

# MAPPING THE LORDSHIP OF BOWLAND

## William Bowland

Today, the lordship of Bowland is an “incorporeal hereditament”, a title that is deemed to be property in its own right and therefore hereditary but that comes without land.

However, throughout much of its long history, the lordship depended on land – having been founded on a grant of land and for many hundreds of years, deemed to be co-extensive with it.

This nexus between land and lordship is historical. To be Lord of Bowland in the eleventh century meant something very different than it does in the twenty-first. Yet, it is possible to trace continuities between the two. Such continuities depend on property. Furthermore, any customary rights pertaining to that lordship, such as the right to appoint a Bowbearer or to convene a forest court, must also have their origins in property.

There can be no question that mapping the lordship of Bowland, assigning it a precise territorial footprint is a complex task but it is by no means an impossible one.

Of course, the challenges are real. The historical record shows that the boundaries of Bowland have shifted and changed, sometimes radically, over the centuries while the name *Bowland* has found itself used to describe a variety of overlapping, sometimes even conflicting geographies.

Perhaps no place name better exemplifies this confusion than Bolton-by-Bowland which at times in its history, particularly in the early modern period, is often described as Bolton-*in*-Bowland.

Yet, while the great Perambulations of the Forest of Bowland in the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries placed Bolton firmly outside the Forest, they chose at the very same time not to draw a distinction between the western and eastern parts of Bowland, the Forest and the Liberty.

Such confusion persists. Today’s Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is many times greater than its historic counterpart. The AONB created in the 1960s covers approximately 300 miles, extending west to Scorton, east to Tosside, north to High Bentham encompassing areas that lie well outside what might traditionally be considered Bowland.

It also seems there are multiple ways to look at Bowland across time – in terms of its ancient townships; its manorial organisation; its parish boundaries; its topography and landscape; its governance. Bowland is not and never has been a fixed quantity.

For all this, the historical record we possess is a strong one and it provides a robust foundation on which to base our research.

## **BOWLAND (PRE-1090)**

The lands of modern-day Bowland are thought to have formed part of the ancient British kingdom of Rheged whose southern capital may have been at Ribchester. These lands were absorbed into the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria in the seventh century. In turn, as Northumbrian influence waned, the westernmost areas of Bowland became part of Amounderness, a territory forged by the Norse chieftain Agmundr in the early tenth century.

In 926, Amounderness was annexed by Aethelstan, king of the West Saxons, as a spoil of war. In 934, he granted it to Wulfstan I, Archbishop of York. According to Aethelstan's grant, Amounderness at that time stretched "from the sea along the Cocker to the source of that river, from that source straight to another spring which is called in Old English, *Dunshop*, thus down the riverlet to the Hodder, in the same direction to the Ribble and thus along that river through the middle of the channel to the sea". As such, Amounderness encompassed a significant portion of what we would now consider western and south-western Bowland.

In his 1922 study of Lancashire place names, Ekwall thus describes the eastern boundary of Amounderness as "being formed by the fells on the Yorkshire border"; a description which places the ancient boundary firmly within the modern-day Forest of Bowland. While it is difficult to pinpoint *Dunshop*, the confluence of the rivers Dunsop and Hodder at Dunsop Bridge seems a likely locale, situated as it is close to the eastern mouth of the Trough of Bowland whose Grey Stone marks the line of the pre-1974 county boundary.

Contrary to the popular accounts, the origins of the name *Bowland* have nothing to do with archery ("the land of the bow") or with medieval cattle farms or vaccaries (Old Norse, *buu-*, farmstead). The name derives from the Old Norse *boga-/bogi-*, meaning a "bend in a river".

The late eleventh-century *Bogeuurde* is an instance of this usage – a place name thought to designate Barge Ford (formerly known as *Boward Ford*), an ancient ford that sits on the wide, pronounced bend of the Hodder at its confluence with Foulscapes Brook, southwest of Newton.

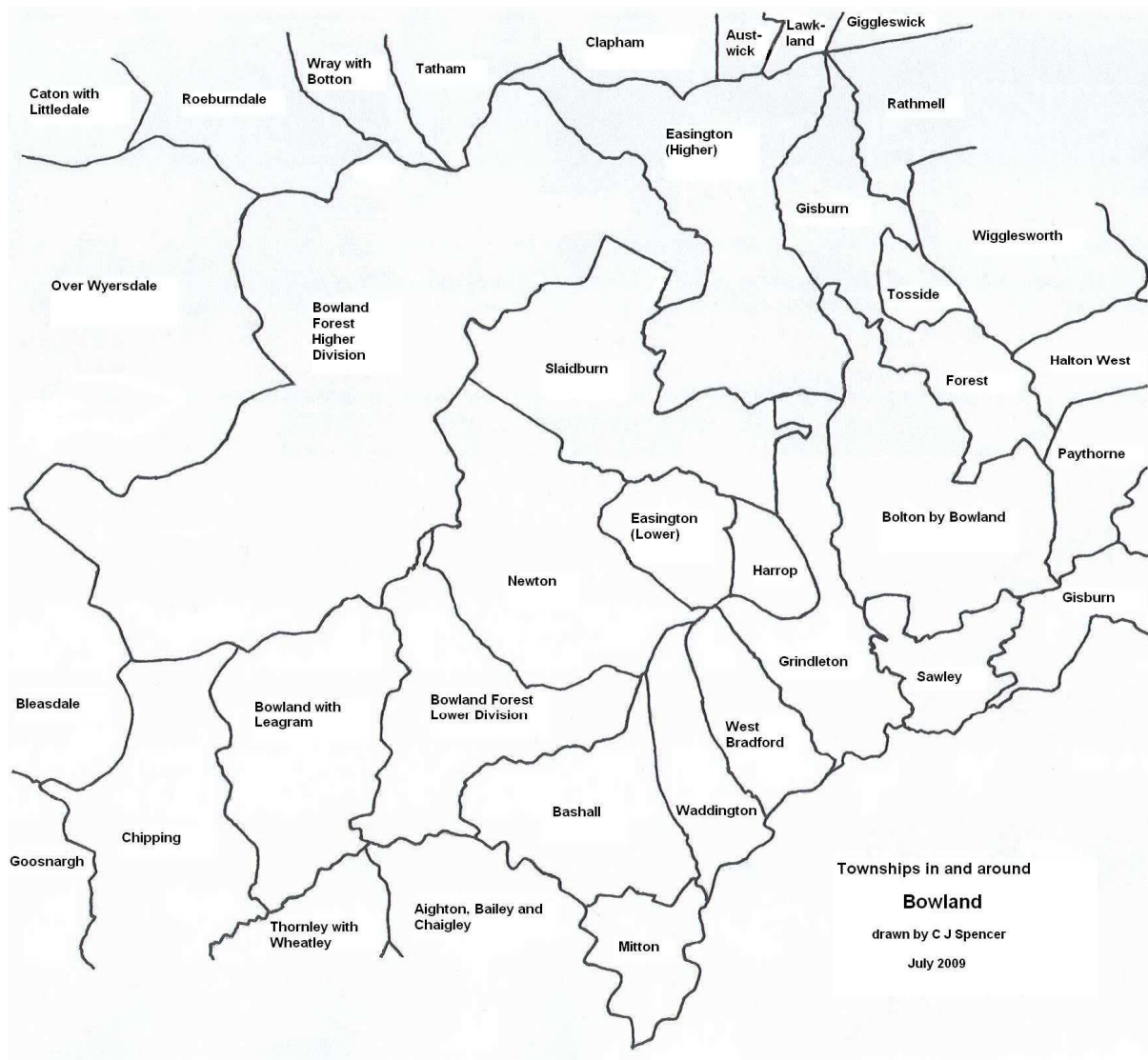
The characterisation of the topography of the Hodder basin, with its meandering river and streams, as *Bowland* by Norse settlers must have occurred during the period of

the Viking Kings of York, that is in the final quarter of the ninth century or in the first quarter of the tenth (875-925).

### FOREST OF BOWLAND (1090-1399)

At the time of the Norman Conquest, Bowland was held by Tosti, son of Godwin, Earl of Wessex . However, there was no Anglo-Saxon *Forest of Bowland*.

As a feudal entity, the Forest of Bowland was created by the Normans sometime after 1090. The Forest and its lordship were granted by William Rufus to his vassal Roger de Poitou, possibly to reward Poitou for his campaign against the Scots. In all likelihood, it was this grant that subsumed the eastern portion of Amounderness into Bowland and in so doing, established the boundaries of the early lordship of the Forest.



At this point, Bowland, the Forest of Bowland and the Lordship of Bowland would have been largely co-extensive. In probability, the area covered would have approximated that of the ten townships of modern-day Bowland, namely Bowland Forest High, Bowland Forest Low, Bowland-with-Leagram, Bashall, Mitton, Waddington, West Bradford, Grindleton, Higher and Lower Easington, Slaidburn, Newton, plus the fold of Harrop.

Domesday's failure to mention Bowland just a few years earlier suggests that it is likely to have been its designation as a hunting forest that gave Bowland territorial integrity on this scale. It then continued to serve as a seigneurial chase during the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, with *launds* (enclosed deer parks) at Leagram and Radholme.

However, towards the end of the fourteenth century, when Bowland passed to the Duchy of Lancaster and in so doing, became a royal forest, wholesale tenurial reorganisation occurred. The most significant feature of this reorganisation was the subordination of the Domesday manor of Grindleton to the new *caput* manor of Slaidburn as part of the creation of a feudal liberty in the eastern part of Bowland. Forest administration also appears to have shifted from Radholme to Lower Whitewell at this time.

Hence, by the early fifteenth century, the Forest of Bowland was no longer co-extensive with Bowland in its entirety. Indeed, there were two distinct feudal jurisdictions in Bowland that operated under different systems of law, known respectively as the Forest and Liberty of Bowland.

Although both jurisdictions were held in common by the Duke of Lancaster as *Lord King of Bowland*, the Forest of Bowland was now technically the western part of Bowland while the Liberty of Bowland occupied the eastern portion.

Ironically, it was this division – made during the most powerful period of Bowland's history (1399-1661) - that sowed the seeds for the long-term decline of the Forest and its lordship after royal patronage ceased in 1661.

## **FOREST AND LIBERTY OF BOWLAND (1399-1661)**

In eastern Bowland, the new Liberty comprised nine manors over which the Lord King of Bowland had waived his regalian rights. The manors of Waddington, Easington, Knowlmore, Hammerton, Withgill (Crook), Dunnow (Battersby), Bashall, Mitton were thus granted to mesne lords. However, as a *caput* manor, Slaidburn was held in demesne and in turn was granted its own liberty comprising Newton, West Bradford and Grindleton.

The fourteenth-century Forest encompassed what we now know as the civil parishes of Bowland Forest High and Bowland Forest Low, Bowland-with-Leagram, and the

fold of Harrop. Little Bowland (Bowland-with-Leagram) lay in Lancashire rather than the West Riding of Yorkshire for much of its history, perhaps from as early as the twelfth century when the county of Lancashire was formed.

This model of manorial organisation endured until the Restoration. However, the granting of Bowland as part and parcel of the Honor of Clitheroe to the Dukes of Albemarle in the early 1660s coincided with reform of the law of tenure, the abolition of paramountcy and the introduction of property freehold. This effectively left the Liberty of Bowland as an honorific without legal substance and may explain why the Perambulation of that period chose to subsume its former extent under the category of Forest.

### **THE BOWLAND FOREST ESTATE (1835-1885)**

In 1835, after more than more than two centuries of decline, the Forest and Liberty of Bowland were reconfigured for sale as a freehold estate of some 9,000 acres.

Purchased by the Towneley family from the Dukes of Buccleuch, the estate conveyed with it both the Lordship of the Forest of Bowland and the Lordship of the Manor and Liberty of Slaidburn, West Bradford and Grindleton.

In so doing, it misconstrued the Lordship of the Manor and Liberty of Slaidburn as being co-extensive with the medieval Liberty of Bowland.

For the first time, however, this sale provided a detailed rather than a general footprint for the Lordship of the Forest of Bowland. This footprint included land and properties at Radholme Laund, Park Gate, Seed Hill, Lees, Stakes, Wardsley, Lower and Higher Whitewell, Burholme, Sower Barn, Brennand, Whitendale and in Little Bowland. The estate centred on the Hodder Valley from Doeford Bridge in the south to Langden Bridge in the north. It extended as far west as Totridge Fell and east to Browsholme Heights.

### **THE BOWLAND ESTATE (1885-1938)**

The 1885 Towneley Estates Act placed more than 22,000 acres of Bowland into trust for descendants of John Towneley. This included the 9,000 acres from the Bowland Forest Estate of 1835, plus properties and land acquired in the intervening half-century. It also included the Lordship of the Forest of Bowland. However, as it failed to specify the lordship in its schedules, the Act caused the lordship to be overlooked in subsequent transactions and ultimately, to become separated from land.

## **THE WHITEWELL ESTATE (1938-PRESENT)**

Just over a half-century later, in 1938, the purchase by the Duchy of Lancaster of the residuum of the Bowland Estate – some 6,000 acres from the Bowland Forest Estate of 1835 - specifically excluded manors and manorial rights. This exclusion applied to the Lordship of Bowland and in so doing, effectively rendered it an “incorporeal hereditament”, a title without land.

It was to be a further seventy years before the Towneley family finally recovered the title from trust and in 2008, presented it for auction.

Today, the Duchy of Lancaster’s Whitewell Estate incorporates almost all the land that formed the basis of the Lordship of the Forest of Bowland in 1835. Over a period of nine centuries, a territorial lordship that once extended from Wyresdale in the west to Easington in the east, from Tatham in the north to Thornley in the south, has progressively declined, its sway dwindling over time, its influence restricted first to the western part of Bowland, then to the Hodder valley and finally reduced to the mere possession of customary rights.

Today, the Lord of Bowland retains the customary right to appoint Bowbearers and a Chief Steward of the Forest of Bowland. At a push, he might consider convening forest courts that haven’t met since 1835.

In other words, the Lord of Bowland is that most modern of feudal magnates: a lord without land.

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