

# **The Changing View from Oxford**

## ***I. Vivat Rex Ineternum!***

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THE PURPOSE of this paper is to examine some of the records of the University of Oxford and its Colleges which are relevant to the study of the life of King Richard III. The contemporary documents illustrate some aspects of the uncertain and wary relationship between Universities and governments that has continued even into this century. They also provide fragments of circumstantial evidence touching the many fascinating historical problems of Richard's reign. Like most Ricardian studies, the story does not end in August 1485 for the transition from Yorkist to Tudor regime had its effect on the University's political life and it will be shown that Oxford men subsequently played a significant role in the development of the versions of fifteenth century history which still exist today.

The sources for this study are unusually rich and accessible. The University maintained a continuous dialogue of letters with the King and other likely patrons whilst the individual colleges carefully recorded their occasional correspondence with the mighty along with notes on current events and transactions in their registers and account books. The correspondence was not always one-sided for kings and magnates found as much cause to court the colleges' influence on matters of doctrine, policy and science and recruitment of trained men as the latter did to seek patronage and liberties.

It is perhaps not surprising that a far greater proportion of these documents have survived and been printed than has been the case for most other corporate bodies. A large proportion of Oxford manuscripts have in fact been edited and published by Oxford men during the last 150 years either as individuals or through the Oxford Historical Society, with the result that much of the material is available at the major libraries and it is only occasionally necessary to consult original manuscripts to check doubtful details.

The principal documents may be grouped for convenience as follows:

- (a) University Register 'F' or Letter-book, now preserved in the Bodleian Library.<sup>1</sup>
  - (b) Magdalen College Register 'A'.<sup>2-5</sup>
  - (c) Magdalen College Libri Computi or Account Books.<sup>2-5</sup>
  - (d) Various registers and account books of other Oxford colleges.<sup>6-8</sup>
- All of which are ostensibly contemporary records, and
- (e) Later manuscripts.<sup>4-9</sup>

The balance of the material used can be found in the records of central government preserved at the Public Record Office or the British Library

Department of Manuscripts (British Museum). The documents are quoted and commented upon mainly in chronological sequence although it is sometimes necessary to digress for background information or to depart from date order to follow a series of letters. In many cases the actual texts (or verbatim transcripts of Latin) are quoted rather than attempting to summarise so that the reader can make his own judgement as to the meaning.

The University's first known contact with the King after his accession occurred on the occasion of his visit to Magdalen College on 24th and 25th July, 1483. On Sunday, 6th July, as the culmination of perhaps the most confusing and controversial three months in British history, Richard and his Queen were crowned at Westminster. After two weeks occupied with government business, the King set out on his first progress travelling into the West via Windsor (21st July) and Reading (23rd July).<sup>10</sup> Richard had apparently taken leave of his chief lieutenant, Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, in London. They were to meet again on only two occasions; at Gloucester on 2nd August and at Buckingham's trial and execution for treason at Salisbury early in November.

The corporate body of 'The President and Scholars of St Mary Magdalen Hall'<sup>11</sup> was founded in 1448 by William Waynflete, Bishop of Winchester, whose remarkable career as ecclesiastic, educationalist and politician covered some 65 years. The bishop's family name is variously reported as Patten or Barbour<sup>11</sup> and he is thought to have adopted the name of his Lincolnshire birthplace at the time of his ordination as a sub-deacon in 1421.<sup>3,11</sup>

The College originally occupied existing buildings in High Street but new building work had progressed sufficiently by 1458 for a move to the present site, although construction work continued intermittently into the sixteenth century. The College chapel was essentially completed between 1474 and 1480 and it is apparent that some reorganisation took place about this time with formulation of the Founder's Statutes,<sup>5</sup> the start of College Register 'A' in August 1480 and the Chapel Account Book in 1481/2, all of which contain material for the present study.

During Edward IV's reign the College (already commonly called 'Mawdelyn' College) prospered as a result of the generosity of Waynflete and several other benefactors so that by 1481 it was no doubt well-equipped to receive the King on a brief visit from Woodstock. The record of this occasion (Appendix I) makes an interesting comparison with that of Richard's visit. The rising status of the College is further reflected in the accounts for entertainment of distinguished visitors that year, including: 'Justice' Catesby, Lord Dynham's brother, the sons of the Earl of Suffolk and Lord Stanley, and the Master of the Rolls.<sup>12</sup>

Richard's visit is recorded in Magdalen College Register 'A' f.27b and the Latin has been transcribed and published with varying degrees of accuracy on two occasions<sup>2,4</sup> and summarised in English in three other works.<sup>3,5,11</sup> The following is thought to be the first published verbatim translation:

"Twenty-second day of July (1483) the reverend father in Christ and Lord William Waynflete, Bishop of Winchester and Founder of this College came to Oxford to oversee the condition of his College and the building

of the same and also to honourably receive the most illustrious Lord King Richard the Third in his above-named College on his progress towards Woodstock.

"Twenty-fourth day of this month the most illustrious King Richard the Third was honourably received, firstly outside the University by the Chancellor of the University<sup>13</sup> and by the Regents and non-Regents; then he was received honourably and in procession at the College of the Blessed Mary Magdalene by a speech by the lord Founder and by the President and scholars and he stayed there overnight and on the morrow, which was St James the Apostle's day and the feast of Saint Anne the Mother of Mary, he stayed until after dinner with as many of his Lords spiritual and temporal and other nobles as follows:

"The same day there came to the college with the lord King, the Lord Bishop of Durham, the Lord Bishop of Worcester, the Lord Bishop of St Asaph's and Master Thomas Langtone Bishop-elect of St David's, the Earl of Lincoln, the Lord Steward the Earl of Surrey, the Lord Chamberlain Lord Lovell, Lord Stanley, Lord Audeley, Lord Becham,<sup>14</sup> Lord [*sic*] Richard Radclyff, knight, and many other nobles who all stayed overnight in College. And the lord Founder received all with honour.

"Twenty-fifth day of this month, at the command and desire of the lord King, two solemn debates were held in the great hall of the College, the first being in moral philosophy by Master Thomas Kerver<sup>15</sup> and replying, a certain Bachelor of the same college. Next was held another solemn theological dispute also in the presence of the King, by Master John Taylor Doctor of Sacred Theology with Master William Grocyn<sup>16</sup> replying, all of whom the lord King magnificently and honourably rewarded, to wit: The Doctor of sacred Theology with a buck (venison) and one hundred shillings and his disputant with a buck and five marks (66 shillings and eight pence), the master disputant in philosophy with a buck and five marks and the bachelor disputant with a buck and forty shillings. Moreover the great King gave to the president of the College and the scholars two bucks with five marks for wine. *Vivat Rex ineternum.*"

It is very difficult for us to judge in what spirit this account was written.<sup>17</sup> The closing words could be translated as an enthusiastic: 'may the King live for ever!' or a dutiful 'long live the King'. Even Chandler,<sup>3</sup> normally hostile to Richard, grudgingly concedes: "his generosity and condescension (!) certainly gained him the goodwill of the society at Magdalen, as the entry in the Register ends with '*vivat Rex ineternum.*'" Or is the recorder excelling at the fifteenth century art of flattery and adulation on the assumption that his book might later come in for scrutiny? It will be demonstrated later that members of the University were not backward in applying their talents to the task of lobbying the current political leaders. On the other hand, as far as we know, the college never found it necessary to destroy or modify their records under the next regime.

We can turn with more confidence from the style of this account to its content and several subsidiary facts emerge for mention below. Others will no doubt become apparent to specialist readers:

Firstly the document provides a glimpse of the King's cultural tastes. There was certainly no need for a medieval autocrat to sit through not one but two learned debates if he did not find a genuine interest there. One is led to suspect that Richard's visits to Oxford and Cambridge<sup>18</sup> were welcome interludes from the cares of government.

Secondly, we are informed that the King was met by the Chancellor of the University, Lionel Woodville, Bishop of Salisbury. According to Kendall,<sup>19</sup> the Bishop, before or at the outbreak of Buckingham's rebellion 'had slipped away from the sanctuary at Westminster some time before and was fomenting trouble in his diocese.' The college record seems to indicate that he had come out of sanctuary and presumably gone through the motions of reconciliation with the King much earlier and possibly before the Coronation.

The College record gives us an independent list of the chief notables who accompanied Richard on this first royal progress (see Appendix II). Kendall,<sup>20</sup> using Macray's transcription,<sup>2</sup> uses it to support the view that the Duke of Buckingham did not leave London with the King, thus placing him under some suspicion in the matter of the Princes.

In this list, the new Earl of Surrey (Thomas Howard, son of John Howard newly made Duke of Norfolk) is described as '*dominus seneschallus*' i.e. Lord Steward of the Household. Although he acknowledges that: "in the contemporary account<sup>21</sup> of the coronation banquet, the Earl of Surrey is designated 'Steward' . . . with a white staff in his hand," Kendall<sup>20</sup> argues that the post must have been purely ceremonial since there is no indication that Surrey was afterwards a member of Richard's Household and Lord Stanley was probably restored to this office which he held under Edward IV. The Magdalen Register thus provides independent contemporary reference to Surrey as Steward. A further reference is provided by John Rous in his History.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the King did not return Stanley to full favour as rapidly as some commentators have suggested.

Kendall<sup>20</sup> (referring to Macray<sup>2</sup>) also states that Richard rode on to Woodstock after dinner on the 25th "but he returned the next day to inspect the University . . ." It is by no means clear where this information derives from for there is no mention of this in Macray's book or in the Register itself.

## APPENDIX I

Edward IV's visit is recorded in Magdalen College Register 'A', ff.7b,8 in Latin, best transcription in Macray. Verbatim translation by the present author:

"On 20th day September the reverend father in Christ lord William Waynflete, bishop of Winchester and Founder of this college came to Oxford to inspect the state of his college and the new buildings. And he brought with him to his college and also sent before him divers books mostly for the new library, eight hundred or thereabouts, in addition to the books left there previously and bequeathed by various benefactors.

He also brought then divers title deeds of the lordships and lands of his college.

"The same day the said Founder was honourably received in procession into his College by the President and his scholars not only as Founder but as governor and patron of the place by virtue of liberties granted earlier. Before he entered his college an address or speech of congratulation on his arrival was made by the President to the praise, glory and honour of Almighty God, his magnificent name and mighty works, etc.

"22nd day of this month the Lord Founder proceeded to Wodestoke to the illustrious lord King Edward IV and the Lord King of his own accord and his especial grace promised the lord Founder to visit his refounded [new-founded?] college at Oxford the following night and to spend the night there which thing was not a little pleasing to the Lord Founder.

"The same night after sunset, the illustrious Lord King was honourably received outside the University by the lord chancellor of the University and by the regents and non-regents bearing many torches;<sup>22</sup> then he was received with honour and ceremony at the college of the blessed Mary Magdalen by the said lord Founder and by the President and Scholars and there stayed the night. And on the morrow, which was the Lord's day he stayed until after dinner and afternoon with as many of his lords spiritual and temporal and other nobles as follows etc.

"That night same there came to the college with the lord King the lord bishop of Chichester; the bishop of Ely; the bishop of Rochester; the Earl of Lincoln; The Lord Steward; Lord Stanneley; Lord Dacors of Sussex; Lord Thomas Borowzg,<sup>23</sup> knight; and several other nobles who all spent the night in college. And the lord Founder received them all with honour, etc.

"The following day, that is the 23rd day of September, which was the Lord's day, between Matins and the Processional, at the Founder's command, the President of the college in the presence of the King and his Lords, delivered a brief speech of congratulation on the King's arrival and petition for his especial grace towards the University and the college. Truly, the King replied full eloquently and inventively to everything and graciously noted [?] each request etc. Then he was followed by his lords in solemn procession through the precincts and cloister of the college etc."

## APPENDIX II

The notables in Richard's retinue at Warwick, two weeks after leaving Oxford were listed by John Rous in his *Historia Johannis Rossi Warwicensis de Regibus Anglie*<sup>24</sup> ff.131-136, recently translated and published by Dr Alison Hanham,<sup>25</sup> from which the following extract is taken for ease of reference.

"There were then with the King at Warwick the bishops of Worcester, Coventry, Lichfield, Durham and St. Asaphs; the Duke of Albany, brother of the King of Scotland; Edward, Earl of Warwick; Thomas,

Earl of Surrey, the Steward of the King's Household; the Earl of Huntingdon; John, Earl of Lincoln; and the Lords Stanley, Dudley, Morley and Scrope; Francis, Lord Lovell, the King's chamberlain and William Hussey, chief justice of England, and many other lords and ladies of similar rank with the Queen."

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Rev. H. Anstey (Editor), *Epistolae Academicæ Oxoniensis* (Registrum F), Part 2, 1457-1509, Oxford Historical Society, Vol. 36 (1898). This volume provides full Latin transcription with summaries and notes in English of University Register 'F'.
2. W. D. Macray, *Register of Magdalen College Oxford*, New Series, Vol. I (1894). This reference provides the best Latin transcription of the entries in Magdalen College Register 'A' concerning the visits to the College of Edward IV (pp. 8-9) (f.8 in the MS.) and Richard III (pp. 11-12) (f.27 in the MS.)
3. R. Chandler, *Life of Waynflete*, Oxford (1811). Includes an English summary of the Register 'A' account of Richard's visit with hostile comments.
4. J. R. Bloxam, *Heylin's Memorial of Waynflete*, Caxton Society (1851). Includes an inaccurate Latin transcription of Register 'A' on Richard's visit, incomplete extracts from the College Account Book and Heylin's poem.
5. J. R. Bloxam, *The Magdalen College Register*, Vol. 2 (1857). Includes a brief English summary of Richard's visit, incomplete relevant extracts from the Account Book and notes on Francis Lovell, William Wootton, Thomas Kerver and the benefactors of the College.
6. H. E. Salter, *Registrum Annalium Collegii Mertonensis—Merton College 1483-1531*, Oxford Historical Society, Vol. 76 (1921). Quotes letters to and from Richard III, Lionel Woodville, pp. 30-45 and a notice of Richard's death, p. 72.
7. H. E. Salter and W. H. Stevenson, *The Early History of St John's College* (St Bernard's College), Oxford Historical Society, New Series, Vol. 1 (1939). Quotes letters of Edward V and Richard III taken from *Harley MS.433*, pp. 24-26, 81-82.
8. T. Fowler, *History of Corpus Christi College*, Oxford Historical Society, Vol. 25 (1893).
9. J. Budden (J. C. Mansell-Pleydell, editor), *A Biographical Sketch of Cardinal Morton. Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Field Club*, Vol. 3 (1879), pp. 49-73.
10. Richard's itinerary can be established (not without problems) from the dating of bills, writs and letters patent and close; e.g. Writ of Privy Seal, PRO ref. C81/886/14 dated at Windsor 21st July, 1483; Grant dated at Reading 23rd July, 1483, *Harl. MS.433*, f.109a.
11. H. C. Maxwell-Lyte, *History of the University of Oxford*, 1886, pp. 330-333, 360-362, 369-371. Contains English summaries of Edward IV's and Richard III's visits and Henry VII's pursuit of Bishop Stillington.
12. Macray, p. 11.
13. Lionel Woodville, Bishop of Salisbury was Chancellor of the University at the time of Richard's visit.
14. Lord Beauchamp. Richard, 2nd Lord Beauchamp of Powick (c.1435-1496) married Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Humphrey Stafford.

15. Thomas Kerver was the first Dean of Arts appointed in Magdalen College in July 1482. For notes on his career see Reference 3, pp. 155, 161 and Reference 5.
16. For notes on William Grocyn see Kendall, *Richard III*, p. 252, and M. Burrows, *Memoir of William Grocyn*, Collectanea II, Oxford Historical Society, Vol. 16, 1890.
17. Comparison with the record of Edward IV's visit (Appendix I) may help. No descriptive record of Henry VII's visit survives, References 2, 3, 4 and 5. It is known only indirectly from receipts and payments in the accounts.
18. Richard was at Cambridge in March 1484 (signed Bill PRO ref. C81/1530/33; Kendall (Note 19), p. 290).
19. P. M. Kendall, *Richard III* (1955), p. 261.
20. Kendall, *Richard III*, pp. 251-2 and notes.
21. *Excerpta Historica* (J. S. Bentley, Editor), 1831, pp. 380, 382.
22. According to Lyte the Proctor's Roll for 1481 includes the following payments:  
     Item, for rose-water for the benediction on the arrival of the King—4d.  
     Item, for torches carried at the arrival of the King—20d.  
     Item, to the clerk for carrying the cross and other labours at the King's arrival—12d.
23. This is most likely Sir Thomas Burgh, Master of the Horse, but could possibly be Thomas Barowe, Master of the Rolls.
24. John Rous, *Historia Johannis Rossi Warwicensis de Regibus Anglie*, ff.131-136. Translation by Hanham, see Note 25.
25. A. Hanham, *Richard III and his Early Historians 1483-1535* (1975), and Appendix II to this paper.

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