

PORTRAIT OF A BOWBEARER

William Bowland



Richard Eastwood, the butcher's son who became Bowbearer of the Forest of Bowland

There have been Bowbearers of the Forest of Bowland since the twelfth century. Perhaps the most notorious of these being Nicholas Tempest who was hanged, drawn and quartered at Tyburn in 1537 for his part in the ill-fated Pilgrimage of Grace, the Catholic revolt against Henry VIII.

Thomas Lister Parker (b. 1797) was among the more colourful. His lavish re-modelling of Browsholme Hall led to ruin and bankruptcy while he exploited local history, through his patronage of Thomas Dunham Whitaker, to inflate the glories of his ancestral line. To Lister Parker, we owe the myth of the hereditary Bowbearer – a right he claimed proudly and disingenuously right up to the time of his death in 1858 (his cousin having legally assumed the Bowbearership in 1820 at the time he purchased the Browsholme estate).

However, for much of its long history, the Bowbearership – an ancient ceremonial office bestowed upon an official who accompanied the Lord of Bowland hunting and literally bore his bow – has been a quiet affair, held by the heads of worthy local families and sometimes their sons: the Rawlinsons, the Listers, the Fenwicks. On two occasions only in nine hundred years do we see the office retained within families and across generations for any period of time: by the de Boltons in the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; and by the Parkers in the three centuries after the Restoration.

Early Bowbearers appear to have been *foresters in fee*, holders of their own feudal lands within the Forest. However, the creation of a Royal Forest in the late fourteenth century subordinated the Bowbearer to a Master Forester, a Royal appointee. By Tudor times, the Bowbearer had become more akin to a *chief verderer*, an unpaid official appointed to protect vert and venison and responsible for supervising and assisting in the enforcement of forest laws (Cunliffe Shaw 1956). Such Bowbearers – frequently after the Restoration there were two at any one time – were appointed by the Lord of Bowland’s Forest Court which convened twice-yearly at Whitewell (at what is now the Inn at Whitewell).

This situation changed dramatically after 1835 when Peregrine Towneley’s purchase of the Bowland Forest Estate led to the discontinuance of the Whitewell courts. This in turn led to a fundamental shift in the nature of the office and of the Bowbearer himself. The man at the heart of this shift was Richard Eastwood.

From butcher’s son to lawyer

Richard Eastwood (1801-71), son of Burnley butcher, Henry Eastwood, was a lawyer by training. Articled to the solicitors’ firm of Grimshaws, he married Anne Grimshaw, youngest daughter of Nicholas Grimshaw, in 1821, after the early death of his first wife. He set up his own firm, Buck and Eastwood, shortly afterwards and in 1840, moved to Swinshawe Hall, an estate of some fifty acres near the hamlet of Hapton on the moors a few miles to the west of Burnley. Swinshawe Hall was a Towneley property damaged by fire and in need of renovation (Chapples 1987: 35).



Swinshawe Hall, Hapton

From lawyer to Bowbearer

After 1846, Eastwood joined Colonel Charles Towneley, 12th Lord of Bowland, as his land agent for the Towneley estates, including the Forest of Bowland. He appears to have adopted the historic title *Bowbearer of the Forest of Bowland* at this time.

The Bowland Forest Estate purchased in 1835 had originally comprised some 9,000 acres of “the Forest and Liberty or Wapentake of Bowland”. However, the Towneleys had been acquiring land in the area well before 1835 and continued to purchase property in stages thereafter (Chapples 1987). By the time of his death, Peregrine Towneley had amassed a total 17,800 acres of Bowland (Lewis 1848).

When Colonel Charles Towneley inherited the family’s Lancashire and Yorkshire estates, including the enlarged Bowland Forest Estate, in 1846, times were inauspicious. After the protracted economic downturn of the 1840s, the repeal of the Corn Laws had led to a steep decline in cereal prices that was to herald three decades of agricultural depression. Ever falling income from copyhold rents did nothing to help balance the books.

Like any businessman under pressure, Charles Towneley sought to diversify – and Eastwood drove these changes. Dixon (1862) describes the transformation that took place across Bowland at this time: “those who remember the killing of the last buck have long since grown into greybeards, and when antlers were extinct, the curved horn of the Lonk King reigned paramount on the dark heather sides, and up the ash and sycamore gulleys of the Forest of Bowland, of which Mr Richard Eastwood is the Bowbearer”. It was said that the Bowbearer himself had a flock of more than two thousand lonks (Pennine sheep), cross-breeds, Shropshires and Southdowns spread across the fells and grasslands of Bowland (Dixon 1895).

Eastwood was also involved in a silver mining venture at Sykes and instrumental in creating the Towneley stud at Root Hill, near Dunsop Bridge. A contemporary account written by Thomas Lawley in 1869 states: “Root Stud Farm, which is the property of Colonel Towneley, is under the direction of Mr Eastwood, and both these gentlemen are distinguished ... as breeders of racehorses. In the management of the stud, Mr Eastwood, one of the few sportsmen we have left that breed and race for honour rather than for self ... is assisted by Richard Heseltine, a careful steady servant who has held the situation on the Towneley estates for nearly thirty years. Many high class racehorses whose names will be familiar to all racing men have been reared at the Stud”.

From Root Stud Farm, Eastwood produced an Oaks winner, *Butterfly*, in 1860. In 1861, Charles Towneley’s *Kettledrum* won the Epsom Derby, a triumph commemorated in the celebrated portrait by Harry Hall which now hangs at Towneley Hall (Dixon 1862, 1895):



Kettledrum, with Richard Eastwood on the far right

Trained but not bred by Eastwood, the chestnut was named after the Kettledrum Pit sunk on the Towneleys' Stella estates at Stanley in County Durham in 1859.

Eastwood's combined winnings from the Oaks and Derby – some £700 - allowed him to buy land from Charles Towneley on which to build St Hubert's at Dunsop Bridge, a Catholic chapel designed by Edward Pugin, dedicated to the patron saint of hunting ("Opening of a New Catholic Chapel, in the Forest of Bowland", *Preston Guardian*, 27 September 1865).



The porch of St Hubert's with Richard Eastwood's tomb to its left

The chapel houses the Towneley family vault and Eastwood himself has his tomb at the front of the chapel, in a commanding position opposite the lych gate.

In its early years, Masses were provided by the Jesuits from nearby Stonyhurst. However, there have been seventeen resident incumbent priests since 1874. According to a speech given by the present incumbent Monsignor John Chaloner in 1993, one of his predecessors, Father Austin Forkin, was something of an eccentric. In the early 1950s, Father Forkin kept goats, pigs and hens at St Hubert's and even cooped hens in the Towneley Memorial enclosure. Valuable and revered collection plates were often used as feeding troughs for the livestock.

The chapel contains many charming sculptural features including a horse's head, a kettledrum and Eastwood's own coat of arms:



The Eastwood family arms

A contemporary newspaper account paints a memorable portrait of the chapel:

“St Hubert's ... is a gem set in a dull and forbidding background, if viewed in winter, and then it rarely sees a congregation of more than 50. Seen in the bright sunshine of a more favourable season, however, it becomes a pearl in a link of precious stones, gracing the bosom of the hills, and then it attracts far larger groups, far more admirers”.

All-in-all, the 1860s marked the peak of Eastwood's career. According to his obituary in the *Burnley Express*, Eastwood's “lithographic likeness was in nearly every farmer's house on the Towneley Estates” during this period. Similarly, an account from the *Preston Guardian* from Saturday 27 September 1862 records his leading role at that year's Whitewell Fair and Show of Stock:

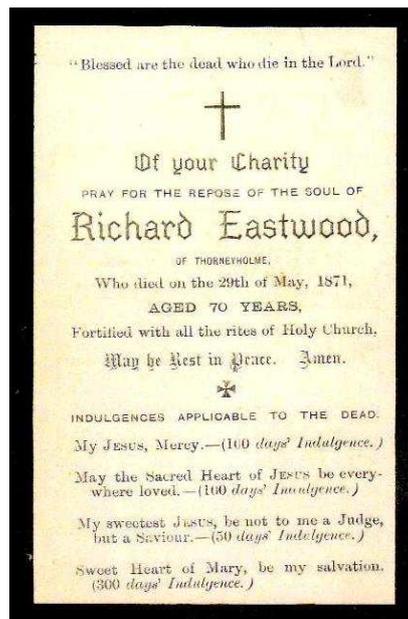
“After the show, upwards of forty gentlemen sat down to dinner, at the Whitewell Inn. Rd. Eastwood, Esq., of Swinshaw, near Burnley, and Thornihaugh, near Whitewell, the agent of Lieut.-Colonel Towneley, and bowbearer of the forest of Bowland, presided ... After dinner, it was announced that a sale of cattle and sheep, at which Mr. Holgate, of Clitheroe, wielded the hammer, was going on. This, and the fineness of the day, somewhat thinned the company. Nevertheless, the after dinner proceedings were of an interesting character”.

On his 5,000-acre Thorneyholme Hall estate, Eastwood bred shorthorn cattle, including a prize bull, aptly-named *The Duke of Bowland*, which he sold to the Duke of Buccleuch for a handsome sum (Sinclair 1907):



The Duke of Bowland

Due to failing health, Eastwood sold his prize herd of shorthorns to his neighbour, Sir Jonathan Peel of Knowlmere, in 1871. He died in May that same year of hepatitis and jaundice while staying with relatives in Poulton-le-Fylde, near Blackpool.



Eastwood's memorial card

Bowland after Eastwood

Eastwood wrought many changes during his time in Bowland. After his death, the office of Bowbearer fell into abeyance until it was revived by the 16th Lord of Bowland in 2009. The Bowland estates themselves went into decline. After 1871, the management of the Bowland Forest Estate devolved into the hands of professional land agents – most notably, from the 1880s, father and son, Frank and Noel Parmeter, with Frank Parmeter based at Middle Lees in Bowland.

On Charles Towneley's death in 1876, the administration of the family estates passed to his younger brother, John (b. 1806). As 13th Lord, John Towneley, a former MP for Beverley, preferred his London home in Carlton House Terrace to life in the Forest or the grandeur of Towneley Hall.

John's reign was short-lived, blighted by the early death of his only son and heir, Richard, who died in 1877. John himself died in London a year later. Both father and son are interred in the family vault at St Hubert's.

With no male member of the family to continue the administration of the Towneley estates, the family was compelled to seek a Private Act of Parliament to enable assets to be distributed.

After seven years in which administration lay with John Towneley's widow (Anderson 1970), the 1885 Towneley Estates Act "authorised the apportionment of the estate between the seven beneficiaries, the two surviving daughters of Charles Towneley, plus the family of his daughter Lady Norreys, who had died in 1873, and the four daughters of John Towneley" (Chapples 1987: 43).

By the late 1920s, the management of affairs had shifted to offices in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, perhaps to better accommodate Towneley family interests in the Stella Estate in County Durham. From that point on, it was the Clitheroe Estate Company based at Clitheroe Castle that administered affairs in Bowland on the Parmeters' behalf.

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