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ARTICLE

The Place of Bearwards in Early Modern England

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Abstract

This article recognizes the significance of commercial entertainment producers in early modern England operating outside of London. In doing so, it offers fresh methodological approaches for understanding pre-modern social status. I explore the geographical and social places of independent bearwards – individuals who kept bears for the commercial sport of baiting. Regional figures involved in entertainment production have been little explored and left behind frustratingly few biographical details. Yet three generations of one family – the Whitestones of Ormskirk in Lancashire (1610s through the 1630s) – do leave substantial surviving documentary evidence about their activities, assets, and networks. I use the Whitestones's probate inventories and wills and their and their neighbours' court depositions and petitions to offer for the first time a holistic appraisal of the material, economic, and cultural circumstances of the bearward. By stepping inside the households and communities of several generations of independent entertainment producers, we can appreciate their complex and variable social status and the role of commercial recreation in social mobility. I finish by considering the human–animal relationships that underpinned the bearward's place in early modern England, offering fresh evidence of bears' living arrangements and a theoretical framework for discussing their exploitation in the blood sport industry.

Almost everyone in early modern England would have known a bearward. In many cases, they were the most prominent purveyors of entertainment in their local area: arranging fights or 'courses' with their bears and travelling around the region throughout the year. This article considers the *place* of such bearwards, both geographically and socially. I accordingly explore the role of leisure and play in shaping that status, moving away from London-centric studies of what Paola Pugliatti has called 'arts- and entertainment-producers'[1] to recognize their presence in the provinces. In the first quarter of the seventeenth century, Edward Alleyn and Philip

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[1] Pugliatti, '"my good sweet mouse": letters in a time of plague', *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, Special Issue (2020), pp. 1–23, at p. 9.

Henslowe used royal office and Bankside's commercial animal sports to '[gain] a social status of their own, granted by the public success of their trade, but still dependent on patronage and protection'.[2] Entertainment producers in counties like Lancashire could similarly achieve social mobility via their trade, often separate from aristocratic patronage systems and instead rooted in local networks and relationships. This article therefore establishes a model for appreciating pre-modern regional cultural production; it does so by bringing together distinctly different documentary sources in order to analyse social status and mobility for groups who typically left behind limited evidence.

I examine here an unusually rich body of documentation related to a family 'dynasty' of such entertainment producers – three generations of bearwards called the Whitestones, who hailed from Ormskirk in Lancashire and were active from the 1610s to the late 1630s. This microhistory of north-west England offers a wealth of detail that allows us to step inside the household and communities of several generations of independent regional bearwards. Local court appearances and depositions shine a light on the cultural place of bearwards in their local communities. Family members' probate materials also offer rich detail on the material and economic circumstances of commercial entertainers outside of London. There has long been recognition of the relationship between social status and locale in early modern England.[3] This article builds on these rich, place-conscious studies by focusing on one particular family. In doing so, I turn attention to the role of commercial play in this relationship, following David Underdown's foundational exploration of how specific communities executed and received play activities, including bullbaiting and bearbaiting.[4] I look at bearbaiting not through the lenses of religious tension or 'festive' protest (in the terms of Steve Hindle's rich study of pastimes in the Whitestones's home of north-west England),[5] however, but via the perspectives of those engaged in what was an established (if controversial) occupation. Indeed, the Whitestones show how bearwards wielded social and economic power – often in conjunction with other activities or livelihoods. Yet social status was always precarious in this period and forever in negotiation – what Craig Muldrew calls a 'process of continual achievement'[6] – and the Whitestones are a case in point.

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[2] Ibid., p. 9.

[3] Susan Amussen, *An ordered society: gender and class in early modern England* (New York, NY, 1988); Ian Archer, *The pursuit of stability: social relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge, 1991); Henry French, *The middle sort of people in provincial England* (Oxford, 2007); Steve Hindle, 'Power, poor relief, and social relations', *Historical Journal*, 41 (1998), pp. 67–96; David Underdown, *Fire from heaven: life in an English town in the seventeenth century* (New Haven, CT, 1994); Keith Wrightson and David Levine, *Poverty and piety in an English village: Terling, 1525–1700* (Oxford, 1995).

[4] David Underdown, *Revel, riot, and rebellion: popular politics and culture in England, 1603–1660* (Oxford, 1985).

[5] Steve Hindle, 'Custom, festival and protest in early modern England: the Little Budworth Wakes, St Peter's Day, 1596', *Rural History*, 6 (1995), pp. 155–78.

[6] Craig Muldrew, 'Class and credit: social identity, wealth, and the life course in early modern England', in Henry French and Jonathan Barry, eds., *Identity and agency in England, 1500–1800*

The place of the bearward was therefore not uniform and depended upon wider credit, reputation, and economic activity. Commercial recreation played a crucial role in all three and accordingly determined and shaped identity – both for producers and their audiences. In turn, the Whitestones's records help us recover not only the living situations of humans but of the animals in their charge. This article looks finally, then, at the lives and afterlives of the early modern bears. The Whitestones afford exceptional insight into the material and social lives of regional entertainment producers and their inter-generational – and interspecies – dynamics.

I

Bearbaiting was, to a degree, centralized in early modern England, falling within the legal remit of royally appointed officials whose centre of operations was usually in or around the capital. Letters patent from the crown granted the 'Cheefe M{aste}r Overseer and Ruler of our beares Bulls and mastiffe dogges'

> full power comission and authoritie...to take vp & kepe for our service pastyme and sporte any mastife dogge or dogg{es} and mastife Bitches Beares, bulls and other...at and for such reasonable prices [can be agreed] w{i}th the Owner or owners of the Beares and bulls.[7]

The monarch's masters, therefore, had licence to commandeer animals from across the country, as well as to 'stay or cause to be stayed' any bearwards or bear or dog owners from their sporting practices.

Although overseers were granted nationwide powers, scholarship has some-times overstated bearbaiting's centralized bias. Studies of bearwards have been few and far between, though the *Box Office Bears* project is bringing together zooarchaeology, palaeogenetics, and archives to explore the national presence of baiting and the travels and ancestry of its animals.[8] To date, the gruesome but popular sport has largely been framed in terms of the capital and the royal courts – centring in particular on Philip Henslowe and Edward Alleyn, the les-sees of the Bear Garden on Bankside and (from 1604) royally appointed Masters of the Game of Bulls, Bears, and Mastiff Dogs. The debated relationship between bearbaiting arenas and playhouses has aligned animal sports with London-centric approaches to the playing industry. Baiting arenas constructed on Bankside were among the first freestanding and high-capacity venues for leisure in early modern England.[9] Andreas Höfele has instructively read the connections between London's 'theatre, the bear-garden, and...the spectacle

(Basingstoke, 2004), pp. 147–77, at p. 149; Craig Muldrew, *The economy of obligation: the culture of credit and social relations in early modern England* (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 151.

[7] MSS 002, Article 005, Dulwich College Archives, Dulwich, London.

[8] See www.boxofficebears.com.

[9] William Westmoreland Braines, *The site of the Globe Playhouse, Southwark* (London, 1924); Anthony Mackinder with Lyn Blackmore, Julian Bowsher, and Christopher Phillpotts, *The Hope Playhouse* (London, 2013); see the *REED Online* edition for *The Bear Gardens and Hope Playhouse* (forthcoming).

of public execution';[10] S. P. Cerasano, Barbara Ravelhofer, and Jason Scott-Warren have also offered valuable insight into commercial bearbaiting as rooted in the cultural and economic scene of the Tudor and Stuart capital.[11]

Yet regional bearbaiting was also thriving and widespread. Documents transcribed and published in the *Records of early English drama* demonstrate that it took place with regularity across the country, recording more than 1,250 references to animal sports across its county collections, ranging from Wales to Newcastle to Hampshire.[12] Indeed, Elizabeth Baldwin's studies, arising from work on the Cheshire and Lancashire records, have demonstrated the vitality and reach of bearwards working in provincial areas. Her examination of John Seckerston, the earl of Derby's bearward, has shone a light on his regional base in Nantwich (at the fittingly named Bear inn) as well as his travels elsewhere, perhaps dealing in the market of early modern bears.[13] Similarly, Baldwin's study of Congleton demonstrates its municipal investment in the animal sport industry.[14] Fixed places of play like Bankside's arenas also existed in towns and cities across the country, from Congleton's cockpit to Canterbury's Bullstake.[15] Exeter had a Mayor of the Bullring, responsible for key tasks 'when any bull or bear baiting be appointed': 'first to make the Mayor privy thereof, and no baiting to be used within the city, but that the said Mayor be present or give leave thereunto And he shall see all things to be well done and orderly used at such pastimes.'[16] By the sixteenth century, then, England's regional baiting industries could be both architecturally and administratively sophisticated.

Bloodsport more generally was a prominent part of English culture. Despite debates over the appropriateness or Christian decency of cockfighting, for instance, the gentry classes continued to pursue it well into the eighteenth century;[17] aristocrats enjoyed betting on the 'game' long after bearbaiting had become unfashionable, celebrating it as a 'laudable diversion'.[18] Hunting, meanwhile, was a lawful and sometimes even encouraged exercise (not least by passionate practisers of the sport like James I and IV); like archery, it

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[10] Andreas Höfele, *Stage, stake, and scaffold: humans and animals in Shakespeare's theatre* (Oxford, 2011), p. 2.

[11] S. P. Cerasano, 'The masters of the bears in art and enterprise', *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, 5 (1991), pp. 195–209; Barbara Ravelhofer, '"Beasts of recreacion": Henslowe's white bears', *English Literary Renaissance*, 32 (2002), pp. 287–323; Jason Scott-Warren, 'When theaters were beargardens: or, what's at stake in the comedy of humors', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 54 (2003), 63–82.

[12] Drawn from my database of *REED* references to animal sport.

[13] Elizabeth Baldwin, 'John Seckerston: the earl of Derby's bearward', *Medieval English Theatre*, 20 (1998), pp. 95–103.

[14] Elizabeth Baldwin, '"Selling the Bible to pay for the bear": the value placed on entertainment in Congleton, 1584–1637', in Pat Starkey and Tom Scott, eds., *The middle ages in the north-west* (Liverpool, 1995), pp. 257–67.

[15] See Callan Davies, *What is a playhouse? England at play, 1520–1620* (Abingdon, 2022).

[16] Richard Hooker, *A pamphlet of the offices, and duties of euerie particular sworne officer, of the citie of Excester* (London, 1584), fo. I1r.

[17] Keith Thomas, *Man and the natural world: changing attitudes in England, 1500–1800* (London, 1983).

[18] Peter Borsay, *The English urban renaissance: culture and society in the provincial town, 1660–1770* (Oxford, 1991), p. 176.

was perceived as useful military training. Yet while a widespread rural practice, hunting was increasingly protected as an elite preserve.[19] In Liverpool in 1567, for instance, mastiff dogs used for baiting were distinguished from hunting canines: 'greyhounds, hounds, and spaniels, that is gentlemen's dogs'.[20] Unlike certain other bloodsports, then, baiting was open to and enjoyed by those across the social spectrum. It also had established utility (unlike cockfighting), which derived not (unlike hunting) from its martial qualities but its practical nature: national law necessitated that all bulls be baited before their flesh could be sold (as seen in marketplaces or baiting rings in every part of the country). Baiting therefore held a curious place among early modern England's leisure ecology, as it overlapped with daily life and economic practice.

Exeter's Mayor of the Bullring indicates the complex layers of local and national authority surrounding bearbaiting and associated activities. Records from Henslowe and Alleyn's time as Masters of the Royal Game held at Dulwich College Archives and available online on the Henslowe–Alleyn Digitisation Project document numerous points of conflict between royally sanctioned deputies and local residents or authorities. When James Starkey, Thomas Radford, and John Pott tried to exercise the royal commission to take up dogs in Chester, they were violently injured:

> Yo{u}r comission was first at a Bearebeatinge in Swinhead questiond to be counterfayt by one Lathome a petty gentleman, & son in lawe to Richard Leigh of Swinhead gentleman [and] riotously assaulted by one Richard Penkits of Penkits gentleman in Comit: Lancast{er} gentlem{n} Richard Massy his serua{n}te, & Ralphe Barnes of warrington as drunkards w{i}th many more.[21]

The complex social world of early modern England comes to the fore in these moments of claim and counterclaim over animals. Steve Hindle, James Stokes, and David Underdown, for instance, recognize the fraught relationship between policing and permitting contentious play forms (especially when it came to puritanical reform or, contrastingly, the ludic sympathies of particular towns or regions).[22] Indeed, other justices were more forthright in their treatment of royal authority when it came to bears and dogs; Sir Morris Bartlet, presented with the king's commission and 'intreated...to help [Henslowe and Alleyn's men] to a beare', 'toeke it and locked vpon it & said it was nawght and he wold not a lowe of it'.[23] Local magistrates and companies of gentlemen and 'petty gentlemen' (presumably connoting gentility of lesser significance or

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[19] See Roger B. Manning, *Hunters and poachers: a social and cultural history of unlawful hunting in England* (Oxford, 1993); Edward Berry, *Shakespeare and the hunt: a cultural and social study* (Cambridge, 2001).

[20] Thomas, *Man and the natural world*, pp. 106–7.

[21] MSS 002, Article 023, Dulwich College Archives, Dulwich, London.

[22] Hindle, 'Custom'; James Stokes, 'Bull and bear baiting in Somerset: the gentles' sport', in Alexandra F. Johnston and Wim Huskin, eds., *English parish drama* (Amsterdam, 1996), pp. 65–80; Underdown, *Riot*.

[23] MSS 002, Article 026, Dulwich College Archives, Dulwich, London.

order) were perhaps hostile to claims of centralized authority, especially potentially fraudulent ones, and these instances suggest a local hierarchy that saw less-than-gentrified outsiders as presumptuous upstarts to be socially, and sometimes physically, put in their place. Moreover, some animal owners had emotional connection with their animals. Anthony Cooke defended his disinclination to yield dogs to Henslowe and Alleyn's deputies by explaining the men behaved themselves rudely; he acceded to the request to hand over his dogs but reserved the right to 'make stay of that Dogge taken by them here w{hi}ch I maye not parte w{i}thall'.[24] Pride, social status, jurisdictional conflict, and interpersonal suspicion also sat alongside such vague affective relationships, glimpsed obliquely in correspondence like this, between humans and animals when it came to sporting ownership.

The force of feeling surrounding bulls, bears, and dogs is also explained in part by their instrumental role in local identity and their shaping of inhabitants' sense of place. Not only were bears given toponyms like 'Ned of Canterbury' or 'Judith of Cambridge'[25] – or, below, Ralph Whitestones's 'Chester' – but individuals aligned themselves with local animals in the manner of modern sports teams. Cheshire, which occasioned the affray with Henslowe's servants above, is particularly rich in such examples. Over the border in Shrewsbury in 1597, a 'matche was made betweene the Cockes of cheshire and lanckashir against the cock*es* of shropshire and wales thider cam lvnden*eres* with their cock*es* whiche held with shropshiremen but in the ennd the cheshire-me*n* and lancashir had the victory and went away with the gayness of greate soms of Money'.[26] In 1612, at a bearbaiting in Barnhill in the county, the bearward announced that 'noe Chester men should Carrye any staves but putt A Contreyman indifferent for them to stave of their dogges'.[27] These instances reveal bearbaiting to be deeply intertwined with geography. Just as dog owners like Anthony Cooke had obscure but personal reasons for 'making stay' of animals, so inhabitants of Cheshire or Lancashire saw animal sports as an extension of civic, municipal, or county identity. Indeed, Congleton, which still bears the epithet 'Bear Town', was especially known for its predilection for bloodsport. One of its chief playmakers, Robert Wilkinson (who regularly repaired the town's cockpit and other leisure facilities), appeared at the nearby village of Astbury Newbold in 1605; an eyewitness saw

> [Wylkenson of Congleton aforesaid drawe his dagger & lift] vpp his staffe He sawe the Bearward lift vpp his staffe & Laie his hand on his dagger, to whome he heard…Robert Wilkenson of Congleton aforesaid saye, take heide what you [<…>] doe for if you offer anie blowes to anie Congleton man it were better for you, you did not, or to that effecte.[28]

[24] MSS 002, Article 031, Dulwich College Archives, Dulwich, London.

[25] John Taylor, *Bull, bear, and horse* (London, 1638), fo. D9r–v.

[26] J. Alan B. Somerset, ed., *Records of early English drama: Shropshire*, I (Toronto, ON, 1994), p. 284.

[27] Elizabeth Baldwin, Laurence M. Clopper, and David Mills, eds., *Records of early English drama: Cheshire (including Chester)*, I (Toronto, ON, 2007), p. 20.

[28] *REED Cheshire*, II, p. 747.

Wilkinson perceived Congleton's name and credit to be linked with bearbaiting.[29] In this instance, a fellow Congletonian was denied a course against the bear with his dog, and Wilkinson interpreted it as a slight against the town. Not only were individuals like Wilkinson, or Seckerston, the drivers of the game outside of London – involved in building and delivering the industry and its infrastructure – but they generated and reflected a culture in which local identity and allegiance was bound up with one's own and one's neighbours' bears and dogs as well as one's stake, so to speak, in the game.

II

The counties of Cheshire and its neighbouring Lancashire offer particularly rich and instructive case-studies for exploring the place of bearwards. The region saw increasing efforts across the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to proscribe 'unlawful' play,[30] and both counties shared jurisdictional and ecclesiastical overlaps. One result of local crackdowns on sports like animal baiting is a plethora of surviving documentary evidence concerning the game. As such, the region was home to some of the best-documented bearwards in the country. Legal records from the two counties document at least twenty-seven named bearwards from the 1530s to the 1630s (separate, that is, from those noted only via their patron, such as 'King's Bearward' or 'Haughton's Bearward'):

1. Peter Broome
2. John Boland
3. Richard Smith
4. Shelmerdyne
5. Langton
6. Thomas Greene
7. William Kelsall
8. Brooke
9. James Wiggan
10. Jacob Meade
11. Gorste
12. Edward Hall
13. Persevalle
14. Stirrupp
15. John Seckerston
16. John Mort
17. Thomas Alexander
18. William Ickinne
19. William Baxter
20. Francis Clark
21. William Fox

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[29] For more on Wilkinson and the Congleton cockpit, see Davies, *What is a playhouse?*

[30] Unlawfulness in relation to play remains complex, in particular for bearbaiting and especially for Lancashire and Cheshire in the wake of sustained Sabbatarian campaigns.

22. Alexander Ashcroft, alias Ormishaw
23. Richard Whitestones
24. Hugh Whitestones
25. Thomas Whitestones
26. Ralph Whitestones
27. Griffith Whitestones[31]

This is an extraordinary number that far outstrips the detail available in records from other counties in this period, and while it need not suggest greater bearbaiting activity, it does alert us to the recognizability of certain individuals *as* bearwards. Previous studies exploring the regional significance of bearwards have emphasized tensions with Protestant reform as well as their role in the 'creation and expression of community in early modern England' by way of 'protest which legitimated and defended that community'.[32] These valuable readings can risk eliding the commercial workaday elements that sustained bearwarding. This list, mostly, comprises people brought before Quarter Sessions or Great Sessions or other legal bodies, but the recognition of many of these individuals as 'bearwards' suggests a local knowledge of the game and its proponents. It accordingly underlines how the independent bearward was a defined, if controversial, occupation. The wording of one legal presentation captures its ambivalent job status by describing it, in reference to a fourteen-year-old boy, as 'employing the illegal way of life, called in English "a bearward"'.[33]

The last five names on the above list leave behind a paper trail more detailed than perhaps any other named bearwards of this period, mapping out a family 'dynasty' (Figure 1). A microhistorical study of the Whitestones family and their community in Ormskirk indicates the local contexts that saw certain bearwards earn a handsome living but equally how contest and conflict might see them arrested or fined. Attending to the shifts in reputation across generations of this family gives insight into the precarious social status of the early modern bearward.

The Whitestones's earliest known legal presentation was in 1617, when brothers Hugh and Thomas are said to have visited Litherland to 'beate there beares', while Richard Pooley of Prescot played the fiddle.[34] Five years later, Hugh and Thomas's father, Ralph, passed away, and his probate documents furnish us with invaluable evidence about their material world – centred, his will tells us, on a property known as the Brandearth.[35] Indeed, Ralph was wealthy enough to leave behind a probate inventory, in itself an indicator of wealth and status.[36] Such documents do not offer straightforward insight into

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[31] Names taken from *REED Cheshire*, II and III.

[32] Hindle, 'Custom', p. 170. See also Patrick Collinson, *The birthpangs of Protestant England: religious and cultural change in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (London, 1998).

[33] *REED Cheshire*, XXII, p. 781, translated from Latin on p. 985.

[34] David George, ed., *Records of early English drama: Lancashire* (Toronto, ON, 1991), p. 32.

[35] WCW/Supra/C83C/0, Lancashire Archives, Preston, Lancashire.

[36] Required from 1529 for those worth £5 or more, though not always consistently observed. For more on inventories, and their limitations, see Lena Cowen Orlin, 'Fictions of the early modern English probate inventory', in Henry S. Turner, ed., *The culture of capital* (London, 2002), pp. 51–83.
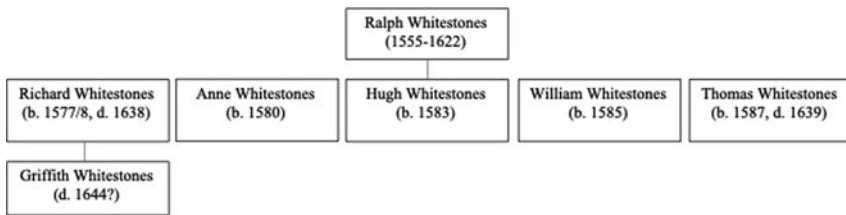
Figure 1. Partial genealogy of the Whitestones family of Ormskirk.

material conditions and are limited by silences, omissions, or biases. Yet reading them without pretence to objectivity and with 'comparative strategies' – that is, in conjunction with other probate and documentary material – can, Lena Cowen Orlin acknowledges, 'advance our understanding of the way personal capital worked'. Here, I follow Orlin's call to 'read anecdotally and with skepticism'[37] and root my exploration of these entertainment producers in direct and indirect evidence about the family's broader lived experience in and around Ormskirk.

Inventories are lists of personal goods and assets, with monetary values ascribed, and were designed to protect personal estates from fraudulent claims and keep the complex and intertwined credit and debt system of early modern England in order. They were 'appraised' by two or more people shortly after the deceased's passing, by moving around successive rooms of the house and valuing the goods within them, before heading to surrounding yards or barns (in the case of farmers).[38] Ralph Whitestones's inventory does not provide detail on specific rooms (though one might imaginatively speculate about the make-up of his property), but it does list his goods in some detail, including: two cows and a sucking calf valued at £3 10s; 14 sheep at 26s and two swine at 15s, along with costly napery and linen: blankets with coverlets at 39s; bolsters and pillows weighing 84 pounds priced at 28s; several feather beds between 22 and 27s; various kitchenware, chests, wood, wool, and other goods. The most valuable entry in the inventory is the fifth item listed: 'one Beare called Chester, £12'.[39]

The somewhat sobering presence of a bear in this list of material goods alerts us to their economic value for early modern owners. While beds, often the most expensive item in a room, are marked here at just over £1, the livestock at £3 or £4, and (second highest on the list) his agricultural stock in corn at £6, the bear is double this latter value. Two years later, in 1624, over the border in Cheshire, a man was attacked by a bear in Brereton Green. The Great Sessions gaol files note that the bear who had lashed out was kept in 'custody' by a local gentleman and was 'worth' £13 6s 8d.[40] The

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[37] Ibid., p. 76.

[38] For more, see Mark Overton et al., *Production and consumption in English households, 1600–1750* (London, 2004), pp. 13–14.

[39] WCW/Supra/C83C/0 sheet 1, Lancashire Archives, Preston, Lancashire.

[40] CHES 24/117/3, The National Archives, Kew, London; see also *REED Cheshire*, I, p. 25, II, pp. 919–20.

appraisers of Whitestones's goods, William Laithwait, James Chadocke, Thomas Morcroft, and James Tyrer – all locals from Ormskirk – seemingly understood well how to value Chester, just as those involved in the Great Sessions did two years later, with the two bear-appraisals being very similar. Yet bears were relatively few and far between (with a small number ranging large geographical expanses), not least in the small town of Ormskirk, in which the Whitestones were highly likely to have been the only bear owners. It is possible that the 'worth' of such animals was widely understood – either locally in Lancashire and Cheshire or across the country – or at least in relation to other goods and by those with the standing, experience, and social status to appraise such costly animals.[41]

Equally, the appraisers may well have known from their own proximity to bears why one might be worth £12. James Chadocke, for instance, was the first named inhabitant of Ormskirk and its 'Constable' in a legal petition in the 1620s, putting him in a distinguished position in the town.[42] He would most likely, like some of his colleagues, have had official if unrecorded encounters with the Whitestones and their bears, as well as having known them on a personal level. Indeed, the Laithwaits and Morcrofts were also local families prominently involved in town business. Ralph's son Richard married Mary Morcroft, and his own will sixteen years later shows the close affective and economic ties between the two families. Nine years after Ralph's death, William Laithwait's son was involved in policing a violent affray (as we shall see) with another of Ralph's sons, Thomas. These four men were closely connected with the Whitestoneses and had quite possibly known Chester for some years.

Ralph Whitestones's probate documents situate him as part of an Ormskirk network of prominent inhabitants, bound together in financial, geographical, and personal terms. At the foot of the inventory and repeated, in part, in the will, are a series of debt obligations both to and from Whitestones, including the appraisers' families, as well as bonds from individuals such as the local vicar, Henry Ambrose.[43] Bonds were increasingly more attractive and 'increasingly necessary to make credit networks work' in the seventeenth century, though individuals 'had to have more credit in their communities to obtain loans on bonds' than needed for direct loans.[44] Whitestones's £11 and 10s in bonds and ten other smaller debts reveal entanglements with a body of Ormskirk residents that position this bearward as a notable presence in the community. After all, credit was bound up with questions of piety and virtue, and 'households sought to construct and maintain their credit', with debt and bonds shaping 'the way social relations were formed and mediated'.[45] Not only was Ralph wealthy enough to leave a probate inventory, he was one of the shapers of the town's socio-economic order.

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[41] For more on appraisers' identities and knowledge, see Catherine Richardson, *Domestic life and domestic tragedy: the material life of the household* (Manchester, 2006), pp. 81, 99 n. 76.
[42] QSB 1/50/30 (1628/9), Lancashire Archives, Preston, Lancashire.
[43] WCW/Supra/C83C/0, Lancashire Archives, Preston, Lancashire.
[44] Muldrew, *Economy*, pp. 109, 113.
[45] Ibid., pp. 194–5.

Other items in the inventory indicate that the Whitestones family lived in relatively comfortable surroundings. Ralph owned four feather beds and two cheaper 'chaffe' beds, as well as an array of blankets, coverlets, linen, bolsters, pillows, and cushions – all signs of moderate affluence, even distinction.[46] There is no reason to assume from the description here that the Whitestoneses enjoyed especially ornate sleeping arrangements; however, they clearly possessed what Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson recognize as one key sign of middling status (placing them above precarious wage-earning positions): 'elaboration of a basic object…made possible by increased wealth'.[47] Moreover, the number of beds suggest a property with at least three rooms, and indicates the likelihood of servants living in the house as well as the potential for guests to stay over – an indicator of well-to-do sociability. The wider inventory testifies to a working household with some material comfort and even embellishment.

Indeed, the second half of the inventory points to a rural and agricultural household and suggests that Ralph Whitestones had more than one source of income. It was not unusual for such households to engage in a variety of labour, and studies have shown how those who work the land exhibited 'distinct temporal rhythms across the year' when it came to craft and production.[48] It is telling, therefore, that Ralph's goods included numerous items for household production – spinning wheels, perhaps used by his wife or daughter for supplementary income[49] – and landwork; carriages and horse riding materials; stables; and various wood and ironware. Bearbaiting perhaps particularly suited the pursuance of multiple occupations, especially in rural areas, where Ralph's land might provide seasonal and place-specific income, but his revenue from the travelling sport of baiting could reach further afield and run all year round.[50]

Tellingly, Whitestones is described in his inventory and will as a 'yeoman'. The term distinguishes him from surrounding 'husbandmen', as yeomen owned the land they worked, whereas husbandmen typically leased it. Moreover, 'yeoman' also avoids prescriptive occupational labels (such as 'butcher', or even 'bearward') and indicates a social position rather than a craft – something perfectly suited to a man who profited from agriculture, typical rural side hustles, and baited bears for income but who nonetheless held a 'solid or accumulative' middling position in his local community: a category (developed by the *Middling Culture* project) for those who had a claim on property, were doing well in a profession or practice, and who were 'actively' seeking to increase

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[46] Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson, 'Early modern beds were not a single item but an assemblage of layers…The relationship between woven outer fabrics, carved wood and linens was costly and complicated to achieve', *A day at home in early modern England: material culture and domestic life, 1500–1700* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2017), pp. 241–2.

[47] Ibid., p. 242.

[48] Ibid., pp. 150–1; Darron Dean, 'Wrotham pottery: an analysis of vernacular ceramics in southeast England, 1600–1740' (MA thesis, V&A and Royal College of Art, 1994).

[49] Hamling and Richardson, *A day at home*, pp. 150–1.

[50] My database of bearbaiting records from across the country shows that the sport took place at all times of the year.

cultural capital and 'shore up this status for their families and children'.[51] Indeed, Alexandra Shepard recognizes that such terms encode important socio-economic realities. In self-estimates of their wealth, yeomen see a sharp upward rise in the century after 1550 'relative to husbandmen, most crafts- and tradespeople, and labourers'; despite their 'makeshift' economy and their agricultural focus, Shepard identifies yeomen as sharing (in the first half of the seventeenth century) a median worth 'second only to that of the gentry and public notaries'.[52]

Although Ralph's bear ownership found its way to his children and even grandchildren, his status marker did not. As we have seen, both Hugh and Thomas were described in 1617 as 'labourers', one of the occupational descriptors whose bearers were pointedly less wealthy than yeomen. By 1631 (as noted below), Thomas called himself 'husbandman'. As third and fifth children respectively, Hugh and Thomas might be expected to be less upwardly mobile than their father and their eldest brother, and like the wider family it seems plausible they diversified their income by working as bearwards in addition to work as labourers. Ralph's eldest son, Richard, inherited the majority of the Brandearth estate in 1622. Yet he is described in his own will in 1638 as a 'butcher' – an occupational marker rather than a social place. The term might reveal an early example of a 'growing emphasis' (in self-description, at least) on 'profession, business, trade, and occupation' – what we might regard as 'more secure occupational identities' – that really accelerated in the latter half of the century.[53] Certainly, Richard's material world had not diminished over the sixteen years. In addition to costly beds and linen, his probate inventory lists stools, chairs, and playing tables – a sign of middling leisure found in houses defined by the combined 'penetration of work and leisure'.[54]

Yet the different labels applied to Ralph's children also suggests a parallel with the professional dramatic playing industry, in which apprentices were typically bound to different trade companies (likely one their actor-master was a member of), but whose true apprenticeship was within the entertainment industry – the craft they practised on a daily basis but that itself had no officially recognized occupational company status.[55] Parallels can also be drawn with playhouse owners, as individuals whose commercial investment in play often met with mixed reception from neighbours and local authorities – especially those who strove for social mobility by way of complex negotiations with their local community, as I have recently explored

[51] For a breakdown of middling social status categories, see www.middlingculture.com/social-statuses-of-early-modern-England/.
[52] Alexandra Shepard, *Accounting for oneself: worth, status, and the social order in early modern England* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 112, 75. See also William Harrison's *Description of England* (London, 1577), which positions yeomen above artificers and labourers.
[53] Shepard, *Accounting for oneself*, p. 267.
[54] Hamling and Richardson, *A day at home*, p. 266.
[55] David Kathman, 'Players, livery companies, and apprentices', in Richard Dutton, ed., *Oxford handbook of early modern theatre* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 413–28; Roslyn Knutson, *Playing companies and commerce in Shakespeare's time* (Cambridge, 2001).

elsewhere.[56] Like players, though, bearwards had no official occupational companies, which would have been especially felt by those who operated without named patrons or outside of the centralized control of the Master of the Bulls, Bears, and Mastiff Dogs. Accordingly, belonging to a defined company could be advantageous to the multi-occupational bearward – most advantageous, perhaps, being Richard's trade as 'butcher'. Butchery, as we will see, was closely bound up with bloodsports in early modern England and butchers were never far from a baiting site. Their familiarity with the practice extended to recreational bloodsports, too.

Across this area of the north-west (as a brief, indicative sample), we find numerous examples where butchers were instrumental to the baiting of bears or to accommodating, managing, or interfering in bearbaitings.[57] In 1608, an anonymous bearward who travelled around Berkshire and the Cotswolds was accompanied by a man known as 'Ned the butcher'.[58] The association also features in popular culture; the devil-dog of *The witch of Edmonton* is differentiated from the 'Paris Garden bandog...that keeps a bow-wow-wowing to have butchers bring their curs thither'.[59] These select instances suggest not only that butchers were closely aligned with recreational baiting and, perhaps more than most, took part as challengers in the sport with their dogs, but that they had skills and experience that suited them to the tasks of bearwarding. It is accordingly unlikely that Richard departed from his family's labouring or agricultural descriptors by accident. He was perhaps inspired or encouraged, even required, to learn butchery by growing up in a household alongside Chester the bear – and doubtless others, too – in a sub-industry where butchers and bearwards were typically connected. Rather than thinking of butchery as a 'by-employment' of bearwarding,[60] or vice versa, they might perhaps more helpfully be considered co-employments.

But where in Richard's world was Chester? No bear appears on Richard's own inventory in 1638. It is quite possible Chester was already dead by this point – sixteen years since the bear's previous appearance. Nonetheless, at that time, Chester was probably included in the 'residue of...goodes cattells and Chattells' bequeathed to Richard's younger brothers Hugh and Thomas 'to be divyded equally betweene them'. Yet by at least the late 1630s, Richard's son Griffith had taken on the bearward's mantle, and he was also described as a butcher.[61] Griffith is marked as a bastard in his father's will, though it is clear that Richard not only acknowledged his paternity but that he was accepted as part of the family; his grandfather Ralph had bequeathed him 20*s*, for instance, although he would not be in line to inherit the Brandearth estate (with Ralph's will stipulating it must go to 'heires male

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[56] Callan Davies, 'The Woolfes of Wine Street: middling culture and community in Bristol, 1600–1620', *English Historical Review*, 137 (2022), pp. 386–415.

[57] *REED Cheshire*, II, pp. 725–6, 693–4, 790–2, I, pp. 18–19.

[58] MSS 002, Article 010, Dulwich College Archives, Dulwich, London.

[59] 4.1.2.265–6, Thomas Dekker, John Ford, and William Rowley, *The witch of Edmonton*, ed. Lucy Munro (London, 2017).

[60] See Overton et al., *Production and consumption*, ch. 4.

[61] QSB/1/194/24 (1637–8), Lancashire Archives, Preston, Lancashire.

lawfully begotten'). This made Griffith's social status even more precarious and perhaps explains his reliance upon the game of bearbaiting, as in 1637 when he describes himself in a petition as a 'pore lame man' dependent upon his trade with bears.[62] At three removes from his affluent grandfather, this bearward occupied a very different social position, not only lacking land and capital but defined by his dependence upon a divisive and potentially 'unlawful' game. Whereas Ralph could draw on multiple ways to make an income and enjoyed a comfortable and economically productive domestic existence, Griffith more closely fits the role of nomadic bearward – dangerously close to one of the masterless men who found themselves on the wrong side of national acts and ordinances.[63]

Although Griffith's bastardy might explain some of this social disparity, Griffith's uncle Thomas Whitestones – Ralph's youngest son and Richard's brother and one of the two who would have inherited Chester the bear – demonstrates how social relations and reputation helped define a bearwards' place in the community. Henry French has shown how inhabitants conceived of status in relation to the parish or town, meaning one's cultural and financial position was always relative to one's neighbours'.[64] In 1631, Thomas was involved in a fracas in which his status as a bearward played an important part. The watchman at the time, Robert Laithwait, explains what he saw of the outcome of a quarrel between Thomas and the Leadbetter brothers at Harper's alehouse. He found

> Thom{a}s Whytestones, Iohn Leadbetter the yonger, and Edward Leadbetter his brother fighting in the street, The said Thom{a}s Whytestones hauing a pare of Iron Tong{es} in his hand{es}, w{i}th w {hi}ch Iron Tong{es} hee did stryke the s{ai}d Iohn Leadbetter on the head insomuch that the blood did issue forth. The said Iohn Leadbetter, hauing a litle pocket dagger in his hand, w{i}th w{hi}ch hee did stab at this Ex{aminan}t and Whytstones and did both sweare and say hee would stabb any or all that did offer to come neere vnto him or to lay hand vpon him, whereupon this Ex{aminan}t did take the said dagger from him, after the said Whytstones had beaten him to the grownd.[65]

Thomas acknowledged before the Quarter Sessions that he was drinking in Harpur's house, where 'passed some foule word{es}' between Thomas and John Leadbetter, who called him 'rogue'. The exchange prompted a fight, before the Leadbetters made to leave. But just before their departure, they turned around and stabbed a fourth man in the affair, John Barton. John Leadbetter claimed Thomas Whitestones followed them with a pair of tongs in his hand and struck him on the head so strongly that 'the Tong{es} did

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[62] QSB/1/194/62 (1637–8), Lancashire Archives, Preston, Lancashire.
[63] See various acts, including Vagrancy Act of 1572 (more below).
[64] French, *The middle sort of people*.
[65] QSB/1/90/39 (1631), Lancashire Archives, Preston, Lancashire.

breake w{i}th the blowe'. Leadbetter claimed ignorance as to Whitestones's motive and denied any involvement in a stabbing.

The use of the word 'rogue' would have been especially charged for a bearward. Martin Ingram recognizes that generalized slanders like 'rogue' or 'knave' were increasingly less contested at law in this period.[66] Yet while the term was a broad and unactionable insult, it also specifically connoted 'an emerging class of displaced figures, poor men and women with no clear social place or identity' and served as a 'catchall term for a variety of social deviants and outcasts, from rural migrants to urban con artists'.[67] Craig Dionne sees one of the origins of rogue insults in Tudor 'Poor Laws', which sought to manage migration by increasingly punitive measures. These laws took aim at perceived 'beggars' of all kinds, including those 'using sybtyll craftye or unlawfull Games or Playes...all Fencers Bearewardes Common Players in Enterludes and Minstrels'.[68] Those without appropriate patrons were considered, in legal terms, to be rogues or vagabonds – terms frequently paired together. The Leadbetters' alehouse insult therefore spoke to the very heart of the precarious condition of the bearward, not least in a family for whom social mobility – both upward and downward – would have been keenly felt.

Indeed, unlike his brother or father, Thomas was defined by his neighbours in terms of bloodsport and gaming. A month before the Leadbetter row, Hugh Page of Ormskirk, glover, related some of Thomas's alleged antisocial behaviour; he,

> w{i}th oth{e}r honest men, were Coming from Liu{er}poole, and one Thomas Whytestones of the same Towne Bearward being in theire Company, this dep{onen}t togeath{e}r w{i}th the rest of the said Company were saying that theire Towne of Or{mskir}k had many honest men in it and was a very honest Towne whereupon the said Whytestones said it was the devill as well and wished that it were on fyre so that his good{es} were forth of it And this dep{onen}t furth{e}r saith that these Whytstones doth harbor at the tyme of devyne service in his howse, the said Whytestones sist{e}r being a maried woman w{i}th one Henry Laithwait and in the night from Eight of the Clock vntill twoe in the morning, besides the said Whytstones doth keep Continuall gaming at all tymes of the night. And that the said Whytstones being bownd to the peace and good behauiour hath broken them both, w{i}thout any feare of so doing, and hath abused the Constable and other Offic{e}rs at seu{er}all tymes. /[69]

Page's account positions Thomas Whitestones as socially aloof and hostile. He stands in contrast to the residents and bearwards of nearby Congleton, for

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[66] Martin Ingram, *Church courts, sex, and marriage in England, 1570–1640* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 297.

[67] Craig Dionne and Steve Mentz, 'Introduction', in Craig Dionne and Steve Mentz, eds., *Rogues and early modern English culture* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2004), pp. 1–32, at p. 1.

[68] Craig Dionne, 'Fashioning outlaws: the early modern rogue and urban culture', in Dionne and Mentz, eds., *Rogues and early modern English culture*, pp. 33–61, at pp. 44–5.

[69] QSB 1/90/40 (1631), Lancashire Archives, Preston, Lancashire.

whom animal sport was commensurate with community and formed the fabric of municipal life. Here, Whitestones – and by extension his bears – is on the fringes of Ormskirk and ultimately desires to extricate himself from it, wishing his goods 'were forth' of the town. Page defines Whitestones's behaviour as rogue-like in both legal terms – gaming all night – as well as in its more figurative associations, touching on the rogue's conceptual ability to 'mediate the clashing social ideals of the age – economic individualism, social mobility, linguistic innovation, and intimate fraternity'.[70] While the latter sense of group solidarity might differ from Thomas's individualistic framing as a commercially driven bearward and play host, his family's long-standing position as Ormskirk bearwards perhaps suggests a fraternity of its own. Indeed, Page frames Thomas's house as a place not only of gaming but of sanctuary for those seeking illicit rendezvous, in this case his own sister and Henry Laithwait (again, related to one of the appraisers of Thomas's father's inventory). According to this deponent, Whitestones was not only rogue in the sense of going it alone – rhetorically envisioning his goods as separate from the community – but as both a fraternal and commercial enabler of roguish behaviour.

Reading the depositions of these two cases together indicates the polarized place Thomas occupied in Ormskirk. He was defined not by his official occupation or any office or role within the town (such as distinguished title of constable or as a watchman), but by the non-official trades of bearward and play proprietor. While his father had diversified his income through agricultural practices and crafts, it seems Thomas was more singularly invested in entertainment production, using 'continual gaming' – a vague description for a huge swathe of the commercial leisure market in early modern England that also included bearbaiting. In turn, he was vulnerable to charged insults or slanders like 'rogue', which risked confirming legal prejudices against animal sport and damaging his financial as well as moral and spiritual capital. After all, this was a period in which 'reputation, in the form of language, was produced and communicated for profit'.[71] Ormskirk residents' regard of Thomas had consequences for his economic security, and his position contrasts sharply with his elder brother's and his father's. Thomas aligns instead with his nephew Griffith, who, as we have seen, found himself 'pore' and dependent upon his bears, with little recourse to other social or economic safety nets. Tellingly, upon his death in 1639, Thomas did not leave an inventory and there seems to have been no official will. The contrasting lives of this father and son indicate how bearwards could occupy radically different positions in a community depending on their occupations, networks, and reputations, resulting in divergent experiences of social mobility.

These examples indicate the difficulty and complexity of middling 'dynasties' in terms of both status and occupation in early modern England. Indeed, while 'certain families did manage to perpetuate themselves over generations in positions of local power', such numbers were relatively low,

[70] Dionne and Mentz, 'Introduction', p. 2.
[71] Muldrew, *Economy*, p. 151.

hampered by 'downward mobility, mortality and geographical mobility (much of which was economically motivated)'.[72] The differing trades of the Whitestones but their shared involvement in animal sports and bear owner-ship raises the possibility of a family identity surrounding bearward activity, yet the different experiences of Ralph in the 1610s and 1620s to his son Thomas and grandson Griffith in the 1630s suggest that the trade offered little security in itself – especially for those in relatively disadvantaged positions, as younger son or bastard. While these differences make it difficult straightfor-wardly to compare one generation with the next, they do emphasize that the status of the bearward in local communities was always contingent on one's wider social and economic profile.

III

It is difficult to understand and appreciate the lives of animals via the patchy documentary archive left by humans. Erica Fudge deems this the 'absent-presence of animals', in which they are 'there but not speaking'.[73] Accordingly, 'reading animals is always reading through humans, and…reading about humans is reading through animals'.[74] In a later work, Fudge considers the affordances of probate material when seeking to understand relationships between people and animals: 'discussions of animal rationality in the seven-teenth century are often purely theoretical, and real animals…and those who work with them tend to be absent'.[75] Just as 'the plowman could not be a plowman without his team of horses',[76] so a bearward was most certainly no bearward without a bear. Accordingly, we find Chester not only named in Ralph Whitestones's inventory, but bequeathed as part of the 'cattle and chattel' to two of his sons. This document and the legal depositions associated with the Whitestones family offer further insight into the connectedness of human and animal in early modern England.

In the final section of Ralph's inventory, among old wheels and washing stones, the appraisers record 'one Cratch w{i}th certayne Cluntry woode over the beare house & stable'.[77] This extraordinary detail offers a rare and perhaps unique glimpse of the living conditions of bears in early modern England.[78] Ralph's 'cratch' – a trough used to feed animals – and bear stable reveals explicitly the extent to which bears lived in regular structures and did so closely among their owners, part of the warp and weft of the

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[72] Muldrew, 'Class and credit', p. 150.

[73] Erica Fudge, *Perceiving animals: humans and beasts in early modern English culture* (Basingstoke, 2000), p. 2.

[74] Ibid., p. 3.

[75] Erica Fudge, *Quick cattle and dying wishes: people and their animals in early modern England* (New Haven, CT, 2018), p. 15.

[76] Ibid., p. 16.

[77] WCW/Supra/C83C/0 sheet 1, Lancashire Archives, Preston, Lancashire.

[78] Implicit signs of 'lodging' can be found in MSS 002, Article 010, fos. 2v, 4r, Dulwich College Archives, Dulwich, London; and James Stokes, ed., *Records of early English drama: Somerset* (Toronto, ON, 1996), pp. 386–7.

agricultural world and the infrastructure of the small country estate. Ralph's inventory therefore reveals not only the domestic arrangements of the Whitestones but of Chester the bear and any forebears; like humans, bears too experienced different living conditions depending on their owners' social position. In the case of Chester, the phrase 'bear house' leaves room for much speculation about its size and layout. 'House' could, Andy Kesson reminds us, mean 'a space, indoor or outdoor, and not simply an individual building'.[79] Indeed, its etymological inclusion in leisure structures like 'playhouse' or 'gaming house' might even suggest that this was a place of commercial game play as well as ursine rest and relaxation, making 'bear house' a bloodsport synonym for 'playhouse' or 'cockpit'.

The Whitestones's bears were not only closely entwined with the fixtures and furnishings of Brandearth but, disconcertingly, became a physical part of them. Another entry on Ralph's inventory records tanned leather 'whereof p{ar}te is horse hyde p{ar}te beare hyde and part is calues skin'. Hides were important material, either to enable the creation of light leatherware such as gloves or leather goods or for other uses, both practical and aesthetic; in turn, 'different grades and provenance of leather – kid, calf, or pigskin, for example – would have signified the wealth, and by extension the social access, of the wearer'.[80] Bear skin would have been comparatively rare as a fabric, making it an unusual form of hide perhaps used for furnishings like wall hangings or rugs.[81] In this sense, the domestic and clothing 'elaboration' crucial to establishing middling social status becomes doubly dependent on bears in the Whitestones household. Not only did bears serve as economic enablers, with animals like Chester generating revenue during baiting courses, but after their death they became inanimate advertisements of status, as well as longer-term material assets. Indeed, 'hides and skins used by tanners and leather-dressers came from farmers and butchers'[82] – like Ralph and Richard, respectively. Bears therefore offered their owners a somewhat sustainable investment, and the high value of Chester could well indicate not only their rarity and their rare abilities at game but also the use of their body parts after death.

Yet despite the inanimate afterlife of bears in the Whitestones household, there are also examples of bears' refusal to conform to training, subjugation, or even to the built environment that defined their captivity. The travelling bearward of 1608 had to pay 2s 2d 'for lloginge and the harme wich the bares the did',[83] while, as we have seen, one bear in Cheshire 'by

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[79] Andy Kesson, ed., 'Playhouses, plays, and theater history: rethinking the 1580s', Forum, *Shakespeare Studies*, 45 (2017), pp. 19–40, at p. 27.

[80] Julie Sanders, 'Under the skin: a neighbourhood ethnography of leather and early modern drama', in Rory Loughnane and Edel Semple, eds., *Staged normality in Shakespeare's England* (Basingstoke, 2016), pp. 109–28, at p. 112.

[81] Hannah O'Regan, 'Menageries and bearskin caps: experiencing North American bears in post-medieval Britain', in Heather A. Lapham and Gregory A. Waselkov, eds., *Bears: archaeological and ethnohistorical perspectives in native eastern North America* (Tallahassee, FL, 2020), pp. 256–70.

[82] L. A. Clarkson, 'The leather crafts in Tudor and Stuart England', *Agricultural History Review*, 14 (1966), pp. 25–39, at p. 26.

[83] MSS 002, Article 010, fo. 3, Dulwich College Archives, Dulwich, London.

misadventure...suddenly bit...Robert Robinson in the lower part of his belly' in 1624.[84] These instances of violence raise questions about bears' temperaments in early modern England. Instructive parallels might be found in anthropological studies of bullbaiting, where breeders 'are certainly not seeking to breed for docility and manageability': 'It is the fierceness of *bravura* they are seeking and this quality has those indications and intimations of both the wild and the domesticated.'[85] Although bulls are bred and reared in ranching systems – which may differ from bears in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – this combination of domestic and wild nonetheless pertains to animals who are similarly prized for fighting and performing abilities. Indeed, fierceness and prowess were important to early modern bear owners. In 1610, Edward Barrett praised one bear called Little Bess of Bromley, who was so successful she fought off two dogs at a time on successive occasions, 'some she killed out righte & the moste parte shee sent halting awaie',[86] while other owners or buyers imply such physical prowess and success by using descriptions like 'great bear' or 'best bear'.[87]

Despite their putative fierceness, it was important that bears remained manageable, not least for long travels across county or even country and for peaceable sleeping arrangements – making the fine balance between domestic and wild important. Bears' temperaments might therefore have been a result of the combination of violent control and coercion, training, and environmental conditions. Moreover, recent literature has explored the notion of animal 'personality', or otherwise of behaviours or temperaments, as a means of understanding animals. A study of brown bears in the wild discovered that they held consistent behavioural differences, leading researchers to conclude that 'each bear has its own distinct personality'.[88] In captivity, bears may well carry elements of their wild-type behaviour, but often develop 'stereotypies': 'seemingly purposeless repeated behaviours that are invariant in form' (such as pacing, for instance).[89] They also face a challenge finding adequate isolated space, in order to avoid potentially aggravating social interactions and so reduce the likelihood of violent episodes.[90] Accordingly, early modern bears (if in any way behaviourally similar to those observed in twentieth- and twenty-first-century studies) were unlikely to have been docile.

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[84] *REED Chester*, I, p. 245, II, pp. 919–20.

[85] Mª Verónica De Haro De San Mateo and Garry Marvin, 'The bullfight in twenty-first-century Spain: polemics of culture, art and ethics', in Kaori Nagai et al., eds., *Cosmopolitan animals* (Basingstoke, 2015), pp. 93–106, at p. 96.

[86] MSS 002, Article 013, Dulwich College Archives, Dulwich, London.

[87] See MSS 002, Articles 039, 040, and 009, Dulwich College Archives, Dulwich, London.

[88] Robert Fagen and Johanna M. Fagen, 'Individual distinctiveness in brown bears, *Ursus arctos L*', *Ethology*, 102 (1996), pp. 212–26.

[89] Sophie S. Vickery and Georgie J. Mason, 'Behavioral persistence in captive bears: implications for reintroduction', *Ursus*, 14 (2003), pp. 35–43, at p. 36; see also Giovanni Quintavelle Pastorino et al., 'Behavioural profiles of brown and sloth bears in captivities', *Animals*, 7 (2017), p. 39.

[90] Polar bears strive for 'active management of their spatial relationship with other bears', Michael J. Renner and Aislinn L. Kelly, 'Behavioural decisions for managing social distance and aggression in captive polar bears (*Ursus maritimus*), *Applied Animal Welfare Science*, 9 (2005), pp. 233–9, at p. 234.

Griffith Whitestones's unfortunate accident in 1638 exemplifies the impossibility of fully controlling a bear like Chester (perhaps even Chester himself). In a petition to the Quarter Sessions, Griffith, 'a pore lame man', excused his absence by explaining that he

> is most daungerly wounded w{i}th one of his Beares & is in greate feare to be lamed by that acsident & misfortune hee moste humlie beseecheth yo{u}r wor{shi}ps to take it in comiserac{i}on in Regard of his great wond{es}, and misaries, hee beinge not able to goe or Ryde.[91]

Griffith's wounding by his bear emphasizes not only his economic reliance on the game – as noted above – but his dependence upon bears themselves. Bearbaiting negotiates between human conceptions of performance – what Nicholas Ridout calls 'a world of human signification'[92] – and animal modes of conflict: somewhat choreographed, but equally invested in contestation. Again, bullfighting offers a useful way of appreciating this interchange. Garry Marvin explains how for fights between humans and bulls, for instance, 'a central concern...is that the bull *should* reveal its animal-ness rather than having it wrenched from it. Its animal-ness, and its animal agency, is absolutely central to the bullfight and without it the event could not exist'.[93] Yet unlike bulls, who are slaughtered after each fight, the Whitestones's bears would have appeared repeatedly in courses over years. In turn, they would have had an enduring relationship with their owners.

The sustained bear–bearward relationship complicates bears' perceived animal-ness, which here becomes a fluid and fungible characteristic – desired at points but to be controlled or even abated at other moments. The biopolitical consequences of such attitudes to bears puts them into a complex relationship to what Donna Haraway would term their 'killability'.[94] Their role as fighting beasts required them to be vulnerable, even to the threat of death, but the economy of the industry (and perhaps also close and affective relations between human and bear) necessitated that bearwards care for and protect them for as long as possible. The travelling bearward of 1608, for instance, bought and applied 'ouyl for the blynd bare'.[95] In this sense, the bears of early modern England experienced a form of Lauren Berlant's 'slow death': 'the physical wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence'.[96] We might regard this existence, after Giorgio Agamben's 'bare life', as 'bear life': 'the life...who may be killed and yet not

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[91] QSB/1/194/62 (1637–8), Lancashire Archives, Preston, Lancashire.

[92] Nicholas Ridout, *Stage fright, animals, and other theatrical problems* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 109.

[93] Garry Marvin, 'The art of fierceness; the performance of the Spanish fighting bull', in Lourdes Orozco and Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, eds., *Performing animality: animals in performance practices* (Basingstoke, 2015), pp. 39–56, at p. 47.

[94] Donn Haraway, *When species meet* (London, 1998).

[95] MSS 002, Article 010, fo. 5v, Dulwich College Archives, Dulwich, London.

[96] Lauren Berlant, 'Slow death (sovereignty, obesity, lateral agency', *Critical Inquiry*, 33 (2007), pp. 754–80, at p. 780.

sacrificed', in which 'bare' biological existence has priority over the means or quality of life.[97] The bear's attack on Griffith resists this human-imposed 'bear life' and rejects performative ferocity or obedience – responding with forms of control and defence of their own. As such, they resisted the impulse to manage and contain animal violence that sits, fragilely, at the heart of 'human self-conception'.[98]

Bearwards in early modern England therefore not only negotiated the social, legal, and economic dynamics of their communities but worked to 'communicate and broker between human and animal worlds' and develop 'expertise and…deep understanding of the creatures they tended'.[99] It is telling, perhaps, that Chester is, uniquely, named and so individualized on Ralph Whitestones's probate inventory, despite animal names having no legal value.[100] The recording of Chester's name blurs the lines between 'separate social realms' between human and animal[101] and so underscores the centrality of human–animal relationships to life in Ormskirk and beyond. This was not just any bear, it was Chester – perhaps a local celebrity whose name had advertising power, maybe individuated by recognizable features or behaviours, and no doubt familiar to the appraisers.

IV

The wealth and particularity of evidence surrounding the Whitestones bearwards is rare and unusual, making it difficult to know the typicality of their arrangements. Yet by looking to surrounding archival narratives and practices across early modern England, I have sought to learn more about pre-modern social status. We have understood little, to date, about bearwards' existence and identities outside of the capital. This microhistory has drawn on an unusually rich concentration of documentary evidence to explore their varied positions in the social and economic landscape of early modern England, demonstrating how entertainment producers instrumentalized their game and animals for social advancement. But animal baiting was also a risky enterprise, and heated debates about the legality or morality of animal sport could affect one's social and economic standing. The status descriptions applied to different generations of Whitestones (husbandman, yeoman, labourer, or butcher) remind us bearwards came from, or moved into, a variety of social positions. One's place in the community was contingent on more than being a controversial 'entertainment producer', depending on multiple forms of income and social, credit, and affective networks in the local community.

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[97] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer: sovereign power and bare life* (Stanford CA, 1998; orig. edn 1995), p. 25. See also idem, *The open: man and animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford, CA, 2004).

[98] Karl Steel, *How to make a human: animals and violence in the middle ages* (Columbus, OH, 2011), p. 64, see also pp. 60–4.

[99] Sarah Cockram, 'Interspecies understanding: exotic animals and their handlers at the Italian Renaissance court', *Renaissance Studies*, 31 (2017), pp. 277–96, at p. 296.

[100] Fudge, *Quick cattle*, p. 94.

[101] Ibid., p. 93.

The Ormskirk records also give insight into the lives of those bears at the heart of this unpleasant but popular industry. The Brandearth 'bear house' listed in Ralph's inventory may have been a similar commercial venue to Bankside's Bear Garden or Hope. Yet rural Ormskirk also posed different economic challenges to London. Chester and fellow bears lived on an agricultural estate that depended on both livestock farming and corn, as well as other labours. So many documents from Lancashire and Cheshire advertise the centrality of bloodsports to regional activity and even identity, but by thinking about the built environments that defined Chester's lived experience, as well the Whitestones's, we are reminded that this was an industry built on animal captivity, exploitation, and cruelty (even if combined with care). But we might also, by degrees, begin to appreciate the names, personalities, and behaviour of those animals ultimately responsible for the place of early modern bearwards.