

Richard the Third and the Battle of Dunesmore

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The sight of an investigation, with its successes and reverses, is seldom boring.

Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, Manchester 1954, p. 71.

I went to Exeter for a conference on Anachronism, a conference from which I fled at five the following morning. My journey, however, had not been in vain. Before turning up to register for the conference I revisited the cathedral, last seen in 1957, and called in at the Local Studies Library. There I took down from the shelves E.S. Chalk, *History of St Peter's Church, Tiverton* (Tiverton 1905) and discovered the Book of Hours owned by that church.¹ It was the name of William Worcester which startled me; here he was in 1438 drawing up astrological tables for a fellow Bristolian, Richard Roper. Had he not done the same for Sir John Fastolf at about the same time? Indeed he had, and probably in the previous year, as I discovered after my flight from Devon.² At this point in the investigation I became stupid; my stupidity requires explanation. Because McFarlane in 'William Worcester: A Preliminary Survey' does not mention the Tiverton Church manuscript I somehow assumed it to be the manuscript he referred to as having in it the astrological tables made by Worcester for Fastolf: Bodleian Library, Oxford, Laud MS 674.³ Confused by the similarity of date and by the omission of the Tiverton Church manuscript from McFarlane's paper I jumped to a conclusion which overlooked Archbishop William Laud. My assumption was that at some time after 1905 the Bodleian had acquired the manuscript and called it Laud MS 674. Then I forgot what I had done, or rather stopped thinking about how I had come to assume what I did assume, until on turning up at the Bodleian and finding that Laud MS 674 was not the Tiverton Church manuscript, I complained to the Librarian; I was so

convinced there was a great mystery here that even his patient exposition of the Laudian Manuscripts to someone he took for a complete fool did not sink in until some minutes had elapsed. As I sat in Duke Humfrey common sense slowly prevailed: there was no mystery; there were simply two manuscripts.

The Tiverton Church manuscript now disappears from the story. So do William Worcester and K.B. McFarlane. What came to interest me about Laud MS 674 as I sat there examining it was not its Fastolf connection but the additions made to it by a late fifteenth-century hand which is neither Worcester's nor his son's.⁴ The additions which are of concern here are of the familiar 'historical notices' kind; the most important occur on the first folio.⁵

anno d[omini] 1485 22 die mensis augusti erat bellum apud dunnismore
ubi interfectus erat rex ricardus 3 cum johanne hawerde duce norfolk et
pluribus aliis henrico septimo tunc victore et regnare incipiente Qui
postea in eodem anno apud westmonasterium 29 die mensis octobris erat
coronatus

anno d[omini] 1483 nono die mensis aprilis morebatur rex edwardus 4
viz in primo 23 anni regni sui Et in primo die may proximo sequenti
princeps edwardus captus et traditorie deceptus erat apud stony stratforth
deinde ductus londoniis positus erat in turre londoniarum et post paucos
dies ibidem interfectus erat ex precepto ricardi ducis gloucestrie avunculi
eius Qui quidem ricardus dux glocestrie postea elevatus in regem
coronatus erat 25 die julii apud westmonasterium

(The year of Our Lord 1485, 22 day of the month of August there was a
battle at Dunnismore where King Richard III was killed together with
John Howard, Duke of Norfolk and many others, Henry VII being then
victor and began to reign who after in the same year was crowned at
Westminster 29 day of the month of October.

The year of Our Lord 1483 9 day of the month of April King Edward IV
died that is in the twenty-third year of his reign, and on first day of May
next following Prince Edward was captured and treacherously deceived
at Stony Stratford and from there led to London and placed in the Tower
of London, and after a few days he was killed at the order of Richard,
Duke of Gloucester, his uncle, and this Richard Duke of Gloucester was
afterwards elevated and crowned as king on 25 day of July at
Westminster).

The two entries are in two different hands; a third hand has added at the end of the second entry that on the day of Saints Timothy and Symphorian in 1485 Richard was killed.

On folios 8r-11v are further 'historical notices'. They begin with the battle of Sluys in 1340 and break off after Henry VII's return from the siege of Boulogne at Christmas 1492; they are in the second hand, the hand of the 1483 entry, of folio 1. The Ricardian notices virtually duplicate those on folio 1, but not quite.

anno domini 1483 nono die mensis aprilis rex edwardus quartus viz in 23
anno regno sui diem clausit extremum

et in primo die may proximo sequenti princeps edwardus filius predicti
edwardi quarti captus erat et traditorie deceptus apud stony stratforth per
patrum suum ricardum ducem glocestrie Qui quidem princeps edwardus
ductus erat londonium et in turre londoniarum positus Et post paucos dies
ibidem ut creditur interfectus

et predictus Ricardus dux glocestrie elevatus in regem 25 die julii apud
westmonasterium fuit coronatus Et in tercio anno regni sui in die
sanctorum thimothei et simphoriani viz in octavo die assumptionis beate
marie virginis scilicet in die lune anno domini 1485 predictus ricardus
tercius miserabiliter occisus erat cum johanne howarde duce norfolk et
pluribus aliis generosis

(The year of Our Lord 1483 9 day of the month of April King Edward IV
breathed his last that is in the twenty-third year of his reign.

And on the first day of May next following Prince Edward, son of the
aforesaid Edward IV was captured and treacherously deceived at Stony
Stratford by his uncle, Richard Duke of Gloucester. And this Prince
Edward was led to London and placed in the Tower of London, and after
a few days he was killed there, as it is believed.

And the aforesaid Richard Duke of Gloucester was raised to the kingship
and crowned on 25 day of July at Westminster. And in the third year of
his reign on the day of Saints Timothy and Symphorian, that is in the
octave of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, that is on the
Monday in the year of Our Lord 1485 the aforesaid King Richard III was
miserably killed together with John Howard Duke of Norfolk and many
other gentlemen).

Little or preferably nothing requires to be added by way of comment. All of
this is probably copied from elsewhere and is the standard stuff of 'historical
notices'. A few days can mean anything, although I would like them to mean a few
days rather than a few weeks let alone a few months. A compiler who has the date
of Richard's accession wrong by a month does not, however, inspire confidence.

Yet, a new title for the battle of Bosworth is worth recording to underline the fact that it took place on Redemore, for which Dunesmore, or 'brown heath', is only another name.⁶

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Described on pp. 73-5; the most recent description is N.R. Ker and A.J. Piper, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, vol. 4, Oxford 1992, pp. 494-95.
- 2 K.B. McFarlane, *England in the Fifteenth Century*, London 1981, p. 199.
- 3 Not only stupid but lazy: only now have I bothered to look at *William Worcester: Itineraries*, ed. John H. Harvey, Oxford 1969, pp. 80-81 to find that Worcester recorded the date of death of Friar John Somner, the compiler of the astrological calendar he copied for Roper and Fastolf, and that John Harvey notes Worcester's copy for Roper, citing E.S. Chalk, although not mentioning the Tiverton Church MS. John Somner or Somer, an Oxford astronomer known to Chaucer, features in the *Dictionary of National Biography* and in A.B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500*, Oxford 1957-59, vol. 3, p. 1727: neither knows of the year of his death, which according to Worcester was 1419.
- 4 These additions are not noticed in Andrew G. Watson, *Catalogue of Dated and Datable Manuscripts c.435-1600 in Oxford Libraries*, Oxford 1984, vol. 1, p. 103.
- 5 The two entries appear in the non-chronological order in which they are given here, but there are transposition signs against them in the margin.
- 6 For which see Peter J. Foss, *The Field of Redemore: the Battle of Bosworth, 1485*, Leeds 1990, pp. 19-20: a reference I owe to Philip Morgan, to whom I am also grateful for aid with my Latin. The 'brown heath' occurs in another Bodleian manuscript, Ashmole 1448, a fifteenth-century miscellany with historical and genealogical additions of about the same date as those in Laud MS 674: Alison Hanham, *Richard III and his early historians 1483-1535*, Oxford 1975, p. 107.