Dickinson) for this information, and to Mr Robert Yorke, Archivist of the College of Arms, for his extensive help during my examination of this manuscript. Hawley’s text is reproduced in appendix 1b.

23 College of Arms MS I 3, ff. 3-36 reproduces, generally in identical order, entries contained in BL Add. MS 45131 ff. 6-69, though the order of the entries relating to Louise of Savoy and Viscount Welles is reversed, additional material relating to Charles VIII of France is interpolated, and the entry relating to William Courtenay, earl of Devon (which comes much later in BL Add. MS 45131) is brought forward. The discrepancy in the number of folios is due to the fact that BL Add. MS 45131 contains a number of blank folios.

24 Kincaid / Buck, p. 217.

25 Sandford, Genealogical History, p. 410.
be more accurate than Buck’s. Both Sandford’s text and the manuscript texts from which it derives produce readings which imply some criticism of Richard; an element which is absent from Buck’s version. This may not be an accident. Buck may have deliberately modified the epitaph in Richard’s favour. Since his source has not been found, it is impossible to judge how accurately he reproduced it.

However, since Buck’s text is more accessible in print, and is better known than Sandford’s, the following (with one modification where the text of Buck 1647 appears to give a grammatically more accurate reading)26 is the epitaph as published in Buck 1619. This will provide a starting point from which to work backwards to the earliest extant texts of the epitaph (which present certain problems of their own). The punctuation supplied here is modern, as there is no reason to suppose that Buck’s published punctuation reproduces that of the original text.27 Variant readings from Buck 1647, and from Sandford are given in the footnotes, while full transcriptions of the two surviving manuscript texts are given in appendix 1. The italicised introduction and ending printed below are derived from Buck alone. They are absent both from Sandford’s text and from the extant manuscript sources. Hence they formed no part of the original epitaph. Buck may have derived them from his lost source.28

Epitaphium Regis Ricardi tertii, Sepultii apud Leicestriam, iussu et sumptibus Sancti Regis Henrici Septimi

Hic ego quem vario tellus sub marmore claudit
Tertius a iusta voce Ricardus eram.
Tutor eram patriae, patrius pro iure nepotis
Dirupta, tenui regna Britanna fide.
Sextaginta dies binis dumtaxat ademptis
Aestatesque tuli tunc mea sceptra duas.

At sumptu pius ipse tuo sic ossa decoras
Regem olimque facis regis honore coli
Quattuor exceptis iam tantum quinque bis annis
Acta trecenta quidem lustra salutis erant.
Anteque Septembris undena luce Kalendas
Reddideram rubre iura petita rosae.

26 See below, n. 53.
27 The extant manuscript copies of the epitaph contain no punctuation.
28 It seems unlikely that Buck himself wrote them, since he probably would not have chosen to apply to Henry VII the adjective sanctus.
29 Buck 1647: Richardi.
30 Buck 1647: ad.
31 Buck 1647: Sti.
32 Sandford: multa.
33 Buck 1647: Richardus.
34 Sandford: Nam patrie tutor.
35 Buck 1647 and Sandford: patrius.
36 Buck 1647: dumtaxat.
37 Buck 1647: Aestatesque; Sandford: Aestatesque.
38 Sandford: non.
39 Buck 1647 has a marginal note here: Annos 2 & 51 dies. Buck 1619 has Annos 2 et 52 dies. This misinterprets the text, which gives the length of Richard’s reign as ‘two summers and fifty-eight days’ (it actually lasted two years fifty-seven days).
40 Sandford: merito.
41 Buck 1647: dicaras.
42 Buck 1647 and Sandford: quatuor.
43 Buck 1647: quinq.; Sandford: quinqz.
44 Sandford: trecenta.
45 Buck 1647 here inserts a marginal note: Anno Domini 1484. Buck 1619 sets this note next to the preceding line. Both texts seem to take the convoluted date as referring to the battle of Bosworth.
46 Buck 1647: antique; Sandford: antiqz.
47 Buck 1647 has a marginal note at this point reading Die 21 Aug. Buck 1619 has Die 22 Augusti. The latter is clearly the correct reading.
48 Buck 1647 and Sandford: Redideram.
49 Sandford: Rubre.
Deo Optimo Maximō Trino et Uni sit laus et Gloria æternæ. Amen.

b. Translation

Since the only previous translation of the epitaph is based solely on Buck’s Latin text, is versified rather than literal, and contains some inaccuracies, and since the Latin text of the epitaph is in places complex, and its readings, doubtful, the present writer now offers this new translation. Sandford’s variant readings, and those of the extant manuscripts, alter the meaning at certain points, and these alternative translations are given in the footnotes.

The epitaph of King Richard III, buried at Leicester by the order and at the expense of the blessed King Henry VII.

I, here, whom the earth encloses under various coloured marble,

Was justly called Richard the Third.

I was Protector of my country, an uncle ruling on behalf of his nephew.

I held the British kingdoms by broken faith.

Then for just sixty days less two,

And two summers, I held my sceptres.

Fighting bravely in war, deserted by the English,

I succumbed to you, King Henry VII.

But you yourself, piously, at your expense, thus honour my bones

And you cause a former king to be revered with the honour of a king

When [in] twice five years less four

Three hundred five-year periods of our salvation have passed.

And eleven days before the Kalends of September

I surrendered to the red rose the power it desired.

Whoever you are, pray for my offences,

That my punishment may be lessened by your prayers.

To God the most High and most Glorious, the Trinity and the One, be praise and glory for ever. Amen.

The Significance of the Text

Any epitaph is in the nature of a public statement. Richard III’s epitaph would hardly have survived had the Tudor government disapproved, so it also carries some degree of official sanction. It is therefore

50 Sandford: debita iura.
51 Sandford: Rose.
52 Buck 1647: precarem.
53 Buck 1619: levat; Sandford: pena fienda. See also appendix 1 and note 86.
54 Buck 1647: Uno.
55 This valediction is not in Sandford’s text. Like the heading it was not part of the epitaph, but probably derived from Buck’s manuscript source.
56 See appendix 2.
57 The manuscript texts give: ‘I, here, whom the earth encloses under vain [or ostentatious] marble’. See appendix 1 and note 76.
58 Sandford and both manuscript sources give: ‘Was by many called Richard the Third’.
59 The reading of the manuscripts at this point is uncertain, but might produce: ‘As the father’s protector of the country on behalf of the right of [my] nephews’. See below, note 78.
60 ‘Exactly’ or ‘merely’. The word means ‘just’ in both these senses.
61 The manuscripts give: ‘For two summers I wielded sceptres that did not belong to me’. See below, note 81.
62 The reading of Sandford and the manuscripts would mean ‘deservedly deserted’.
63 The manuscript texts give: ‘… And caused a non-king to be revered with the honour of a king’. See appendix 1, note 83.
64 2 x 5 = 10, - 4 = 6. An alternative possible (but less likely) reading of this line would be ‘When [in] twice four years less five’ (i.e. 2 x 4 = 8, - 5 = 3).
65 300 x 5 = 1500, minus the figure given in the previous line (either 6 or 3) would give 1494 (or – less probably – 1497). This dating technique is a complex numbers game. The punctuation given here assumes that the writer’s intention was to convey the date of the inauguration of the tomb (and perhaps the epitaph). With different punctuation, however, one might argue that the intention was to give the date of Richard’s death – in which case the writer evidently became so tied up in his own cleverness that he made an error.
66 On 22 August.
67 Sandford and both manuscript sources: ‘… the right it was owed’.
certainly of interest. Unsurprisingly, perhaps – for this is a theme encountered in other Tudor sources – it pays tribute to Richard’s bravery. The final couplet has sometimes been seen as implying that Richard was evil, and Buck’s (?) verse translation, which employs the word ‘crimes’, carries that flavour. In fact, however, the closing lines reflect nothing more than the standard late medieval preoccupation with purgatory, common to all believers at the time when Richard’s tomb was erected. It was normal in tomb inscriptions to request prayers for the deceased. The fact that this epitaph does so does not imply that Richard III was more in need of such prayers than other people.

Given the date parameters of its composition, one notable omission is the accusation that Richard had the sons of Edward IV put to death. Indeed, the epitaph contains no accusations of murder. If Buck’s text is accurate, not one of the crimes traditionally imputed to Richard III is mentioned, and the epitaph acknowledges Richard’s titles. His right to the protectorship during Edward V’s minority is accepted, and the epitaph specifically concedes Richard’s right to the throne. The manuscript versions seem somewhat less favourable to Richard than the text published by Buck (though there are remaining difficulties of interpretation in respect of them), with Sandford holding the middle ground.

The fact remains that, even if all the possible readings least favourable to Richard III are preferred, the epitaph remains far less hostile to him than might have been expected, given its period of composition. This invites a broader question. Why did Henry VII decide, nine or ten years after Richard’s death, to create a monument for him? Had Henry simply mellowed as time passed? Did he come to feel sorry for Richard? Was it that sufficient time had elapsed for him to feel that commemoration of Richard would now be safe? Above all, whatever inspired him to cause Richard to be memorialised, in the words of the epitaph itself, ‘with the honour of a king’? There are those who decry Henry’s tomb for Richard as a late and cheap memorial, but this, surely, is to miss the point. For nine or ten years there had been no official commemoration. Why did Henry VII now decide to create a permanent tomb and countenance such an epitaph? The answer to these questions can never be known, but some suggestions can be offered.

Early in 1493 Henry (having already survived an attempt on his crown by the earl of Lincoln and Lambert Simnel) had become aware of a new Yorkist conspiracy against him. He knew that Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy had under her wing a young man reputed to be his brother-in-law, Richard of Shrewsbury, Duke of York. During 1493 and 1494, Yorkists at home in England were known to be plotting against Henry, and in the interests of Margaret’s protégé. It was against this background that Henry took the decision to erect a tomb for Richard III. Perhaps it was therefore a calculated move on his part, designed to curry favour with Yorkist opinion. In such a context, Richard’s epitaph may have cleverly exploited Yorkist divisions. Logic decreed that the sons of Edward IV on the one hand, and Richard III on the other, could not both simultaneously have legitimate Yorkist claims to the throne. Their claims were mutually exclusive. If Edward V had been a legitimate king, then Richard III was a usurper, and vice versa. Previously it had suited Henry to call Richard a usurper and treat Edward IV’s sons as legitimate claimants. However, now that one of Edward’s sons was reputedly moving against him, it may have seemed preferable to take a more equivocal stance. After all, Richard III was safely dead.

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68 Sutton, Visser-Fuchs, Griffiths, *Royal Funerals*, p. 75.
69 Sandford follows Buck on this point, though both manuscript sources give a different reading. See appendix 1.
70 Hutton, *The Battle of Bosworth-Field*, p. 142, calls it ‘a scruffy alabaster monument’, and it certainly seems to have cost a great deal less than Henry’s own tomb, though we do not have complete accounts in respect of it, and its full cost is unknown.
71 Henry VII could not, of course, foresee the Dissolution and its effects. So far as he was concerned the tomb would be there for ever.
Appendix 1: Manuscript Texts of the Epitaph of Richard III

a. BL Add. MS 45131 f. 10v (old enumeration, p. 20), c.1495-1534

There is no punctuation in this manuscript text, but the capitalisation of the original has been reproduced here, and abbreviations have been retained unexpanded. The errors and tentative readings (some subsequently deleted) suggest a degree of hesitancy on the part of the transcriber, such as might have resulted from working directly from an inscription in metal, engraved by an illiterate workman, and possibly containing errors and nonsense forms of which Wriothesley sought to make sense. Perhaps, therefore, this text of the epitaph was copied directly from the tomb itself. Alternatively Wriothesley may have been working from an uncorrected first generation copy of the epitaph.

Epitaph of Richard III

Hic 
Ecco

Regis

Hic 
Ecco

Regis

tercius

Sexaginta

Regna

Erecta

non

Set

Sed

Minor


73 The words *Ricardi Regis* 3rd have been added in a later hand.
74 The manuscript clearly reads *eco*. Superficially this might be a misreading of *eco*, but it is probably an error for *ego*.
75 Abbreviation for *animō*. That word, however, makes no sense in this context, and produces too many syllables for the scansion.
76 The manuscript certainly appears to read *vano*. See above, note 57. Dr Lesley Boatwright comments that the scansion of the verse is of no help in choosing between *vario* and *vano*, and that both make sense.
77 Although Sandford does not reproduce this spelling, it is the standard medieval Latin form of this word.
78 Dr Boatwright notes that the possible alternative versions of this line all scan properly. The original reading may have been: *Nam patriae tutor patrius pro iure nepotum* (see below, note 80).
79 Perhaps an error for *patruus*?
80 This word was probably abbreviated in the original text. Dr Boatwright suggests that it may have read *nepotum* (with suspended –m); an abbreviation for *nepotum* (nephews, in the plural). The transcriber seems to have been uncertain how to complete it. Both Buck and Sandford use the singular noun *nepotis*.
81 *Non mea* = ‘not mine’.
82 The transcriber seems to have been uncertain how to complete this word, which was probably abbreviated.
83 This line as it stands does not scan properly in either manuscript.
84 This is probably a misreading of *tātū* (abbreviation for *tantum*).
85 Perhaps an error for *Siē ad*, but the scansion is wrong.
86 Perhaps an error for *ferenda* (= ‘must be borne’). This would not greatly alter the essential meaning of the line. Scansion does not help here in choosing between the various readings, since *levata*, *fienda* and *forenda* (for which read probably *ferenda*) all scan the same.
Fig. 1. Sir Thomas Wriothesley’s copy of Richard III’s epitaph (pre-1534): BL, Add. Ms 45131, f.10v. By kind permission of the British Library

b. College of Arms MS I 3, f. 4, 1509-1557
This manuscript is also without punctuation. The text is almost identical to BL Add. MS 45131, f.10v, but some of Wriothesley’s abbreviations have been expanded by Hawley, and some of his doubtful readings, resolved. A few oddities remain. This manuscript is presumably the source at the College of Arms cited by Sandford. Nevertheless, at some points Sandford’s published text departs from its readings (see footnotes). Possibly he was influenced by Buck’s publication.

Epitaphie

Hic equo aloq.18 variæ tellus sub marmore claudit
Tendus multa19 voce Ricardus  Exam
Nam patriæ20 tutor patriae pro utre spolet21
daupha temai Regna Bretanva  fide
Senaginta dies binis dumtaxat adeimptis
Estatu quí suli non mea  Sceptræ duas

18 Where Sandford’s text merely expands manuscript abbreviations or alters capitalisation this has not been noted.
19 Sandford: Hier equo guem....
20 The manuscript may possibly read exam.
21 Sandford: Tertio in multa.... Dr Barwright observes that there seems to be an error here in both manuscripts, which Sandford has corrected. Without the preposition a the line would not scan.
22 Sandford: ...... patris.......
23 Sandford: ...... repotes.
fortiter in bello merito desertis ab anglis
Rex honore tibi septimae succubui
sit sumpta pia pietate tua sic cela decora
Non Regem23 factis Rege honore Coli
quatuor etsi iam turris cum24 quinque bis annis
acta trecenta25 quidem Lustra salutis ostent
anteq27 Septembris undena lucos Kalendas
Reddideram28 Rubeis debita Iura Roos
Sed at mea29 quisquis erit peperet omenissa g'case
Sit minist ut peccibus penitendo tuis

Fig. 2. Thomas Hawley's copy of Richard III's epitaph (pre-1557): College of Arms, Ms I 3, f.4.
By kind permission of the College of Arms

23 Sandford: Regem oblivique ....
24 Sandford: tantum ...
25 Sandford: trecenta ...
26 Sandford: Redideram ...
27 Sandford: ... mea ...
28 Sandford: ...
Appendix 2: Buck’s(?) Verse Translation of Richard III’s Epitaph

In the early nineteenth century Buck’s text of Richard III’s Latin epitaph was reprinted in John Nichols’ History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester, and also in Nichols’ additions to Hutton’s The Battle of Bosworth Field (second edition), where it was accompanied by the following versified English translation, which Nichols ascribed to Buck. Buck’s(?) translation conveys the general meaning of the epitaph, but contains some inaccuracies. Until now, it appears to have been the only published English version.

I who am laid beneath this marble stone,
Richard the Third, possessed the British throne.
My Country’s guardian in my nephew’s claim,
By trust betray’d I to the kingdom came.
Two years and sixty days, save two, I reign’d;
And bravely strove in fight; but, unsustain’d
My English left me in the luckless field,
Where I to Henry’s arms was forc’d to yield.
Yet at his cost my corse this tomb obtains,
Who piously inter’d me, and ordains
That regal honours wait a king’s remains.
Th’year thirteen hundred ‘twas and eighty four
The twenty-first of August, when its power
And all its rights I did to the Red Rose restore.
Reader, whoe’er thou art, thy prayers bestow,
T’atone my crimes and ease my pains below.

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98 J. Nichols, History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester, 4 vols, London 1795-1815, vol. 1, part 2, p. 298. Curiously, Nichols published a composite text containing elements of Buck 1619 (which was not published in his day) and Buck 1647. Nichols also noted the variant readings of Sandford. Despite occasional errors, Nichols notes more of Sandford’s variant readings than does Kincaid in his edition of Buck 1619.


100 Both year and day are incorrectly translated.