

The Funeral of a Grand Aristocrat

An Account of the funeral of George Harry Grey 6th Earl of Stamford and Warrington (1765-1845)

The 6th Earl of Stamford and Warrington was known as a proud aristocrat with a reputation for caring well for his tenants and servants. On the other hand, he obtained a reputation for being harsh on his own family. In his personal life the 6th Earl suffered setbacks and great anxiety, which might have contributed to his irascible nature. His wife developed serious mental health problems, which today may have been diagnosed as being bi-polar. But as her mental health deteriorated she had to be sent far away to live in isolation with an employed carer. The Earl's eldest daughter, Henrietta, eloped with the vicar of Bowdon, the Rev. James Law. This was very much against her father's wishes and for a while he disinherited her. Maria, his second daughter, died at the age of twenty of consumption. She had been sent to the Isle of Wight to find a cure. Both of the 6th Earl's sons also had serious health problems. The elder son and heir predeceased the 6th Earl and his younger son spent the majority of his life in mental institutions. Consequently the 6th Earl, in his sadness and old age, was left to care for a wayward teenage heir who succeeded him as the 7th Earl.



George Harry Grey – 6th Earl of Stamford and Warrington

George Harry Grey, 6th Earl of Stamford and Warrington, died at his Enville house in Staffordshire, on 26th April 1845, of "old age". His earthly remains were brought back to Dunham Massey for interment in the Booth and Grey family vault in St Mary's church, Bowdon. This was the old, galleried, medieval church. The current church was not completed until fifteen years later, during the time of the seventh Earl. He attended his grandfather's elaborate funeral on 7th May 1845. It was widely reported in the press.

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FUNERAL OF THE EARL OF STAMFORD AND WARRINGTON. The remains of the late lamented Earl of Stamford and Warrington were consigned to their last resting place, the family vault, in Bowdon Church, on Wednesday morning last. On no occasion since the interment of the late earl's father, in 1819, has any event occurred to excite so deep and general an interest in the towns of Bowdon, Dunham,

¹ Spelling and punctuation as published in the account

and Altrincham, the inhabitants of which, with scarce exception, sought to mark their respect for the memory of the late nobleman by attending his remains to the grave. As we stated in our last, the death of the noble earl took place on Saturday, the 26th ult., at his mansion at Enville, in Staffordshire. The body was removed from thence on Monday morning, passing through Wolverhampton, between seven and eight o'clock. Stone was the resting-place for the night, and on the following morning the mournful cortege set out for Dunham Hall, where it arrived about two o'clock on Tuesday afternoon.

It was the wish of the relatives that the funeral should, as far possible, be a private one, compliance with the custom that has prevailed in the family for a number of years; otherwise, several gentlemen of Bowdon and the neighbourhood would have sent their carriages; indeed, it is not improbable that half the nobility and gentry of the county would have done so. As it was, the funeral procession, so far as carriages were concerned, was confined to the hearse, seven mourning coaches, and the Earl's carriage, closed, which left Dunham Hall precisely at nine o'clock.

The funeral arrangements were confided to Messrs. Satterfield, of St. Ann's Square ; and the hearse, mourning coaches, and horses, were supplied by Mr. J. Cockshott, of Stevenson's Square. The mourners having taken their places in the carriages, the procession left the hall in following order:—

Two mutemen, bearing the Earl's escutcheon on the mutestaves.

Mr. Lambert, the Earl's valet, on horseback, bearing the Earl's coronet on a velvet cushion. A groom on each side.

The Hearse, drawn by six black horses.

The mourning coach, drawn by four black horses, and containing the Earl of Stamford & Warrington, grandson of the deceased; the Hon. William Booth Grey, brother of the deceased; Sir John Walsh, son-in-law of the deceased; the Rev. James Thomas Law, son-in-law of the deceased.

Two footmen.

The 2nd mourning coach, drawn by four black horses, and containing Mr. Booth Grey, brother-in-law of the deceased; Mr. Walsh, grandson of the deceased; the Rev. G. C. Coates, Mr. Coates—trustees under the will of the deceased.

Two footmen.

The 3d mourning coach, drawn by four black horses, containing Col. Wildman, the Rev G. Heron, of Carrington.

Two footmen.

The 4th mourning coach, drawn by four black horses, and containing Mr. Martin, Steward's Hey. chief agent of the Earl; Mr. J. Martin; Mr. Legh Richmond, his lordship's solicitor on the estate; Mr. Thornton, the land agent.

Two footmen.

The 5th mourning coach, drawn by four black horses, and containing Mr. Broadbent, surgeon, Altrincham; Mr. Belts, surgeon, of Enville.

Two footmen.

The 6th and 7th mourning coaches, each drawn by four black horses, containing the officers of the household, amongst whom were—Mr. Dean, the house steward; Mr. Osgood, the butler; Mr. Burroughs, the head cook, Mr. Beddard, the head gardener at Enville; and Mr. Wilcox, the head gardener at Dunham.

The Earl's carriage, closed, with postillions, drawn by four horses.

The mournful procession slowly wended its way through the park, its progress being anxiously watched by hundreds of spectators who had assembled in groups and lined the road along which it had to pass. The effect of this funereal display in the park, so oft the scene of holiday pastime and juvenile recreation, was most solemn and striking ; while the mementos of the earthly rank and grandeur of the deceased, borne in slow state before his bier, conveyed to all a salutary lesson on the mutability of all earthly things. The morning was cold and gloomy; and shortly after the procession had started the rain began to fall, and continued at intervals during the ceremony.

Arrived at the bottom of the green walk, the procession was met by about 300 of the inhabitants of Bowden and Altrincham, who formed in line, and walked before the hearse and coaches up the walk. The minute-bell of Bowdon Church tolled from seven o'clock in the morning. The head of the procession reached the church gates at about five minutes before ten. At that time the churchyard was densely crowded, and all the approaches thereto were thronged with spectators. Others, anxious to secure good place inside, had entered the church, the side aisles and galleries of which were thrown open ; altogether there must have been upwards of 5,000 persons present.

The greatest order was preserved by the officers of the church and the constables of Altrincham and Bowdon, assisted by a party of the Cheshire county police, under the direction of Mr. Irwin, the special high constable of Bucklow hundred.

At the church gates, the procession was met by the Rev. W. H. G. Mann, Vicar of Bowdon; the Rev. George Heron, of Carrington ; the Rev. Mr. Kinesley, Curate of Bowdon ; the Rev. Dr. Orton, of Altrincham ; the Rev. A. Hulton, of St. Peter's, Ashton; and the Rev. T. T. Eagar, Incumbent of Audenshaw, near Ashton-under-Lyne.

The mourners having left the carriages, the procession re-formed, and entered the church, by the south door, in the following order :—

Two mutes.

The Clergymen, named above. Mr- Betts Mr. Broadbent Mr. Richmond Mr- Martin Mr. Thornton Mr. J. Martin, Mr. Lambert, bearing the Earl's coronet.

THE COFFIN, borne by ten of the Earl's tenantry.

The Hon. W. B. Grey, The Earl of Stamford, Sir John Walsh, The Rev. J. Law, Mr. Walsh, Mr. Booth Grey, Mr. Coates, Col. Wildman, and the Rev. C. Coates. Mr. Osgood Mr. Dunn, Mr. Wilcox Mr. Beddard Mr. Burroughs.

Servants, two-a-breast, about twenty in number.

The gentlemen of the town and neighbourhood.

The church was crowded, especially in the galleries, and those parts commanding a view of the entrance to the vault. The pulpit, reading desk, and altar, and the Dunham Chapel, were hung with black cloth.

The vault is a very spacious one, extending under the whole of the Dunham Chapel; it is entered by a flight of twelve steps on the south side of the chancel. That portion of the vault on the left of the entrance has been filled by former branches of the family, and is now walled up, with the exception of a small aperture. In the more modern portion, the dimensions of which are about 8 yards by 5, are fifteen coffins.

The 15 coffins in the vault are arranged in three tiers; the seven next the extreme end of the vault are somewhat decayed, and the inscriptions effaced; in the next tier are six, comprising those of the late Earl and Countess, a brother of the earl, and a daughter of the earl, recently deceased; also those of "Booth Grey " and " Elizabeth Grey," as shown by a small plate attached to the wall near which the coffins lie.

Those last deposited, and nearest the entrance to the vault, are those of Lord George Harry Grey of Groby, (son of the late, and father of the present earl,) who died in 1835, and Lady Grey, who died last year. Lady Grey's coffin is next the wall on the right hand —her husband's is in the centre; and the space on the other side, next the left-hand wall, was allotted to the remains of the late earl.

The body was inclosed in three coffins, of the usual materials; on the outer one was a metallic plate, bearing the following inscription :—" George Harry, Earl of Stamford and Warrington, born Oct. 31st, 1765; died April 26th, 1845." The outer coffin was of Spanish mahogany, covered with crimson silk velvet, the furniture being of finely-plated metal, with massive handles, and an Earl's coronet and crest on the sides.

The "Dead March Saul" was played by Mr. Forrest, the organist, as the procession entered the church. The body was placed in the middle aisle, in front of the reading desk, and the first portion of the burial service was most impressively read by the Rev. George Heron. The bearers then removed the body up the aisle to the entrance to the vault, where it was followed by the mourners, the organ playing a voluntary by Adams, and the remainder of the service was then read by Mr. Heron.

During this part of the service, the whole of the large congregation remained in their pews, and observed the most orderly attention, the clergymen present and the four churchwardens being all who left their pews, except the family, friends, and domestics, who formed around the vault while the remainder of the service was read. The benediction being pronounced, the mourners each stooped to take a last look at the coffin inclosing the venerable Earl's remains, and they then left the church.

The vault was allowed to remain open for about three hours, during which time it was viewed by an immense number of persons. The flags were then replaced, and the grave closed on the mortal remains of George Harry, Earl of Stamford and Warrington. The present Earl is about 19 years of age; he is at present at Cambridge².

Note: No ladies were present at the Earl's funeral. This was the usual custom at the time.

² There he met, and subsequently married, the daughter of his Cambridge shoemaker. Upon her death in 1854 the 7th Earl remarried a courtesan and circus performer. Both marriages caused a great scandal in his family and amongst the "nouveau riche" wives of Bowdon.