



The name 'Bowland' has nothing to do with archery (the land of the bow) or with mediaeval cattle farms but from the Old Norse 'boga' or 'bogi', meaning a bend in a river. In this case, the Hodder.



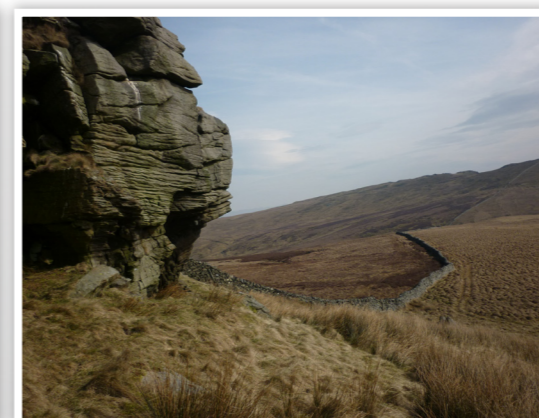
The origins of the Lordship are thought to have been created by William Rufus (William II, 1087-1100) and was granted to his Roger de Poitou. After 1351, it was administered as part of the Duchy of Lancaster and, from 1399, a possession of the Crown. The Lordship of Bowland eventually descended through the Montagu and Buccleuch and Towneley families. Ownership of the title became confused after it was lost in 1885.



Robert Parker, of Browsholme Hall, was appointed the bowbearer of the estate. His relatives held the position for almost 200 years from 1662. Perhaps the most notorious Bowbearer of the Forest of Bowland was Sir Nicholas Tempest, executed at Tyburn in 1537, who was one of the northern leaders of a Catholic uprising against Henry VIII.



Picture: Alexander P. Kapp - From geograph.org.uk



From left – the Cross of Greet, Bowland Knotts and the Grey Stone mark the boundaries of the Bowland lands



William, 16th Lord of Bowland, is a fellow at one of the older Cambridge colleges. The university's students and dons will be no strangers to farming as the land around some of the colleges (as here at King's) is pasture

He prefers to stay anonymous, but being the Lord of Bowland and maintaining its ancient

traditions and duties is a task William takes extremely seriously, as JOYCE BISHOP reveals

Lord of the Fells...

guardian of history

WILLIAM, 16th Lord of Bowland, wonders whether he should break with tradition and, unlike his predecessors, move into the area.

You suspect he will not, partly because it would not fit in with his other life as an academic, researcher and new dad, but also because he doesn't look like someone who tramples lightly over the past.

On the contrary, this is a man who has spent the last few years researching the history of the Lords and Lord Kings of Bowland and is committed to restoring and retaining tradition, not doing away with it.

Since he took on the title 'for a few thousand pounds' in 2009, he has demon-

strated this commitment by reinstating two positions associated with the Lord of the Fells, as it is also known: the chief steward and the bowbearer.

It would be easy to dismiss anyone who has bought a lordship: you can turn yourself into a lord or a lady for less than £20 if all you desire is two square foot of land in the Lake District.

But the Bowland lordship is in a league of its own. Having been around since the 11th century, it is one of the most ancient lordships in the British Isles. However, its existence and ownership became confused after it was lost in 1885, so that when it was rediscovered by a freelance researcher in 2008 there was a lot of unravelling to do in order to establish

exactly who owned the title.

William, a youthful looking 54-year-old, who will not reveal his real name, explains: "The researcher got confused over the Towneley family succession to the title and, in what is admittedly a hugely complex piece of legal detective work, inadvertently muddled some of the lines of legal proof."

It was this error that resulted in a number of potential claimants to the title – Sir Simon Towneley, Lord Clitheroe, the Duchy of Lancaster and, finally, Lord O'Hagan, second cousin to Sir Simon, who sparked controversy by putting the title up for sale. "All those parties thought someone was stealing their property," says William. "A little like someone trying to sell

your car. We had to spend several months disentangling the historic evidence and we finally established that the title was not in the possession of the Duchy and that Lord Clitheroe had no claim. Having reviewed evidence we provided to him, Sir Simon chose to withdraw his claim. This left Lord O'Hagan, a Towneley descendant as the sole remaining claimant."

The lordship, however, failed to reach its reserve at auction, allowing William to secure it by private treaty.

"I was very concerned because we'd done months of work looking at the whole area and the lords of Bowland and I didn't want all that throwing away; that was my real motivation. I decided it was worth trying to save it."

He also admits that he 'quite liked the idea' and, although fitting in the annual three-day visit to the area to fulfil speaking engagements, deliver a lecture and visit local primary schools is clearly difficult, he is determined not to let people down.

"I thought long and hard about my role and decided it should be one of service to the community," he says. "I work very closely with my chief steward Michael Parkinson, the Bowland AONB team and Slaidburn archives and we discuss and agree what to do."

One of his earliest duties involved the reintroduction of two traditional appointments – the chief steward mentioned above and the bowbearer. The latter is of particular significance, not just because it

detracts attention from publicity-shy William, but because the position has gone to Robert Parker of Browsholme Hall, whose relatives were bowbearers for almost 200 years, until the early 1800s.

Despite his assertion that he is 'deeply private', once steered away from the subject of the lordship and on to himself he is, albeit briefly, generous in his response.

He lifts weights for relaxation: "Proper weights" he assures me; shoots game occasionally in Sussex and is the proud dad of a one-year-old son – Master of Bowland – with whom he would like to spend more time.

Well-spoken and dressed in smart, traditional clothing, William has links with Bowland that can be traced back to the

late 1600s. He describes his family as middle class but when pressed about his upbringing adds: "I'm not an aristocrat; but I did go to private school."

Now, he is a fellow of one of the older and more prestigious Cambridge colleges and an historical linguist specialising in place-name history (onomastics).

All this ... and a lordship. "What began as an academic exercise has taken on a life of its own," he says. "I was amazed at the interest in my buying it. I do enjoy it, of course, but I've also come to realise being the 16th lord carries with it duties and responsibilities and it can be demanding to fulfil those duties, meet everyone's expectations and not disappoint."

As a Lancashire lad himself, William knew Bowland as a child and his annual visits give him a chance to renew that old acquaintance.

"I always go up to the Cross of Greet and Bowland Knotts and that gives me a most commanding view over the landscape," he says.

"That area is probably one of the most amazing and I've seen it in all weather; that's the joy of it."

"Bowland is a uniquely special place, an unspoilt gem, and it's worth celebrating in its own right."
So, might he be tempted to move to Bowland? He is non-committal, instead pointing out: "Not a single Lord of Bowland has lived in the Forest."