

Review Article

The Coronation of Richard III: The Extant Documents

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THIS ORIGINAL COLLECTION of mainly archival material published under its self-explanatory title *The Coronation of Richard III: The Extant Documents*, marks an outstanding contribution to the quincentenary of Richard III's accession and crowning. The documents are impressively presented and they, with the ancillary information provided, ensure the volume its place as a basic research tool. The work should be consulted by scholars concerned with the history of the coronation, and by those interested in Richard III and his reign; it will be overlooked at their peril by those with a broad interest in England in the late middle ages.

Some fifty years ago Schramm noted the importance of Richard III's coronation ceremony as the model adopted by Henry VII and by Henry VIII. The *Little Device of the Coronation of . . . Henry VII*, by which this order of ceremony is commonly known, derives from a manuscript (British Library, Additional MS. 18669) where the names of the participants at Richard's coronation have been cancelled for replacement by those at Henry VII's; this is striking testimony of the derivative nature of the latter's ceremony. The names of the participants at Richard's ceremony are those originally in the text, with some contemporary cancellations and insertions, which presumably represent second thoughts. The *Little Device* as it applied to Henry VII's ceremony has been printed several times, but it has never been published with the names of Richard III's participants and with the portions deleted for

Henry's ceremony — the crowning of the Queen is one such. Now here we have printed the *Little Device of the Coronation of . . . Richard III* (pp.213-27).

Until dispensed with by James II in 1685 the coronation commenced on the day prior to the crowning with a procession from the Tower of London to Westminster Hall. Until the further curtailment of ceremonies in 1831 the crowning was followed by a banquet. Information as to the procession and the banquet at Richard III's coronation can be gleaned from the *Little Device*, but hitherto has been most familiar from the printed version of Grafton's *Chronicle*. The present collection provides for the first time in print an anonymous account of the coronation which exists in a mid-sixteenth century transcription (British Library, Additional MS. 6113) (pp.270-82). There undoubtedly is a relationship between this and Grafton's account; the editors' case is that the former derives from a now lost contemporary source, as does Grafton's. Moreover since the anonymous description spawned a number of elaborations in the three decades from about 1550 the editors provide the variants from these. Documents illustrative of the part played by the Cinque Ports, as found in the White Book of the Brotherhood of those ports, also throw light on the ceremony, and are published for the first time (pp.195-9). The most extensive source here first published (pp.91-189) is from the Great Wardrobe Accounts. The extract begins with Henry IV's ceremony, of interest for its details concerning the creation of Knights of the Bath by the sovereign — another integral part of the coronation ceremony — and is followed by lengthy listings of the enormous quantity of robes, liveries and stuffs required for Richard III's coronation. Finally the menu for the banquet is provided (British Library, Additional MS. 47,716A), it being convincingly maintained that the date 1327 as found in the text is erroneous (pp.291-302).

The text of the documents in all comprises just under one hundred and fifty pages out of five hundred. Each document is introduced by a consideration of its nature. So, for instance, the section devoted to the Great Wardrobe Accounts in forty pages (pp.47-86) examines in particular the Great Wardrobe, its keepers and minions, and its method of accounting, all essential information if one is fully to appreciate the document. Secondly, for each document there is a short bibliographical description of the source, which is followed by an explanation of the method adopted in editing. For publication the common abbreviations have been expanded so as to provide the text as it would have been understood by contemporaries, while the modern usage of punctuation and capitalisation has been adopted. Obscurities, erasures, significant corrections, changes in handwriting, and similar matters, are indicated. The spelling is that of the original save the thorn appears as 'th' and the modern usage of 'u' and 'v' is followed. 'All figures, weights, measures and dates have been left in their original form' (pp.86-7). Where the text is in Latin or in French a translation into modern English is also provided, and this translation is reliable.

The documents are set firmly in their historical context by means of a 'Chronology of Events' (pp.13-46), a precisely documented appendix of 'Biographies' (pp.303-415) which represents an enormous amount of detailed research and has a value quite apart from the documents, and a 'Glossary' of

terms (pp.416-35). The 'Bibliography' indicates the manuscript material that is pertinent (pp.436-8), as well as that printed (pp.438-55). Eight pages of plates provide nine illustrations that are apt and of high quality.

The documents in the collection have not previously been printed but any supposition based on the title that here are all the extant documents would prove false. Indeed my primary criticism is that we are only provided with a selection of the existing relevant material. It would, for example, have been convenient if Grafton's description had been printed; as it is one can merely reconstruct it with much effort on the basis of the anonymous account published in the collection and those footnote variants to it which are indicated as being in Grafton's text. The editors themselves mention details of the coronation as found in *The Great Chronicle* of London and in other London chronicles, notably Fabian's (p.27). The relevant extracts from these sources should have been reprinted here. Yet another account of the ceremony is that of Domenico Mancini, assuredly written before the end of 1483 and so undoubtedly contemporary. This Italian was in England at the time of Richard III's coronation, almost certainly in London and an eyewitness of some, at least, of the events that occurred outside the Abbey and Westminster Hall. He was in contact with Dr. John Argentine, the medical consultant of Edward V. Mancini does not give details of the ceremony in the Abbey, but what he wrote of the events leading up to the crowning ceremony is important and the relevant extract ought to have been reprinted in the collection. Polydore Vergil covered essentially the same events in his *Historia Anglica*, certainly written by 1513 and probably even a decade earlier; what he wrote merits inclusion.

The editors stress the importance of the symbolism inherent in the ceremony in the Abbey, and their section on the regalia in this connection (pp.228-44) is most rewarding. However the bulk of the documents in the collection puts the emphasis rather on sumptuous clothing for the procession, crowning and banquet, and on the numerous courses at the latter. Accordingly the stress is on 'magnificence'. The editors claim that the degree of magnificence at Richard's coronation was traditional rather than testimony of extravagance (p.31 n.124). For comparative purposes some evidence relating to other English coronations of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries is marshalled to support the case (notably on pp.53, 56-7, 256-7). However as I see it the source that furnishes the costing of Richard's coronation, which is the Great Wardrobe Account, may not cover all the expenses; the 'rewards' donated to the Northerners (*The Great Chronicle*, p.233) certainly were not charged against it. Moreover as they stand printed in this collection the extensive details of ordering clothes leave the impression of extravagant magnificence, but more research is needed before a reliable conclusion can be reached.

Mancini's account suggests to me the need to modify some of the commentary to the documents. Tradition dictated that the Archbishop of Canterbury crowned the King of England. Cardinal Thomas Bouchier in that capacity crowned Richard III, and note what is said by the editors in his biography (p.315):

'The Bishop of Durham took his [Bourchier's] place at the banquet . . . and this has been interpreted as a sign of his dislike of RIII's accession, but he was in his seventies, possibly in ill health and the arduous Abbey ceremony was probably the real reason. Similarly the pardon he received in Dec. 1483 was for mundane reasons and not because of any loss of royal favour . . . 1485 crowned HVII'.

It should be said that there is no contemporary evidence attributing Bourchier's absence from the banquet to ill health or fatigue; these are speculations on the part of the editors to account for absence. Two years later the cardinal was well enough to perform the ceremony and to attend the banquet. Further it can be argued from the evidence of Bourchier's Register that he withdrew to his manor of Knole at the end of May 1483 because he was unhappy with the turn of events. Some support for this, too, is provided by Mancini's report that 'the Cardinal of Canterbury, albeit unwillingly, anointed and crowned him [Richard] King of England'. This comment was written by December 1483 by an individual who was in no way personally involved in English politics and certainly not a Tudor propagandist. It appears to me an important comment on the coronation.

Under 3 July in the 'Chronology of Events' the editors provide (p.27):

'The king rode to Finsbury Fields with his lords to review the muster of the Northerners who had come to his support. Afterwards they [the Northerners] marched into the City, for a service at St. Paul's. We are then told that the route was lined with men of the City Companies who 'numbered over 156 men in their place on the route. There was certainly rivalry between the Londoners and the Northerners and this is echoed in the later London Chronicles which carefully recorded the jibes made by the citizens at the Northerners' rusty accoutrements'.

The relevant footnote 105 adds: '*The Great Chronicle*, 233, suggests that the Northerners were so unruly that Richard was forced to visit them but there is no suggestion of this in Mancini, 98-101. Mancini, 101, appears to have confused the City watch with the Northerners'.

What Mancini wrote merits quoting in full and I give the English translation of his Latin:

'Meanwhile as the day appointed for the coronation approached, Richard summoned troops to the number of six thousand into the city from his own estates and from those of the duke of Buckingham. He was afraid lest any uproar should be fomented against him at his coronation, when there would be a very great concourse of people. He himself went out to meet the soldiers before they entered the city; and, when they were drawn up in a circle on a very great field, he passed with bared head around their ranks and thanked them; then accompanied by the troops he returned to the city' (p.99). [After a digression Mancini resumed:] 'The troops being stationed at suitable points, the day arrived preceding the coronation' (p.101).

What emerges from Mancini is that Richard III had summoned a considerable number of armed retainers (leaving aside the accuracy of 6,000; Polydore Vergil gives 5,000, and *The Great Chronicle*, 4,000 or 5,000), and that after visiting them to stimulate their loyalty to him he introduced them into London so that there would be no rising against him during the coronation (Vergil makes the same point independently of Mancini). The

implication is that these Northerners were placed at strategic points by Richard's orders; they may not have been within the City, since this would have infringed the City's liberties. Accordingly Richard had his troops in London (though perhaps not the City itself) to overawe any opposition and to cheer him. His magnificent coronation itself aimed at winning popular support by providing a spectacle. The elaborate crowning ceremony reflected the King's wishes to impress on his subjects that he was God's approved ruler and that rebellion against the Lord's anointed would be sacrilegious. The coronation admirably illustrates the attempt of a usurper to consolidate and legitimize his position by all possible means. Significantly two years later Henry Tudor, likewise insecure as *de facto* ruler, adopted in essence the order of service in the Abbey that had been followed by Richard III, but seemingly avoided having armed retainers to dominate London. I would add that Mancini wrote of the visit to the Northerners made by Richard before the coronation, while *The Great Chronicle* (p.233, as cited by the editors) is concerned with a visit after the coronation. Therefore the point made by the editors concerning the King's visit not having been precipitated by unruly behaviour before the coronation is invalid.

The documents of the collection and the commentary to them illustrate the split among the Yorkist families that the Duke of Gloucester's assumption of the crown had engendered. Obviously the Woodville family was absent from the coronation. William, Lord Hastings, who had been Edward IV's Chamberlain and had taken under his protection Edward's two sons, was killed on 13 June, seemingly at Richard's orders. However if the anonymous description is correct on this detail Lord Hastings' younger brother, Richard, Lord Welles, was at the coronation (p.270). Lord Welles' subsequent career (indicated under 'Biographies', p.354) does suggest that he sided with Richard III despite his brother's death, so there is reason to accept his participation at the ceremony. The prominent families at the ceremony were the Howards, Nevilles, and Stanleys. Notable absences were those of George Talbot, fourth Earl of Shrewsbury and his uncle, Sir Gilbert Talbot. It was Sir Gilbert's sister, Eleanor, who as the supposed contracted wife of Edward IV provided the case for the illegitimacy of Edward V and his brother, whose exclusion in consequence was fundamental for the legality of Richard's claim to kingship. Sir Gilbert, though his father, John second Earl of Shrewsbury, had been killed at the battle of Northampton in 1460 fighting on the Lancastrian side, had been a cupbearer and then a royal carver to Edward IV. He became Steward of Ralph, Lord Greystock (or Greystoke), and through marrying Lord Greystock's daughter, Anne, became brother-in-law of Sir Robert Greystock, chosen by Richard for a leading role at the crowning ceremony. George, Earl of Shrewsbury, had been a ward of William, Lord Hastings, and probably in 1481 married his daughter, Anne. The absence of these Talbots from Richard's coronation is worth remarking since they were the leading representatives of a Lancastrian family which under Edward IV appeared to have become Yorkist. Richard III made what appears to be an attempt to win over the family to him, as he appointed Sir Gilbert Sheriff of Shropshire. His failure to obtain the support of the family was important for in 1485 Sir Gilbert went to meet Henry Tudor at Newport, where he was

joined by his nephew. Both Talbots fought against Richard III at Bosworth and played a part at Henry VII's coronation, the Earl bearing the sword *curtana*.

The editors caution that some names indicated in the sources they publish may be unreliable. The issues are particular to each case and can only be resolved in terms of probabilities. For instance the *Little Device* (p.211) lists four nominated to hold the baldachin over the King when he was being anointed with Holy Oil during the ceremony in the Abbey. The *Little Device* also makes it plain that the task of necessity was to be performed by four Knights of the Garter. Of the four named only Sir William Parr was of that order. Of the remaining three Sir Robert Greystock is thought to have died on 17 June 1483, which prompted the editors to conclude that 'the news [of this death, seemingly in the country] had obviously not reached London when the *Little Device* was drawn up'. Subsequently the matter of three out of four not being Knights of the Garter is considered by the editors, who in different places provide alternative solutions. On page 351 it is suggested: 'It is possible RIII chose to ignore this custom [which is that the four had to be Knights of the Garter] and honour four Northern associates'. Three pages later the conclusion is that 'the entry [it refers to the four names, though under Sir Edmund Hastings] must be suspect'. At the time there were twenty-five Companion Knights of the Garter, of whom six were foreigners. In the summer of 1483 seven further stalls were vacant or void as far as Richard III was concerned. Edward V had had a stall as Prince of Wales, which became vacant when on ascending to the throne he was Sovereign Head of the order; the stall that Richard III had occupied as Duke of Gloucester likewise was vacant when he became King. Richard, Duke of York, Edward V's brother, was in the Tower or dead; Lord Hastings had been killed; Anthony Woodville, second Earl Rivers, was beheaded on 25 June; Henry Bourchier, first Earl of Essex, had died on 4 April; Thomas Grey, first Marquis of Dorset, was in hiding. Of the remaining twelve Knights all save John Sutton, Lord Dudley, had been elected while Edward IV was Sovereign Head, and hence were of the Yorkist party. On the evidence of the collection of documents the twelve were anticipated to be attending the coronation (gifts of robes for the ceremony is not certain testimony that the recipient did actually participate, of course). John Howard, first Duke of Norfolk, was Earl Marshal at the ceremony; Henry Stafford, first Duke of Buckingham, its High Steward; William Fitzalan, eleventh Earl of Arundel, was possibly Chief Butler at the coronation (see p.341); Henry Percy, fourth Earl of Northumberland, bore the sword *curtana*; John de la Pole, second Duke of Suffolk, carried the King's sceptre; John Scrope, Lord Scrope of Bolton, bore the Queen's sceptre; Sir William Parr assisted with the baldachin. Walter Devereux, sixth Lord Ferrers, Thomas Fitzalan, Lord Mautravers (son and heir of the Earl of Arundel), Sir John Astley and Sir Thomas Montgomery were the remaining four Knights of the Garter, seemingly without a function at the coronation. Astley may have been too old to have carried the baldachin, but he and others may have had offices relating to the Queen's coronation, since her crowning involved more functionaries than was usual at a coronation. It seems to me likely that the situation which Richard had to

face was an insufficiency of Knights of the Garter among his supporters to do all that was required at the ceremony. Moreover the summoning of the Knights for an election involved several months' notice, so election of Knights to vacant stalls was not a possibility unless the coronation was delayed. Hence despite the requirements stressed in the *Little Device* Richard III had to make do, in all probability, with only one Knight of the Garter to hold his baldachin. There is no reason to believe that the names indicated by the *Little Device* are erroneous. Secondly we are not told the authority for the date of Sir Robert Greystock's death, given as 17 June 1483. Presumably it derives from the *Obituary of Westminster*, cited in *The Complete Peerage*, VI, page 199. The reliability of the evidence needs to be assured before one can accept this date and the editors' conclusion as to when those names added supposedly as second thoughts in the *Little Device* were inserted.

One should have been able to find immediately by means of footnotes to the text such important matters concerning the nature of the text itself as those indicated above in the consideration of the four names found in the *Little Device*. As it is one comes to the information only after lengthy reading. Footnoting in this way, too, would have minimised the risk of alternative conclusions that confuse the reader. It would have considerably aided research if the cross-references provided by the editors had consistently been to the pagination of the source as printed in their collection. For instance in the 'Biographies' reference to the *Little Device* is followed by the foliation of the manuscript; in order to check one must either consult the index or the table of contents so as to find the printed text and then the folio number indicated. On occasion reference is even to an editorial note; for instance under Sir Robert Percy (p.382) one finds: 'Knighted before coronation (see note 57 to Add. 6113 above)', where what is required is 'see p.273 n.57'. It would have been helpful if in the 'Biographies' of nobility their title had been given more fully, for example: Henry Percy, fourth Earl of Northumberland, not simply Earl of Northumberland. There are some cross-references that have been overlooked; for example, p.48 n.2, 'below 000' should read 'see below at pp.238, 410'; a like case on the last line of the text at p.243 should read 'see at pp.210-11', and another on p.382 under Sir Robert Percy should read 'Court of Claims, at p.251'. However the standard of proof-correcting in this substantial volume is very high. A few errors have been noted: for example, p.66 n.74, lines 3-4, should read '*in honour of R. H. Robbins*'; p.67 n.82, should read 'BL.: Harl. MS.'; p.72 n.107 line 1, should read 'See G. L. Harriss'. Exceptionally the volume number of *History* in which Tanner's 'Westminster Abbey . . .' appeared is not provided on p.76 n.119, or in the 'Bibliography' at p.453; it is XXI.