

SUMMARY: The excerpt below is taken from Kincaid's edition of Sir George Buck's handwritten manuscript of *The History of King Richard the Third*, BL MS Cotton Tiberius E.X. See Kincaid, Arthur Noel, ed., *The History of King Richard the Third (1619) By Sir George Buck, Master of the Revels*, (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing Limited, 1979).

The manuscript was badly damaged by fire, and Kincaid has placed within square brackets all material which is no longer legible in the original, and which has been supplied from other copies of the manuscript, principally BL MS Egerton 2216, a mid-17th century copy written by a scribe (see Kincaid, *supra*, p. liii).

In this excerpt below, Sir George Buck (bap. 1560, d. 1622), a Yorkist and an apologist for Richard III, recounts a prophecy involving the prominent Lancastrian, John de Vere (1442-1513), 13th Earl of Oxford, in which a hermit foretold that the 13th Earl and his house would repent the execution of Perkin Warbeck (c.1474-1499), a claimant to the English throne whom Buck viewed not as an imposter, but as the real Duke of York, one of the two young princes who had been imprisoned by Richard III in the Tower and who were both allegedly murdered. Buck purports to find fulfilment of the hermit's prophecy in the fact that the 13th Earl was shortly thereafter arrested and fined £30,000 by Henry VII for a minor offence, and that he died without issue. In a marginal note in Kincaid's edition, the Earl of Arundel is cited, *viva voce*, as authority for the amount of this fine. However, if there was a marginal note mentioning the Earl of Arundel in the original manuscript, it was burned away by fire, and Kincaid has supplied it from the scribal copy, BL MS Egerton 2216. See Kincaid, *supra*, pp. cxi, 169.

In the index, Kincaid identifies the Earl of Arundel who was the source for the £30,000 fine as Thomas Howard (1585-1646), 14th Earl of Arundel, 4th Earl of Surrey, and 1st Earl of Norfolk. However Thomas Howard was not born until 1585, and was thus much too young to have had any personal knowledge of a fine levied on the 13th Earl of Oxford. Buck's source is more likely to have been Henry Fitzalan (1512-1580), 12th Earl of Arundel, or perhaps the 12th Earl's heir, Philip Howard (1557-1595), 13th Earl of Arundel, son of Oxford's first cousin, Thomas Howard, 4th Duke of Norfolk.

Buck purports to find further fulfilment of the hermit's prophecy in the sale of almost all the lands of the earldom in the 17th Earl of Oxford's lifetime, although Buck exonerates Oxford of any blame, calling it the result of 'divine ordinance'. To underscore the point that it was not Oxford's fault, Buck praises Oxford as devout, magnificent, learned, religious and truly noble, a man more likely, in the estimation of those of good judgment, to have established a new earldom than to have lost an old one. Buck states that he had been personally acquainted with Oxford, who had died 15 years earlier in 1604, and cites an incident in which Oxford visited him in his lodgings at Hampton Court and told him that when the lands of the earldom were returned to him after his wardship ended in 1571/2 a group of rich men had offered to 'farm' the lands, that is, to rent them out at their own prices, paying Oxford £12,000 annually, and leaving to his occupation all the usual residences of the earldom together with the parks and woods.

Alan Nelson accepted the figure of £12,000 uncritically. See Nelson, Alan H., *Monstrous Adversary; The Life of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), p. 70:

Lured like moths to his apparent new-found wealth, a financial syndicate approached Oxford with an offer of £12,000 per annum for financial control of his 'stately Erledome'. Though he might thus have enjoyed a life of great comfort, he opted instead for a life of reckless expenditure, which he would sustain for some fifteen years only by treating his lands as liquid assets.

Nelson cites as his source Thomas Wilson's manuscript *The State of England Anno Dom. 1600* (for which see TNA SP 12/280 on this website):

I find great alterations almost every year, so mutable are worldly things and worldly men's affairs. As namely the Earl of Oxford, who in the year 1575 was rated at 12,000 a year sterling, within 2 following was vanished and no name of him found, having in that time prodigally spent and consumed all even to the selling of the stones, timber and lead of his castles and houses, and yet he liveth and hath the first place amongst earls.

It should be noted that Wilson does not mention an offer by a syndicate, but instead states that Oxford's lands were 'rated' at £12,000 in 1575. Moreover Wilson does not use the phrase 'stately earldom' which Alan Nelson encloses in quotation marks on p. 70. It thus seems that Alan Nelson's source for both the offer to Oxford from a syndicate and the phrase 'stately earldom' was Kincaid's edition of Buck's manuscript, despite the fact that Kincaid is not cited in Alan Nelson's endnotes or bibliography.

Although according to his manuscript Sir George Buck heard the story of the syndicate's offer directly from Oxford, no reliance can be placed on the figure of £12,000 since that section of the original manuscript in Buck's hand was subsequently damaged by fire, and Kincaid has supplied the word 'twelve' before the words 'thousand pounds' from BL MS Egerton 2216. As noted above, BL MS Egerton is a mid-17th century copy in the hand of a scribe. Moreover £12,000 per annum is a fantastic figure since all the extant documents indicate that Oxford inherited lands from his father, John de Vere, 16th Earl of Oxford, worth approximately £2200 in annual rental value. The 'clear yearly value' of the 16th Earl's lands on 1 July 1562 when the 16th Earl entered into a contract for his son and heir's marriage to a sister of the 3rd Earl of Huntingdon was stated to be £2000 per annum (see HL HAP o/s Box 3(19)). The annual rental value of the 16th Earl's lands in the 16th Earl's inquisition post mortem dated 18 January 1563 totals £2187 2s 7d (see TNA C 142/136/12). WARD 8/13, a Court of Wards accounting document for the period 29 September 1563 to 29 September 1564, gives the total value of the 16th Earl's lands as £2233 13s 7d. When Oxford sued his livery in 1572, the sum charged by the Court of Wards as the fine for his livery was £1257 (see Cecil Papers 25/105). According to Hurstfield, the fine for suing a special livery was slightly more than half the value of the ward's lands. See Hurstfield, Joel, *The Queen's Wards*, (London: Frank Cass, 1973), pp. 172-3. When the evidence of these documents is taken into consideration, it is clear that

the figure of £12,000 is almost six times the actual value of the annual revenue of approximately £2200 pounds which Oxford inherited from the 16th Earl. It thus seems likely that, if there was an offer made to Oxford by a syndicate, the amount which was offered to Oxford was £2000, and that the person who copied Buck's original as BL MS Egerton 2216 misread the original word or numeral '2' or 'two' as '12' or 'twelve'. See also Christopher Paul's discussion of the figure of £12,000 with Arthur Noel Kincaid in Paul, Christopher, 'A Crisis of Scholarship: Misreading the Earl of Oxford', *The Oxfordian*, Vol. IX, 2006, p. 110 at:

<https://shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org/the-oxfordian/>

Another possible explanation for the erroneous figure of £12,000 per annum which the syndicate is said to have offered is that there may have been a story circulating at the time concerning John de Vere (1499-1526), 14th Earl of Oxford, who died without issue, and who, according to Wright, was offered £12,000 a year for his lands. See Wright, Thomas, *The History and Topography of the County of Essex*, Vol. I, (London: George Virtue, 1836), pp. 515-16 at:

<https://books.google.ca/books?id=SgQVAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA515>

The last John de Vere [=John de Vere, 13th Earl of Oxford] dying without issue, was succeeded by the son of his brother, Sir George: he was knight of the garter, and called Little John of Campes, from Castle Campes, where the family had a seat and castle. He was also named John the wise, the good, and the rich, which last term at least was strictly appropriate; for, on his accession to the earldom, he was offered £12,000 a year for his estates; leaving, in his occupation, all manors, houses, castles, parks, woods, forests, and all the demesne lands thereto belonging; the yearly value of which last might be more than many present earldoms. They also had the advowsons of several churches; and of the priories of Blackmore, Colne, Hatfield Broad Oak, Hedingham, Trenhalle, and Swaffham. This earl, dying in 1526, without surviving offspring, his sisters became his heirs to all the estates not entailed to the heirs male. He was buried at Colne Priory.

Another possible explanation for errors in this portion of the manuscript is that Buck left his original manuscript 'in a rough state of completion, heavily revised and often with decisions not made between revision' (p.lxiv), and after revising, sometimes failed to provide new transitional passages. Kincaid writes:

An example of such failure occurs in Book III, the book in which, because of the extreme difficulty in organization, most rewriting occurs. Originally the anecdote about the Earl of Oxford followed the story of Perkin Warbeck directly, but Buck has revised so as to insert more material before it and has failed to write a new transitional passage when he introduces it later, so it appears stuck on. (p. cxxxiii).

Kincaid might well have added that Buck inserted the anecdote involving the 17th Earl of Oxford into the *middle* of the story of the 13th Earl of Oxford and Perkin Warbeck without proper transition since the two final paragraphs which follow the anecdote

concerning the 17th Earl, and which refer to 'this Earl John de Vere', clearly relate back to the earlier material concerning the 13th Earl and Perkin Warbeck and the hermit's prophecy.

The confusion occasioned by Buck's revision of his original manuscript was compounded by Buck's great-nephew, who made 'alterations and corrections in the manuscript' (p.lxv), and in the process of revision, attempted to 'dispose of the work's autobiographical aspects (p.lxviii). In particular, Kincaid notes that 'The reference to the Earl of Oxford's conversation with Buck about the revenue of his land (ff. 209-10) is deleted and the information given with no personal reference'. These latter facts provide additional reasons for doubting the figure of £12,000 discussed above.

Kincaid might also have noted that Buck's claim that less than 60 years after the 13th Earl's death the lands of the Oxford earldom were almost all dilapidated and spoiled, and that the chapel in which the 13th Earl had been buried had been razed to the ground and the bones of the ancient earls 'left under the open air and in the fields', is clearly impossible. Since the 13th Earl died in 1513, this would mean that the entire Oxford earldom had been destroyed by the time Oxford reached the age of majority in 1571, and that the group of rich men whom Buck claims offered to pay Oxford £12,000 a year to farm the lands of the earldom circa 1571/2 were prepared to pay £12,000 a year to farm lands and buildings which had been utterly wasted and destroyed.

There is obviously something more fundamentally at fault with this section of Buck's original manuscript than a mere tacking on of the anecdote involving the 17th Earl of Oxford to the story of the 13th Earl and Perkin Warbeck. Buck's credibility with respect to the entire story of the hermit's prophecy is very much called into question by his impossible statement that within 60 years of the 13th Earl's death in 1513 (i.e. before 1573) the lands and buildings of the Oxford earldom had been wasted and that the bones of the earls of Oxford formerly buried at Colne Priory were lying in the fields in the open air. Oxford owned Colne Priory (where the 13th Earl was entombed) until Roger Harlakenden (d.1604) defrauded him of it in the 1590s (see Oxford's lawsuit against Roger Harlakenden on this website), and thus Buck's statement that the entire Oxford earldom was 'wasted' and 'the castles and manors pulled down', and the chapel at Colne Priory where the 13th Earl was buried was razed to the ground and the bones of the Earls of Oxford were strewn about within 60 years after the 13th Earl's death (i.e. by 1573) is clearly erroneous, although it would not be surprising to learn that Roger Harlakenden and his successors had the chapel at Colne Priory demolished after Oxford's death in 1604 and before Buck's death in 1622, and that Buck may have seen this destruction first-hand.

Another possible explanation for the impossible time frame in which Buck claims the destruction of buildings took place is that, as noted above, Buck revised this section of his manuscript without providing proper transition. In fact Buck may have intended the revised passage to state that within 60 years of the death of Oxford's father, John de Vere (1516-1562), 16th Earl of Oxford, i.e. by 1622, the chapel at Colne Priory where the 13th Earl 'was entombed and where all the sepulchres and goodly monuments of his ancestors

were erected were all defaced and demolished and razed to the ground, and the bones of the ancient earls were left under the open air and in the fields'. As mentioned above, this might very well have happened after the Harlakenden family took over Colne Priory.

The meeting between Oxford and Buck in Buck's lodgings at Hampton Court likely took place in the late 1590s when Buck was an envoy to the Queen from the Cadiz expedition and later an Esquire of the Body, but Oxford and Buck would have known each other much earlier than that because Buck had close connections to the Howard family, as did Oxford, and particularly to Charles Howard, the Lord Admiral, who recommended Buck to Queen Elizabeth.

According to the *ODNB*, Buck had essentially completed *The History of King Richard the Third* by 1619, although the manuscript was still 'in a state of incomplete revision'. Sir John Astley took over from Buck as Master of the Revels on 29 March 1622, and on 12 of that year Buck was 'declared a lunatic'.

In 1621 Sir Francis Bacon also wrote a version of the story of the fine allegedly imposed by Henry VII on the 13th Earl, stating that 'the earl compounded for no less than 15,000 marks'. Ross discusses both Bacon's and Buck's versions of the story, and finds them unlikely to be true, particularly since there is no contemporary record of such a fine being paid. See Ross, James, *John de Vere, Thirteenth Earl of Oxford (1542-1513): 'The Foremost Man of the Kingdom'*, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2011), pp. 141-2.

NOTE: Kincaid's conjectural emendations to the text are shown in italics in the excerpt below, while material which Kincaid has supplied from BL MS Egerton 2216, including the word 'twelve' and the four marginal notes, is enclosed in square brackets.

[The Earl of Oxenford persecutor of Perkin]

Now I will add to the tragedy *of these Plantagenets one act more, and of the Earl of Oxford*, and worthy to be well regarded [for example's sake,] besides that here it also may make [somewhat for the cause] and for the innocency of the two young men, *Edward, Earl of Warwick and Richard, Duke of York*. And this it is. [T]he Earl of Oxford, Sir John de Vere, *who was much affected and devoted to this King Henry VII, as we have seen here by some good instances*, was a great ene[my to] this Richard, alias Perkin, and I think the only [en]emy which he had of the greater nobility. And wheth[er his] evil will grew out of incredulity, or were it out of malice, *or because he hated King Edward and all the House of York*, or else because he applied himself very obsequiously [to o]bserve and to humour the king then reigning in everything, but [I] cannot determine whether of these. But this is certain, [th]at he was so vehement a persecutor of Perkin as that he and t[he Cardinal were] said to be the chief persuaders and procurers of *the more hasty dispatching of Perkin out of the way and of his destruction*. And this Earl also [pronounced the] cruel [sentence against the] Earl of Warwick, son of the Duke of

Clarence (for he was High Judge or Constable in that *action*), [whose dealing thus in those matters] *was much* disliked.

[This Earl John died anno 4, Henry VIII, 1512]

[Dominus de Arun., viva voce]

And this dealing with them being reported, and near to Heveningham Castle, [t]he chief seat of the Earl, it came to the ears of an [old] hermit who lived in the woods near to Heveningham [*Cas*]tle, and who was held to be a very good and devout [and] holy man. And this man as soon as he heard this *news* was much troubled and grieved afterward, because he much [loved the ancient and noble family of Oxenford. And in] much anguish of spirit, he said the Earl and his house would repent and rue this [guilt] and bloody pursuit of these innocent princes. And for the events of [which prophecy,] this hath been observed, viz., that not [long after the Earl] was arrested for a small offence, [and so small that no man thought] that a man of [his merit and credit with the king could be called in question. He was fined also £30000, the which in those days was a kingly sum. After this he lived many years in great discontent, and died without issue or any child la]wfully begotten him.

And in much [shorter time than his] life's time, that great and stately [earldom of Oxenford, with the] very opulent and princely patri[mony was dissipated] and wasted, and it was very suddenly *and swiftly used* and consumed, and como sal en agua, [as the Spaniar]ds say in the refrain. But not by the fault *of the Earl* then lord thereof, but rather by the fate of the *divine ordinance*. For certainly the Earl was *a devout* and a magnificent and a very learned and religious [nobleman,] and so worthy in every way, as I have heard some grave and [di]screet and honourable persons (who knew this Earl from his *youth* and could very well judge of the hopefulness and the *springtimes* of young men) say and affirm that he was much more like to raise and to acquire and to establish a new earldom than to decay *and waste* and lose an old earldom. And in a word, he was a *Vere* in deed as in name, *vere nobilis*. For he was *verily* and truly noble, and a most noble *Vere*.

[The mathematicians that calculated the nativity of this Earl Edward told the Earl his father than the earldom would fall in the son's time.]

And I speak *that* which I know, for he vouchsafed me his familiar *acquaintance*. And whereas I call this earldom a stately [earldom], and a princely patrimony, I do so *after the testimony* of that aforesaid most noble and late Earl of Oxford, who, being pleased to do me the honour to come to my lodging at Hampton *Court*, there he told me that after he was come to the possession [of it,] there were certain rich and *prosperous men* who desired to farm a part of his earldom, who offered to pay him yearly the *sum of* [twelve] thousand pounds, and to leave to his use and [occupation all] castles and manor-houses and wonted *places* of residences of the ancient earls, with *all* the parks and woods or forests. And all the *demesne* lands thereunto adjacent and appertaining *to* this surplusage might doubtless be of more worth, being brought to a yearly value or *revenue*, than are sundry earldoms in this age.

And this earldom was wasted and almost all dilapidated and spoiled, and the castles and manors pulled do[wn,] and the chapel wherein this Earl John de Vere was entombed and where all the sepulchres and goodly monuments of his ancestors were erected *were* all defaced and demolished and razed to the ground, and the bones of the ancient earls *were* left under the open air and in the fields, and all [which happened] within less than threescore years after the death of the said Earl John.

It is a warning not to lift a finger in the shedding of innocent blood, nor to wrong nor to oppress, much less to destroy princes nor the children of princes and of heroical persons. And thereof we are *warned* to take heed by the ancient oracle or sacred proverb *in* this heroical hemistich:

Heroum proles est pernicioosa vivorum.

That is to say, children of heroical *lineage*, of princes or (as we say) those of the *blood royal*, are dangerous and mischievous *things when* they be outraged.