

Richard Preston

The travels and tribulations of an English Catholic: John Richard Beste (1805-85) of Botleigh Grange

John Richard Beste is a phenomenon of the nineteenth century: cosmopolite, writer, English Catholic, radical politician, political economist and candidate for the representation of Southampton in 1844/7 and 1856. His name evolved over the course of three decades from John Richard Best at baptism to John Richard Beste in the late 1830s and finally to John Richard Digby Beste in the 1860s. For convenience we shall – unless clearly anachronistic – use the simple and commonly accepted nomenclature of Richard Beste throughout this essay.

Richard Best was born on 26 April 1806 at Bridgwater in Somerset. He was the second son of Henry Best (1768-1836) and his wife Sarah. Their marriage in 1801 was a fusion of two significant provincial families. The paternal side of the family held land in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire and for three generations its head had been a clergyman in the diocese of Lincoln: great grandfather Henry (c.1699-1755), ordained 1722 and prebend of Lincoln Cathedral 1754; grandfather Henry (1730-82), ordained 1754, vicar of Edlington 1755, prebend of Lincoln Cathedral 1762-82 and rector of Mavis Enderby 1769; and father Henry (1768-1836), ordained deacon in September 1791 and appointed curate of the large parish of St Martin's, Lincoln in December 1791. The distaff side of the family came from Somerset. Sarah was a daughter of Edward and Mary Sealy. Her father was a wine merchant and banker in Bridgwater, joint founder of the Somersetshire Bank in November 1791, with an 8-bedroomed country residence - Castle Hill House - in Nether Stowey, a village eight miles from Bridgwater in the foothills of the Quantocks. Edward died in 1828 and his widow, at an advanced age, in December 1831.

Richard was heir to a strong academic tradition. His grandfather had entered Magdalene College, Cambridge in 1748, proceeding to BA in 1752 (coming first in the *ordo* and elected Senior Wrangler of the University) and MA in 1755. He was elected a fellow of the college in 1752 and awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1767. Richard's father, an *alumnus* like his father of Lincoln Grammar School, matriculated at University College, Oxford on 17 March 1785, aged 16. He later that year migrated to Magdalen College, after nomination to a demyship [scholarship] there, taking his BA in 1788 and MA in 1791. He was elected a probationary fellow of the college in 1791, the fellowship confirmed after publication in 1793 of the *Christian religion defended against the Philosophers and Republicans of France*. A fellow undergraduate was later to remember "BEST of MAGDALEN [as] a name well known to us" (*Gentleman's Magazine*, July 1828, p 52). He resigned his fellowship in April 1797 on succession to a freehold estate on the death of his mother. On 26 May 1798 Henry Beste (to use the extended version of his surname he had adopted about four years earlier) converted to Roman Catholicism. He published a candid narrative of the conversion as a preface to *Four years in France*, published in 1826. Family influences were critical. His mother, Magdalen – daughter and co-heir of Kenelm Digby of North Luffenham in Rutland – saw herself as the representative of the extinct male line of a family formerly at the heart of English Catholicism. Direct ancestors included Sir Everard Digby (c.1578-1606), executed

for his part in the Gunpowder Plot, and his son, Sir Kenelm Digby (1603-65), a leading Catholic intellectual and a founder of the Royal Society. Magdalen was a Protestant at the time of her marriage in 1755 but, in her son's words, "some 'rags of popery' hung about her" (*Four years in France*, p 11).

The timing of the conversion was unusual and, although Henry maintained the friendship of many in his immediate circle, he was widely condemned in the outside world. An anonymous reviewer in *Gentleman's Magazine*, August 1826, thought that his *apologia* "affords ... a melancholy proof of the debasing influence of Catholicism on a fine mind and an excellent understanding". The conversion deprived Henry of any hope of future civil or political advancement. He spent the majority of the next twenty years in provincial obscurity in Somerset and Lincolnshire. His eldest son – Henry Kenelm Beste, commonly known as Kenelm Beste - was born at Bath on 5 May 1801, his parents then living in the west wing of Lansdowne Crescent. Richard was born – as we have seen – five years later at Bridgwater. The family lived for a time at Castle Hill House in Nether Stowey. They left in June 1807, the household furniture, farming stock, brewing and dairy equipment together with a "small library of 7-800 volumes, containing several valuable editions of Greek and Latin classics, and other choice books in different languages" being sold in a five-day auction. The sale of the library occupied the final two days (*Bath Chronicle*, 2 July 1807). The family moved to their Lincolnshire estate at Sutterton, a "secluded place" deep in the fens, where Richard spent most of his young life. His father helped to establish a Roman Catholic congregation at Boston - about ten miles to the north - and funded the building of a chapel in the town (*Oxford dictionary of national biography*). Richard was sent to Stonyhurst College in spring 1817 to begin his formal education in a strict Jesuit environment. He joined his brother Kenelm who had been sent up four years earlier.

The family's provincial exile ended on 24 April 1818 when Henry, his wife and six children aged between three and seventeen years left Southampton on board the *Chesterfield* packet for Havre. This was the start of what Henry called "My long-delayed continental plan", an extended grand tour with the education of his two sons under his personal care. The core classical curriculum was taught by their father and the best continental masters were employed to teach dancing, drawing (in Avignon by an *eleve* of David), art appreciation, music and fencing. The journey can be followed in two works published by Henry Colburn of London: *Four years in France; or narrative of an English family's residence during that period*, 1826 and *Italy as it is; or narrative of an English family's residence for three years in that country*, 1828. The family spent four months in Paris, 40 months in Avignon, four months in Nice, summered in Leghorn on the Italian coast and wintered in Rome and Naples. The itinerary included Marseilles, Toulon, Cannes, Genoa, Turin, Milan and a lengthy sojourn at Florence. The habitual, daily use of two or even three languages (although English was spoken in the family) "produced in all the family some little forgetfulness of our native tongue" (*Four years in France*, p 243). Kenelm died of typhus on 13 September 1821, a cruel end to his father's hopes for such an amiable and promising youth. The mantle of expectation now fell on Richard, almost a victim himself of the same fever. He began a series of journals (in the form of letters) in emulation of his father. The first is dated Rome, 27 October 1823,

when he was 17 years old. They were published in two volumes in 1826 by Richard Cruttwell of Bath as *Transalpine memoirs, or anecdotes and observations, showing the actual state of Italy and the Italians*. As Beste later quipped, “I began life early”.

*Transalpine memories* was published anonymously, the author identified simply but provocatively as “an English Catholic”. This does not suggest that Beste was a fainthearted Catholic: “No man declares himself to be “an *English* Catholic”, unless he conscientiously adopts the creed of that religion” (*Transalpine memories*, volume 1, preface, p xvi). But he was not a Papist. He consistently denied the temporal power of Rome in religion: “A native of England would not willingly be considered a native of Rome, although, in religious matters, he may be in communication with the bishop of that city” (*Morning Chronicle*, 23 October 1839: reply to a description of him in the previous week’s issue as “a Roman Catholic gentleman”). Nor was he a bigot. He was a modernist, a reformer, a believer in freedom of conscience: “It is time that English Catholics should adopt human means to accomplish human ends. The ends we have in view are justice, good-will, gentlemanly feeling, and respect for the consciences and rights of all” (*Dolman’s Magazine*, 1 October 1845).

The family returned to England in 1826 but Richard almost immediately set off unaccompanied on a five-month tour of his native country. He was just turned twenty years of age. *Odious comparisons; or the Cosmopolite in England*, based on daily notes taken throughout the tour, was published in 1831. He was a foreigner in his land of birth: “it will be seen that I could not visit England with the feelings of an Englishman; that to me it was a new country, which I was to judge of by comparing it with those in which I had been educated – with those which I had first known” (*Odious comparisons*, vol 1, p xx: introduction). The customs officials at Dover – his port of entry from Calais and where he began the tour - thought him not to be English (vol 1, p 141). An extended itinerary took in London, Bath, Boston (“No town affords better living, better wines, or better cheer than Boston”), Skegness, York, the Midlands, the south coast and Wales. Richard was in Bridgwater at the time of the general election of June 1826, an impressionable witness to both the endemic violence that often accompanied a contested borough election and the nomination for the county seat of Somerset of Henry Hunt, radical politician, and not long released from Ilchester prison. Richard continued his tour through the southern coastal counties: “and, when you have once walked up and down the broad esplanade of Sidmouth, hurry through that ugliest county in all England, Dorsetshire; nor stop till you reach the shore of Southampton Water. There pause; and tell me what you have seen, on this side of Naples, to compare to the mixture of wood and water, of hill and dale, of town and country, of landscape, sea-scape, and skyscape, which blend together on the ridge of Bittern and of Peartree Green, and on the romantic shores of the Hamble and Botley river?” The following year he made a second unaccompanied tour, this time to the German provinces. The tour began in May 1827 at Metz. *Transrhenane memoirs* was published by Richard Crutwell and Longman & Co in 1828. This journey opened up new intellectual horizons: “an unoccupied man, much of my time is given to literature; the acquisition of the German language will offer to me a new mine of instruction and amusement”. It also helped to define his

nationality: “As I exclaimed on first beholding the Danube at Elm – I may now consider myself an European traveller or, perhaps, an European citizen” (*Transrhenane memoirs*, p 216).

Richard Best settled at Bath on his return from the German provinces. The preface of *Transrhenane memoirs* is dated 3 July 1829 at Marlborough Buildings. He married a distant kinswoman, Harriet Mary Rosamond Best (born c.1810), on 12 January 1830. She was the daughter of Charles Best (1773-1818/9) of Bath and granddaughter of the Reverend Race Godfrey DD, chief proprietor and for nearly 30 years minister of the Kensington Chapel in Bath. An indenture settlement of 5 January 1829 (Hampshire Archives and Local Studies 57M94/148) suggests that the nuptial arrangements had been made the previous year. The marriage was not in the bride’s home town but in the house of His Majesty’s Minister at the Court of Naples. Richard and Harriet were living in Bennett Street in Bath when their eldest child, Catherine, was born on 4 April 1831. Their eldest son, Henry Digby Beste, was born the following year, although it is not clear whether the family was still in Bath or had already relocated to their fen-bound estate at Sutterton in Lincolnshire. In early 1833 the family moved to the softer climes of south Hampshire with the purchase of Botleigh Grange in the parish of South Stoneham, a few miles east of Southampton (Hampshire Archives and Local Studies 57M94/146, indentures of lease and release dated 9 and 10 January 1833). The property was purchased by Henry Beste - Richard’s father – for the young couple.

The 333-acre estate had first come on the market in May 1829, following the departure of Henry Eyre owing to ill-health. It was prime agricultural land, a mix of arable, pasture and woodland, “luxuriously studded” with oak timber. The Hambledon Hunt was close by and a trout stream bisected the estate. The sale included outlying farms at West End, Wildern and Thornhill, but at its core lay the home estate of Botleigh Grange with a 30-acre deer park, an ornamental lake (medieval fishponds originally) and walled gardens “in the finest possible perfection” with fruit trees, greenhouses and ice houses. The house – colonnaded and dating from the Georgian period - was meticulously described by the estate agent Charles Brooks: “A portico and entrance with fire-place, each 26 feet by 19 feet and 15 feet high, leading to an octagonal dining room with chased carved work 24 feet by 24 feet and 16 feet high, a morning room 18 feet 6 inches by 18 feet, gentleman’s room 17 feet 6 inches by 17 feet, all opening to the Lawn by French windows. The latter has a water-closet and bath-room, communicating with a bed chamber and another water-closet. A large and airy staircase leads to a drawing room, 24 feet by 15 feet 7 inches, handsomely decorated, and a lobby. From whence are 3 best and 4 smaller bedrooms and dressing rooms. Above are seven servants’ ditto. The comforts displayed throughout the house are seldom to be met with upon an equal scale” (*Salisbury Journal*, 25 May 1829 – under auction by John Mecey - and 8 June 1829 – under auction by Charles Brooks following the sudden death of John Mecey).

The estate was originally acquired – in June 1829 – by the Reverend William Hamilton Turner. The only son of the Dean of Norwich, William was the non-resident vicar of Dilham with Horning in Norfolk, the parish work entrusted to a stipendiary curate. He was elected an honorary burgess of Southampton in February 1831. William was only 26 years of age when he moved in, with a wife two years younger and three children under the age of five. They

were short-term owners. The house was under offer again in January 1832, this time through the London auctioneer Mr Claridge: “partaking of all the salubrity and beauty of its privileged vicinity [it] may vie in all respects with any other throughout the Empire” (*Morning Chronicle*, 9 January 1832). The following year the Beste family – Richard and Harriet with their two young children and Richard’s parents Henry and Sarah – moved in. Henry died at Brighton on 28 May 1836 (*The Examiner*, 12 June 1836) and Sarah died at Botleigh Grange on 10 December 1843. It was an intensely Catholic household. There was a private Catholic chapel and almost certainly a resident priest, although only two from a later decade can be identified: Reverend W Machurson (1855) – otherwise unknown - and the Reverend Thomas MacAuliffe, DD (1857), a missionary in Madras in the 1840s, founder of St Joseph’s Catholic Schools in Lamb’s Buildings, Bunhill Row, London in 1851/2 and subsequently Catholic chaplain to HM Convict prison, Gibraltar. The first of Richard Beste’s religious publications date from this period. *The family prayer-book, containing all the private and public devotions in use amongst the English Catholics* was published anonymously in 1839, printed by the Southampton firm of Fletcher and Son, both father and son being members of Above Bar Congregational Chapel. The profits were devoted to the education of Catholic clergy for a destitute district. It was written to induce “a sentiment of hopeful gladness rather than of gloom” and included hymns “newly and most literally translated in metres suited to the Church music to which Latin verses are generally sung”. A second edition – retitled *Catholic hours, or the family-prayer book* – was published in 1840, with a tenth edition in 1868. A selection of spiritual reading and instruction - *Holy readings, giving the cream of many books in one* and known only from a fourth edition of 1868 - may also date from the Botleigh years. It is an eclectic mix of the light-weight and the profound, with vernacular translations of foreign texts and including works by both Henry and Richard Beste. Slightly to pre-empt events, a collection of plainchants – *Church hymns in English that may be sung to the Old Church Music* - was published, with the approbation of Cardinal Wiseman, in 1849. The same year saw publication of an English translation of the Christmas carol *Adeste Fideles*.

Botleigh Grange was the principal residence of the Beste family from 1833 to the mid 1840s. The house was substantially rebuilt in 1838: “a handsome elevation has been given to all the rooms, and it now ranks as one of the best houses near the town and neighbourhood of a fashionable resort” (*London Standard*, 20 September 1839). Six children were born here in a little over seven years: Lucy (27 April 1834), Frank Digby (August 1835), Kenelm Digby (1836), Agnes (8 April 1838), Constable Digby (early 1840) and Isabella (24 November 1841). The estate had grown to almost 700 acres by November 1846 through the steady accumulation of outlying farms. Richard became a gentleman farmer, an advocate of the outdoor life and an evangelist of the rural idyll. Those who lived in the country “enjoyed the scenes around them, and considered the health and the fresh air, and the out of doors enjoyments as part of the interest on the capital employed. From the moment they put the seed into the ground they had a peculiar interest on the soil, and watched it till its development in the perfect bulb. They were pursuits which elevated while they employed and made them ‘look through Nature to Nature’s God’” (*Hampshire Advertiser*, 6 April 1844: speech at the 14<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner of Botley Cattle Market).

Richard Beste adopted many of the practices associated with ‘high farming’. He improved drainage. He fertilized the soil: “These were not times for playing at farming. It was a time now when they must have the dung cart, and the four-footed dung carrier constantly employed” (*Hampshire Advertiser*, 6 April 1844). He invested in modern machinery: an auction of farming equipment in 1843 included corn and turnip drills, a grass seed machine, improved chaff and turnip cutters, a large iron park roller, two 2-horse rollers and a bailing roller (*Hampshire Independent*, 21 January 1843). He supported organizations and events that helped to disseminate the new ways of farming: a founder of the Botley Farmers’ Club, a patron both of Botley Cattle Market and of the Botley and South Hants Root and Grain Show and his name headed the town requisition of November 1842 inviting the Royal Agricultural Society – the epitome of modern farming – to hold its sixth annual meeting at Southampton in 1844. He moved, jointly with James Barlow Hoy of Midanbury, the key enabling resolution at the subsequent town meeting. Here he spoke not only of the benefits to the provincial economy - “hundreds would come for the sole purpose of visiting the most beautiful town in England” – but also of the impetus to agricultural reform. Could local farmers but see the new implements on show “their own enlightened views would prompt them to adopt them at once, and if they did so, no part of England would be able to compete with this, in the prosperity of its agriculture” (*Hampshire Independent*, 26 November 1842). He was elected a member of the Royal Agricultural Society in July 1844, shortly before the Southampton meeting.

Richard Beste sat on the local bench as a county magistrate. His certificate of qualification was dated 3 April 1838 (Hampshire Archives and Local Studies Q27/3/361) and was his fifth commission: he was already a magistrate for Devon and for the three Lincolnshire divisions of Lindsey, Holland and Kesteven. The Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 had given Beste the right to take public office, but there was still a reluctance in some circles to appoint Catholics. The Lord Lieutenant, the Duke of Wellington, initially offered to grant his commission only in the event of “a Chartist riot or similar emergency”. Beste refused the commission under such terms - “I would not be deprived of that to which I was entitled, and have it thrust upon me, perhaps, for the convenience of his government” (*Nowadays*, volume 1, p 296) – and awaited more propitious circumstances. Beste was also chairman of the board of guardians of South Stoneham Union for the first two years of its existence (1835-7). He oversaw the conversion – at a cost of £850 – of South Stoneham parish workhouse into a union workhouse serving nine parishes.

The estate at Botleigh was run as an exercise in political economy. Tenants were encouraged, on the renewal of their leases, to exchange traditional fixed cash rents, which offered security of tenure, for corn rents which fluctuated in accordance with the price of grain. These encouraged risk taking. He similarly believed that rural unemployment could be relieved only by private enterprise and market forces. He opposed the use of pauper labour and, as chairman of South Stoneham Union, enforced the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 with Malthusian rigour. He provided written evidence on the union to the *Second annual report of the Commissioners under the Poor Law Amendment Act* in 1836 and in early 1837 published *The new poor law in practice*, an unconditional endorsement of the new system. He claimed

that under his guardianship only one family entered the workhouse and that the cost of maintaining the poor fell from £5,750 to £2,080 *per annum*. This unyielding ideology caused a build-up of resentment amongst tenants and neighbours alike. John Pocock, a respectable tenant farming 40 acres at Moorgreen, came before the county bench in October 1848 charged with trespass in search of game. He thought the charge petty and vindictive as for eight years he had voluntarily given up the shooting rights over his farm to Beste who had then let them for £4 *per annum*: “£32 into his yawning pocket”. But more damaging and disturbing is his almost throw-away observation: “I think Beste ought not to be so particular. Why, I am one of his fortunate tenants, and he hasn’t many, for they either break or run away. Actually, I am about the only one of his tenants who has not run away or failed” (*Hampshire Advertiser*, 21 October 1848). Beste’s similarly ideological approach to the new poor law led to his deselection from the board of guardians of South Stoneham in March 1837. He came fifth out of the six candidates who offered themselves.

In politics, Richard Beste was, as his father, a Liberal. In 1835 he was a founder member of the Hampshire Reform Association (*Salisbury Journal*, 15 June 1835). Three years later he was enrolled an honorary member of the Southampton Reform Protection Association. The latter was the more significant for, although his natural influence lay in the county, Beste’s interests were decidedly urban. He sat on the county bench for the Southampton division. He was steward of Southampton races in 1842. His part in the capture of the Royal Agricultural Society’s show for Southampton and his fulsome, if somewhat misplaced, praise of the town have already been noted. He supported the reform of the Corn Laws, advocating the introduction of a small fixed duty on corn imports in place of the current widely-fluctuating graduated duty. Many in Southampton would have agreed, but, together with criticism of the Anti-Corn Law League for being too insensitive to “the natural fears of those whose all is dependent upon agriculture” (*Dolman’s Magazine*, 1 March 1845), this remnant of agricultural politics formed an uncomfortable barrier between Beste and the more extreme urban radicals. In line with his market-led economic theories, he believed that rural and urban prosperity were intimately linked and that commercial towns, where labour was in short supply, helped to drive up agricultural wages in their rural hinterland. “Commerce alone could enable the poverty-stricken labourer of rural districts to earn that reward for their tolls which would enable them to live like human beings, like Englishmen, like Christians (cheers)” (*Hampshire Independent*, 3 October 1846: speech at Richard Andrews annual workman’s dinner). Practicalities also argued in favour of Southampton, for “it was in large towns only that the reform interest could expect any material support, the counties were too generally in the hands of the Tories” (*Hampshire Telegraph*, 27 August 1838: inaugural speech to the Southampton Reform Protection Association).

Beste’s political involvement with the Liberal party in Southampton developed rapidly. In 1840 he was selected to be part of a highly-politicized deputation to carry a congratulatory address to Queen Victoria on her marriage to Prince Albert. He declined on the technicality that he was not a householder of Southampton. He was replaced by Thomas Leader Harman, proprietor of the *Hampshire Independent* (*Hampshire Telegraph*, 24 February 1840). Two years later, Beste’s support of Harman in a brutal libel battle – leading to Harman being

challenged to a duel – with the Tory election agent John Sadleir Moody led to Beste being dismissed from the Southampton Club, now almost completely infiltrated by Tories (*Hampshire Advertiser*, 11 June 1842; see also ‘Thomas Leader Harman: a gentleman of fortune in mid-nineteenth century Southampton’ in *Journal of the Southampton Local History Forum*, no. 16, Winter 2010). In September 1844, with the possibility of an imminent by election following the anticipated resignation of one of the sitting members, George William Hope, from government, Beste was nominated the Liberal candidate for the borough. To his political opponents, he was “the very last man in the county, who if the Liberal party has any, the remotest chance of success they ought to have chosen” (*Hampshire Advertiser*, 5 October 1844). His acceptance speech of 1 October 1844 was carefully crafted to appeal to the political sentiments of his new constituents, emphasizing his steadfast local connections – the previous eight Liberal candidates had been outsiders -, the mutuality of urban and rural interests and the modernity of his political sentiments. It was printed in full in the *Hampshire Independent*, 5 October 1844. The following is a brief excerpt:

“On his return from Wales, he had yesterday the honour of receiving a deputation, who presented to him a requisition signed by a great portion of the electors of the Borough of Southampton, calling on him to offer himself as a candidate for the Borough in the event of a vacancy (loud cheers)... He felt it to be an honour; it could not be otherwise for a private country gentleman, known only to them as a neighbour, and by his general political principles, to be invited to come forward.... Henceforward, their cause was united. He could have no interests but those which interested them. If he were returned for their borough, he could not make it a stepping stone to some other place; if he were defeated he should not retire, leaving them to seek elsewhere. He was bound by property to the neighbourhood; in that neighbourhood he, and those who came after him, must continue. Their interests must be his interests, for his property must increase in value with the prosperity of their town. Therefore he said, he was not about to leave them.... It was impossible to dictate any longer to Southampton; it had outgrown the despotism which used to enthrall it. Half-a-dozen of the gentry could no longer impose on the town their own ideas (cheers). Should they believe that a town more beautifully situated than almost any other in Europe (and he had seen them all, or nearly so), with its great local advantages, and with its 30,000 inhabitants, increasing every day – should such a town submit to the trammels of a small minority? No, such times were past. The people will think for themselves; let them hear both sides of every question, and form their own opinions. He asked them all to use the thought which God had endowed them with. He who would not think was a bigot, - he who dared not think was a coward, - he who could not think was a fool.”

Richard Beste was the protégé of Richard Andrews – a self-made man, owner of one of the largest coach making businesses in the south of England, a political radical, Congregationalist by religion and soon to be the undisputed arbiter of the Liberal party in Southampton. The allegiance was clear to all. It was Andrews who headed the requisition to Botleigh Grange and it was in Andrews’s opulent carriage bazaar in Above Bar that Beste made his acceptance speech, the centrepiece of the annual workman’s dinner. It was delivered to an audience of around 300, the cream of Southampton Liberalism and including the MPs Sir John Easthope



and Ralph Etwall. Richard Andrews was singled out for praise: “Why all over England the Radical Coach-builder of Southampton was known; he was a beacon to encourage other men to assert their own independence”.

It was a strange *mésalliance* of Congregationalist and Catholic, but conventional religious differences were put aside in the interests of what Beste termed ‘free trade in religion’. Both patron and protégé believed that freedom of conscience was the true test of civilised society. Beste was introduced as respondent to the toast – given by Andrews – ‘Civil and Religious Liberty all over the world’. “He was sure they desired to maintain the doctrine that every man has a right to judge for himself; and ere many years passed he was convinced that doctrine would be so firmly established that historians would speak of the persecutions of days gone by, as geologists now show us the monsters of an antediluvian world” (*Hampshire Independent*, 5 October 1844). Church rates in particular were against the spirit of the times. “No man should be called on to pay towards that from which he conscientiously differed” (*Hampshire Telegraph*, 19 October 1839: speech at Portsmouth). Beste indeed objected to the very phrase ‘religious toleration’ as it “supposed the domination of one portion of mankind over another; it was, in fact, a monopoly, and monopolies had been declared inconsistent with the spirit of the age. [The Test and Corporation Acts had been repealed and Catholic Emancipation granted] and he had heard talk of gratitude; but he did not feel it; for if a man had taken away his birthright, ought he to be grateful when it was restored to him?” (*Hampshire Telegraph*, 26 August 1839: speech at the second anniversary dinner of Southampton Reform Protection Association). In this world of absolutes, the toast ‘Civil and religious liberty’ should be proposed and seconded not by those excluded from the established church but by members of the established church – to have the grace of appearing to grant a right rather than that others may appear to extort it (*Hampshire Independent*, 5 October 1844). It was a mild rebuke of his patron.

The relationship between Andrews and Beste owed much to the seduction of opposites. Richard Andrews had no more than a dame’s school education (he lamented the “many disadvantages arising from the want of early education” in his will made shortly before his death- Hampshire Archives and Local Studies 5M62/2 p 410: 12 November 1858) and few cultural attainments. He relied throughout his political life on sympathetic editors to sanitise and structure his linguistically-naïve and formless speeches. Beste on the contrary was a much published author in a variety of disciplines: religious works, poetry, travelogues and novels which drew heavily on his classical training and his familiarity with contemporary romances. *Cuma, the warrior-bard of Erin, and other poems*, published by Longmans & Co in 1829, included a translation of *Aeneas in the infernal regions* (Thomas Martin Wheeler used the work as a source of mottoes for *Sunshine and shadow: a tale of the nineteenth century*, published in the Chartist *Northern Star* between 31 March 1849 and 5 January 1850 and said to be the first truly working-class novel). *Satires and the Beggar’s Coin; a poem*, published by Hurst, Chance & Co in 1831, included a controversial dissertation – *Infidelity and Catholicism of Lord Byron* – in which Beste argued that the romantic poet was a covert Catholic. *Rondeaulx; translated from the black letter French edition of 1527*, published in 1838 and printed by Fletcher and Son of Southampton, was a collection of minstrel lays. Two

anonymous three-volume novels, by ‘an old author in a new walk’, followed. *The Pope: a novel*, published in 1840, drew inspiration from the reign of Pope Clement VII, 1523-34. *Isadora, or the Adventures of a Neapolitan*, published in 1841, was a romance set in the time of Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor between 1519 and 1558. Richard Andrews seems to have been drawn towards men like Richard Beste – Thomas Leader Harman and the Reverend Henry Holloway are two other names that come readily to mind – whose background and intellectual personality were the mirror opposite of his own.

1845 was an eventful year for Richard Beste. He was the first editor, although unacknowledged, of *Dolman's Magazine and Monthly Miscellany of Criticism* which made its first appearance on 28 February 1845 (the attribution of Beste as editor was made by Joseph Gillow in *A literary and biographical dictionary of the English Catholics*, volume 4, 1855). Charles Dolman had previously published the *Dublin Review* and the *Catholic Magazine*, but the new title was targeted at a more liberal, less exclusive audience. Its remit was specifically to promote fellow feeling between Catholic and Protestant and to make the Catholic faith attractive to a wider audience (*Oxford dictionary of national biography*: entry on Charles Dolman). It was not a passive editorship as Beste used his new influence to promote his own world view. The first article of the first issue – ‘Correspondence between Sir Robert Peel and Mr Beste, on Irish agrarian outrages’ – reprinted four letters to the prime minister dated from Botleigh Grange between 26 December 1842 and 10 January 1845. They argued that private enterprise was the solution to Ireland's economic troubles. The surplus Irish population should be employed as waged labourers on farms, typically of 1,000 acres and reclaimed from the waste, rather than confined, forgotten in the workhouse. “The possession of a plot of highly-rented potatoe [*sic*] ground would no longer be a matter of vital importance, for day-labour and day-pay would have been established” (letter of 26 December 1842). The first issue also carried the first chapter of *The Countess Clemence* by “the editor of *Dolman's Magazine*”, an historical romance set in Sicily to be serialized in thirteen parts. It was a prequel to *Alcazar; or, the Dark Ages* by Richard Beste, published in 1858. A later issue contained an outrageously partisan review, occupying eleven pages, of a second edition of *The Beggar's Coin*, published by Charles Dolman in 1845. “After this what woman would not wish to have Mr Beste as her Poet Laureate?” (*Dolman's Magazine*, volume 1, p 287). Space was also allocated to the posthumous publication of some of his father's works. Richard's parliamentary ambitions – “as a Whig and something more” – were subtly reinforced in an article on ‘Catholics in Parliament’ (*Dolman's Magazine*, 30 June 1845): “So many centuries have elapsed since a Catholic has been called upon to represent an independent English constituency in Parliament”. Beste was succeeded as editor by Miles Gerald Keon in April 1846.

Late summer 1845 saw the posthumous publication of *Poverty and the Baronet's family; a Catholic novel written in the last years of his father's life*. Its London publisher was Thomas Jones, a well-known Catholic publishing house. A minor novel, perhaps the earliest Catholic novel to be written in England (David Lodge, ‘The first Catholic novel?’, *Dublin Review*, volume 234, no.486, Winter 1960, pp 365-71), its interest to contemporaries lay in the author statement, added at his son's insistence: “By the late Henry Digby Beste, MA, Fellow of St

Mary Magdalene College, Oxford: Originator of the Religious Opinions of Modern Oxford". In a lengthy biographical memoir, Richard dated the rise of Tractarianism – the High Church Anglican movement also known as Puseyism - from publication of a sermon on priestly absolution given by his father before the University of Oxford on 24 November 1793. It called on Anglican clergy to revive the private confessional and to resume their lapsed priestly character. To Henry, any significance which the sermon may have had died with his conversion to Catholicism four and a half years later. He reprinted the sermon in *Personal and literary memorials* (pp 315-38) but emphasized that this was a historical copy, not a republication or a re-affirmation of its opinions. To Richard, the sermon had a lasting influence among "the more pious and learned members of the university" and was an essential prelude to the growing use of Catholic practices and doctrine among elements of the clergy. *Dolman's Magazine* (1 October 1845) was one of the few contemporary journals to accept the proposition. A third edition was published in 1874 under the title *Priestly Absolution*: the subject of an essay – 'On a forgotten book' – by Hilaire Belloc in the *Tablet*, 18 May 1940, p 481.

Richard Beste was reselected as one of the Liberal candidates for Southampton on 30 December 1845 on rumours that the government of Robert Peel was about to fall. The vote, at the Southampton Reform Protection Association, was unanimous. His candidature twelve months earlier had been accepted by a large majority of the Southampton Liberals, although the *Hampshire Advertiser* (12 October 1844) presciently noted that two leading Congregationalists – the Reverend William Thorn, minister of the Winchester chapel at which Richard Andrews attended Sunday service, and William Lankester, ironfounder and member of Above Bar chapel – failed to speak in Beste's favour. His candidature now split the party. The government grant earlier in the year to Maynooth College, a Roman Catholic seminary in Ireland, placed church/state relations at the heart of the election. Beste had condemned the grant as "an expedient reserved for this boasted nineteenth century" (*Dolman's Magazine*, 1 September 1845) and reiterated his opposition, to great acclamation, in his re-adoption speech: "The world was now too old to maintain the principle that one man should support another's religion. God's truth would maintain itself, without any forced State maintenance (great applause); and that which required such support was not a truth, but a lie (renewed applause)" (*Hampshire Independent*, 3 January 1846). However the very fact that Beste was a Catholic – albeit one who denied the temporal power of Rome and who had condemned the Maynooth grant – made him unacceptable to the more fundamentalist nonconformists in the party. George Laishley, High Street draper and Wesleyan Methodist preacher, wrote an open letter to "J R Beste, Esq" in defence of "one of the most important, flourishing, intelligent Protestant Constituencies in the kingdom". It was printed in the *Hampshire Independent*, 17 January 1846 despite the objection of the newspaper's editor, Thomas Lawrence Behan (himself born a Roman Catholic although possibly by now a convert to the Anglican church), to "the bitterness of its tone and the sectarianism of its spirit".

"May I be permitted to enquire from what sections of this Protestant Constituency you expect support? Is it from the members of the Established Church, whose sacred communion you

have boldly and publicly denounced as “*a Lie!*” [Or do you] look only and confidently for success to the Dissenters of the Borough. Are you not aware that no class of men in the kingdom have more steadily and resolutely denounced the Puseyite movement in our National Church than the Congregational Dissenters? And why? Simply because of its approximation to the Church of Rome. .. And then as to the Wesleyans, against whom the very “thunders of the Vatican” have more than once resounded, from one end of this kingdom to the other. My conviction is that there is not an Elector among them who would act so absurdly as to vote for a Romanist! No, not even for A CHEAPER LOAF! ...”

The letter ended with barbed references to Beste’s unreliability on the Corn Laws and an attack on his “heartless and callous” support of the new poor laws. “You were kind enough to lend me your pamphlet [*The new poor law in practice*] to read, for which I tender you my best thanks. May I take the liberty of recommending you a small book for your careful perusal – Charles Dickens’s *Christmas Carol*”. Beste retracted much of his initial endorsement of the Poor Law Amendment Act in the light of the Andover workhouse scandal and the jobbing of other unions, but otherwise was unrepentant (*Hampshire Independent*, 24 January 1846: letter to Southampton Reform Protection Association).

The general election was delayed until July 1847. The Liberal candidates now were Alexander Cockburn, a successful London barrister and later attorney general, and Brodie McGee Willcox, managing director of the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company. Beste had been asked to stand down as a candidate by the unanimous vote of the Southampton Reform Protection Association on 14 September 1846, the first meeting attended by Thomas Leader Harman, the Liberal party’s chief election strategist in the borough, on his return from a five-year exile in the United States of America. The reason given was “the divided state of feeling among the constituency” (*Hampshire Independent*, 19 September 1846). Beste simply refused to go, holding the requisitionists of 1844 to what he saw as a solemn and binding oath of allegiance. Francis Cooper, seconder of the motion to re-appoint Beste in December 1845, curtly summarized the subsequent stand-off: “We ... in courteous terms suggested your withdrawal – we waited on you by deputation – we reasoned – we expostulated with you – we exhausted every argument to show you the futility of your pretensions – resolutions of the Reform Association were passed to the same effect – letters were written, dissuading you from an attempt which would result in failure to yourself – disappointment to your friends – and mischief to the cause you professed attachment to. Every expedient failed, leaving the only alternative that of a series of resolutions testifying that between yourself and the Liberal constituents there was no *real* union”. He also referred to Beste’s “extreme unpopularity, even in your neighbourhood” (*Hampshire Independent*, 3 July 1847). A motion of the Southampton Reform Protection Association on 29 June 1847 refused any further correspondence (*Hampshire Independent*, 3 July 1847). Beste had become a nonentity. The editor of the *Hampshire Independent* relegated his next election address to the foot of the last page, next to an advertisement for Blair’s gout and rheumatic pills (19 and 26 June 1847).

Beste should have been an irrelevance. He had no election agent, no election committee, no election headquarters, no canvass and, most damaging of all, no local residence, having left

Botleigh Grange about eighteen months earlier. Even had the requisitionists - numbering it was said between two and three hundred – stayed loyal he would have been easily defeated. But, so long as he remained in the field, he was a potential focus for nonconformists like William Lankester who had threatened to withhold support from any candidate deemed unsafe on the question of state intervention in religion. “Liberal members of the Established Church – Wesleyans, if you, indeed put forward to any claim to liberality – Independents, Nonconformists, if you believe in the great political principles which, of late, you have declared so eloquently in Southampton – be consistent: do not act upon a feeling which might be aroused with tenfold power against yourselves in Ireland and in every borough in England” (*Hampshire Advertiser*, 19 June and 10 July 1847; *Hampshire Independent*, 10 July 1847: address dated 18 June ostensibly from Botleigh Grange). The Tories alone stood to gain by his continued candidature: “Mr Beste was a great card in their hands for a while” (*Hampshire Independent*, 24 July 1847). Beste at length withdrew on 24 July, the day after the dissolution of Parliament. The two Tory candidates followed suite, defenceless against a re-united Liberal party. Beste’s valediction was published not in the *Hampshire Independent* but in the *Hampshire Telegraph* (31 July 1847), a Liberal paper published in Portsmouth:

“I held myself ready to stand. I have awaited their [the requisitionists’] decision. So many have fallen away from them, that I am not encouraged to persevere. I feel, indeed, that the public mind is not, as yet, fully prepared to value the subjects which I have submitted to you. Still questions have been mooted which will hereafter give a loftier tone to all election contests. Seeds will be sown which will hereafter bear fruit. Great principles have been invoked. I am proud to have been the first Parliamentary Candidate who has taken his stand upon them in Southampton. That it is that will lead me to disregard the narrow-minded bigotry which has led many, with professions of liberality on their lips, to object to me that my private religious belief is that of the great bulk of the Christian world, is that of the most liberal Sovereign now living [Pope Pius IX, the last pope to rule as the sovereign of the Papal States, whose election on 16 June 1846 had been hailed – prematurely – as a triumph of reform]. Bigots without knowing it, they will hereafter be ashamed of the manner in which they have falsified all their professions”.

By the time of the election, Botleigh Grange was mothballed, an empty shell devoid of furniture. It seems to have become empty in 1845. George Coffin, woodman to the estate and living at Botleigh Grange Lodge, was by September 1846 the contact for farm lets and the household furniture and effects were sold by R H Perkins at auction on 21 March 1847: the final tranche in a series of sales (*Hampshire Advertiser*, 20 and 27 March 1847). There is no entry for Botleigh Grange in the 1851 census. The Beste family had by the late 1840s relocated to Devon, living at Abbotsham Court, two miles from Bideford, a cliff-top residence with spectacular views over Lundy and the land above Clovelly and Ilfracombe. The house had been purchased in 1839. A new wing and tower were added in 1841 (Bridget Cherry and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The buildings of England: Devon*, 1989, p 124) and by the late 1840s/early 1850s the five-bay house consisted of drawing room (34 feet by 29 feet by 15 feet high), dining room (22 feet by 20 feet), breakfast room, six best bedrooms and servants’ rooms, with stabling, double coach house and walled garden (*North Devon Journal*, 20

September 1849 and 11 July 1851). The property also included Shebbear Town Farm, of 150 acres. Local attractions included fishing, hunting, shooting and sea-bathing. Abbotsham Court was the Beste family residence until March 1851, although Richard spent a good part of 1848/9 in Rome. Two sons were born in Devon: Whittingham Digby on 7 November 1846 and Bruno Digby on 26 October 1848. The death in childbirth of Harriet in October 1848, aged 38 years, left Richard to raise ten children, all under the age of seventeen, as a sole parent.

Unfulfilled dynastic expectations probably explain the acquisition of a second residence. “I once knew an old rogue Robert Studley Vidal of Cornborough, North Devon. He dreamed, when he was dead, that I should have taken his name and, with his little property added to my land, should rattle four in hand round Bideford. Having persuaded me to change my residence and purchase in his neighbourhood in order to round off his estates, he changed his mind and left his property to others” (*Nowadays; or courts, courtiers, churchmen, lawyers and brigands, at home and abroad*, volume 1, 1870). Robert Studley Vidal (1770-1841) was a barrister (member of the Middle Temple), an antiquarian (Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and a contributor to *Archaeologia*), an editor of legal textbooks and a translator of religious and legal texts, including *The commentaries on the affairs of the Christians before the time of Constantine the Great* by Johann Lorenz Masheim (*Dictionary of national biography*). Richard Beste dedicated his translation of *Rondeaux* to “my dear cousin” (probably second cousin) and acknowledged the loan of the rare original text from his library. The dedication is dated Botleigh Grange, 31 January 1838. By the time of his will however (11 November 1841, ten days before his death), Vidal’s favours had been given to Edward Urch Sealy, one of Richard’s cousins (both born in Bridgwater within a year of each other) and a student at the Middle Temple. Edward assumed the surname Vidal and lived at Cornborough House – in the same parish as Abbotsham Court and sharing a similar coastal panorama - until his death in December 1884.

Botleigh Grange was first put up for auction - by Charles Brooks on 22 October 1839 (*London Standard*, 20 September 1839; *Hampshire Independent*, 5 October 1839) – presumably in the wake of Vidal’s intimidation that his estates would pass to Richard. It did not sell. The estate was put at auction again on 24 November 1846: anachronistically described by the London auction house of Daniel Smith & Co as an “Elizabethan manor”. It was linked with farms at Botleigh Grange, West End and Thornhill, “many of which offer very beautiful building sites, together or in lots, 5 miles from Southampton” (*Hampshire Advertiser*, 14 and 21 November 1846). There followed a roller-coaster of sales and lets as Richard tried to rid himself of one or other of his estates. Two years later Abbotsham Court and Botleigh Grange were offered for sale or for let on an either/or basis (*Western Times*, 15 July 1848), a hazardous move which left the future residence of the family to chance. Still unsold, Botleigh Grange was offered at auction by R H Perkins on 31 May 1849, “without the least reservation” and without its outlying farms: “An opportunity seldom offers of procuring such a real Country Residence without the encumbrance of a large estate” (*Hampshire Advertiser*, 10 March 1849). The postponed auction of 5 July 1849 had the added incentive that half the purchase money could remain on mortgage (*Salisbury Journal*, 9 June 1849).

Financial incentives proved unsuccessful, and four months later the two properties were again on offer in tandem (*Salisbury Journal*, 22 September 1849). Abbotsham Court alone went to auction on 12 October 1849, with immediate possession and “the handsome modern furniture” available at a valuation (*North Devon Journal*, 20 September 1849). There were no bidders (*Western Times*, 27 October 1849). Two further attempts were made in 1851 to offload the Devon property: offered for let in March 1851 (*North Devon Journal*, 27 March) and for sale or let in July (*Bath Chronicle*, 31 July). The latter auction included the house’s furniture – made by Messrs English of Bath – and “an undoubted Vandyke painting, a Broadwood pianoforte and about a thousand volumes of books”.

Richard Beste re- married in late 1850, at Marylebone church. His new wife, Marian d’Oyley Meredith, was baptised in Fort St George, Madras on 20 June 1814, the only child of Shearman Bird the younger, a judge in the Bengal Establishment of the East India Company. She came to England in 1818, living at 11 Above Bar in Southampton. Her father died in 1825. She became heir to a significant fortune and, through a great uncle, sole owner of the Harold’s Park estate in Essex. She had been married twice before. Her first husband, who she married in September 1831, was James Barlow Hoy, MP for Southampton 1830-1, 1832-3 and 1835-7 and owner of estates at Midanbury and Thornhill. Hoy and Beste were part of the social and political elite of the town, serving together in the county quarter sessions, allies in the campaign to bring the Royal Agricultural Society’s annual meeting to the town and with shared interests in farming, horse racing and politics. A daughter, Louisa, was born in June 1838. An adopted daughter - Eleanor Maria Pera, known as Ellen Mary – completed the family. Hoy died in a shooting accident in the Pyrenees in August 1843. Marion’s second husband was Captain Richard Meredith RN, who she married in September 1844. He had been a close friend of James Hoy and was godfather to Louisa. He died on 13 July 1850. A widow for less than six months, Marian converted to the Roman Catholic church and married for a third time. Botleigh Grange was, for a brief period, home once more to a young family.

The extended family - re-united with three brothers removed from Catholic colleges in England but originally *sans* the eldest brother - embarked from Havre for New York on 2 May 1851 on the emigrant ship *Kate Hunter* bound for the new world. The Beste family were the only cabin passengers aboard, sharing with 360 steerage passengers, mainly German farming families. The eldest brother, Henry, followed on the *Mary Ann Peters*, sailing from Bristol on 22 August. Richard Beste’s lively account of their epic journey - *The Wabash; or, adventures of an English gentleman’s family in the interior of America* - was published in two volumes in 1855. It incorporates extracts from journals kept by Louisa and one of her half-sisters. The journey was one that Richard had long contemplated:

“From the time of the birth of my second son [Frank in August 1835], I had determined that emigration to the back woods would be the happiest lot for all of them during my life; for all, but the eldest, after me. Fond of a country life myself, I had resolved that the chances of happiness were greater to young men who (first endowed with classical education such as is given in Europe) should occupy lands of their own in the New World, and see their children grow up around them to a similar lot, than they would be to the same young men if harnessed to any of the professions in England, through which they might perhaps by the time they were

sixty, earn a competence on which to marry and breed up another race of aspiring paupers. Right or wrong, this had been my settled conviction through life; and we would now take an opportunity of visiting the country with them and of becoming acquainted with their future home, while our daughters were not old enough to require our residence elsewhere". The sisters were not part of the social experiment, but it was important to Richard that those who returned to Europe "might know the scenes among which brothers were to live; and that the true domestic feeling might be so maintained unbroken" (*The Wabash*, volume 1, pp 27-8).

It was an act of faith in the future of America, where "land ... will increase in value ..., society will become more refined, and the descendants of many an emigrant who has gone out with a fair quantity of capital, energy, and sense, will enjoy wealth and ease in a station not very dissimilar to that of a great landed proprietor in the old country" (*The Examiner*, 30 June 1855: review).

The family travelled with the *impedimenta* of civilised life: three substantial cases containing 784 pieces of plate for table, knives, forks, spoons, dishes, side dishes, cream jugs, *etc* and the whole paraphernalia of the buffet and the buttery. The party was completed by a small menagerie, comprising a queer little lapdog, six canaries in a cage, a dormouse called Sailor and an African grey parrot, the nemesis of his owner who had accompanied Richard on his continental journeys and who – before their tour of Italy – had been taught to cry "*A bas l'Autriche!*" and "*Vive Napoleon!*" from the confines of his tin travelling case in the unfulfilled hope that an Italian customs official would silence him for ever (*The Wabash*, volume 1, pp 33-4). The journey, by carriage, rail, lake steamer, canal boat and waggon and horses, was one taken by many a pioneer: New York – Albany – Buffalo – the Niagara Falls – Indianapolis – across the prairies of Illinois to the banks of the Mississippi – and finally to the little settlement of Terre Haute on the banks of the Wabash River in Vigo County, Indiana. Here the great adventure ended. The youngest daughter, Isabella, died on 10 July 1851. Richard also nearly died. Leaving three of the boys at St Xavier's College, a large Jesuit establishment in Cincinnati, the rest of the family returned to England. They were in Botleigh Grange by October 1854. Richard was now a deputy lieutenant of the county, elected *in absentia* on 24 August 1852.

The family lived at Botleigh Grange for the next two years. *Modern society in Rome; a novel* was published in three volumes in 1856: the introduction is dated April. An endorsement of the Italian *Risorgimento*, it is based on the revolutionary events in Rome between January 1848 and August 1849, many of which were witnessed by the author. The public political characters "speak as they acted and spoke.... It is well that the world should know of what stuff those are made of who influence Italian misrule or Italian regeneration". The running heads in the published work read *Coming out: or the siege of Rome*, a legacy of the last-minute decision of the publishers (Hurst and Blackett) to change the title. "A change which annihilated all my historical pretensions and led people to believe that it was a mere personal satire" (*Nowadays*, 1870, p iii). *Alcazar: or, the Dark Ages: a novel* was published, in three volumes, by Hurst and Blackett in 1857: a sequel to *The Countess Clement* serialized in *Dolman's Magazine* twelve years earlier. The winter of 1856/7 was spent in Lisbon, recommended by the family's London doctor as convalescence for one of Richard's



daughters suffering a bronchial affliction. "I had selected to go to Lisbon because it was not on the road to anywhere else" (*Nowadays*, 1870, volume 1, p 151). Richard, Marian, three daughters, two little boys, the butler, ladies' maid, Swiss nursery maid, domestic chaplain, coachman and two little Black-Forest carriage ponies left Botleigh Grange for Southampton docks on 8 December to board the P&O steamer *Tagus*. The chaplain left the party at Southampton. A third son, Constable, was already in Lisbon, studying at the English College.

Southampton was in the throes of a by election, the result of the resignation of Sir Alexander Cockburn as attorney general. It was a three-way contest between the Tory Sir Edward Butler, Richard Andrews and Thomas Matthias Weguelin, the latter two in a fratricidal battle for the Liberal vote, Andrews having – in Beste's words – been "discountenanced by Lord Palmerston and the great ironmonger [William Lankester]" (*Nowadays*, volume 1, 1870, p 4). Richard Beste fleetingly became a fourth candidate, delivering his election address, dated 8 December 1856, "to the Liberal electors of Southampton" to his printers, Marshall & Co in the High Street, *en route* to the docks. It was posted around the town that afternoon.

"I merely put forth this address to inform the new blood amongst you that, should you ever think it wise to recur to the same plan [civil and religious liberty, free trade, extension of the suffrage and the ballot], you will find me, as I have ever been, prepared to advocate what I believe to be the interests of the people and the rights of man.... I will be with you should you ever wish to go to the poll for the sake of PRINCIPLE. The liberation of all religions from state control is the only principle I now think worth contending for. [I am going to Lisbon, but] if you care for principle rather than for expediency, if you will not be dictated to by half a score of bigots, who call themselves liberals, I shall be within hail" (*Nowadays*, 1870, volume 1, pp 8-9).

The address was a bluff, designed primarily to discomfort his former patron. Polling only awaited the end of the parliamentary recess in February 1857, giving Beste little time to return from Lisbon. A storm-tossed crossing of the Bay of Biscay ended even that possibility. Rather than risk a repeat of the ordeal, the family returned home *via* Spain (Cadiz and Malaga), Algiers ("taking a glimpse at a new quarter of the globe"), Marseilles, Aix and the Pyrenees, Rome (where he found *Modern society in Rome* to be banned and where he published *Pianta dei Contorni di Roma*, a copy of part of a French survey of the city), Milan and Leghorn. His deputy lieutenant's uniform was taken on the journey as an *entrée* to polite society. He wore it when applying for tickets to visit St Peter's Church in Rome. "A military uniform is very useful on the continent; where, as a friend once said to me, everybody believes that, if you are not a soldier, you must be a tailor" (*Nowadays*, volume 1, 1870, p 296).

Richard Beste returned to England in spring or summer 1858. Abbotsham Court became his sole English residence after the sale of Botleigh Grange (the mansion and home estate only) in 1860. We find him sitting at the county magistrates' petty sessions in Bideford in July 1861, chairman in October 1865. The large outlying estates of Botleigh Grange, however, still remained in the family's possession. The Hampshire section of *Return of owners of land*, published in 1873, lists Richard as owner of 322 acres 25 perches (gross estimated rental

£306) and his eldest son Henry as owner of 482 acres, 1 rood 38 perches (gross estimated rental £699. 12s). This gave Richard sufficient local influence to issue an address in support of the anti-establishment views of the Liberal candidate Sir John Simeon – a convert to Catholicism in 1851 – during the Isle of Wight general election of July 1865: “the bulk of Roman Catholics all over the world repudiate all connection between Church and State, on the principle that no man should be taxed for another man’s creed” (*Hampshire Advertiser*, 15 July 1865). Abbotsham Court was sold in 1871, reportedly at a price nearly double what would have been taken when last offered for sale 18 or 20 years earlier (*North Devon Journal*, 19 October 1871). It was bought by James Taylor, railway contractor and developer of Westward Ho!

Louisa Beste’s marriage to the Marquis Guadagno Guadagni in 1861 brought the family a footing in Tuscany. He was the only male representative of a wealthy and long-established Tuscan family and was owner of a large estate at Masseto near Florence. The following year – in June 1862 – Richard purchased “a good many hundred acres of land”, which included fifteen farms, at Torro dell’ Olmo “in order that I might have something on which to carry out my old country habits and amusements” (*Nowadays*, 1870, volume 2, chapter 23). Olmo lay but one and a half miles from Masseto, and here Richard set himself up as an English country gentleman in exile. An old fortress, dating from the time of the Florentine Republic but now degraded into a farm house, was converted into a country residence. The house overlooked Florence six and a half miles to the north. The estate was run as though it was in Hampshire. Beste substituted hired labour, with wages dependent on supply and demand, for the traditional *metayer* system, whereby profits were divided between the landlord and the peasant cultivators of the estate. As in Hampshire twenty years before, the reforms were poorly received. Aggrieved tenants were thought by many to be responsible for the attempted abduction of Whittingham Beste in July 1864. To the Florence correspondence of the *Morning Post*, it was an “agrarian outrage [which ought to convince Beste to] pay more respect to their ancient ways and Tuscan traditions in the manner of tenant-right” (5 August 1864). A less partisan view was that the kidnappers had mistaken Richard’s young son for the Crown Prince of Italy, the scarlet and gold livery of Beste’s coachman being also the livery of the Italian royal family.

*Nowadays; or courts, courtiers, churchmen, Garibaldians, lawyers and brigands, at home and abroad*, published in two volumes by Chapman and Hall in 1870, completed the quartet of semi-autobiographical works started in 1826. The Reverend Robert Joseph Barlow – youngest brother of James Barlow (Hoy) – was moved to reply, under the pseudonym Walter Fitzallen, with his own semi-autographical work, *Remarkable, but still true*, published in 1872. Robert Barlow (?1804-78) was for 47 years vicar of Hutton Radby in Yorkshire and had officiated at the marriage of James and Marian in 1831. James had died a virtual bankrupt, depriving Robert and his sisters of the allowances they received while he was alive and of the annuities they expected on his death (<http://northyorkshirehistor.blogspot.co.uk>). Marian and her mother – their identities barely concealed under the surname Hawk - are depicted as scheming harpies who played on the hapless James (chapter 26). Richard’s latest work was portrayed as a trivial irrelevance: “Lo! behold! two portentous-looking volumes

make their appearance, called *Now-a-days, at Home and Abroad*. How easy to fill an empty barrel with driblets, when you are ‘on the way everywhere’”. This is a reference to the first chapter heading of the first volume of *Nowadays* - ‘*En route to everywhere*’.

John Richard Digby Beste died, aged 80, on 7 August 1885 at 2 Piazza della Vicchia in Florence. He was buried in the family tomb in the Campo Santa at Naples, on a terrace overlooking the city and with the island of Capri in the distance. The sepulchre was built as a memorial to those of his children who had pre-deceased their father: Agnes (died at Naples, 15 August 1859), Lucy (who died the following day), Isabella (died at Terre Haute, 10 July 1851), Henry (died of sunstroke in Fiji, 13 April 1858), Constable (died of fever at Albano near Rome, 5 September 1858), Frank (died at Buffalo, New York, 12 September 1862: his vocation had been to preach the gospel to the native Indians in Minnesota) and Whittingham (drowned in the Hougley River in India, Christmas day 1865). “[The inscriptions] are in no foreign language; although they tell of more distant lands than were ever before brought together on one such monument”. Told that the site was reserved for writers and authors, Richard replied “I had been of the craft since the age of nineteen” (*Nowadays*, volume 2, 1870, p 380). Richard left a personal estate of £2,709.9s. Marian d’Oyley Digby-Beste died on 30 March 1885, a few months before Richard, at their Florence residence. She left a personal estate of £15,382.4s.1d. The family’s Tuscan villa was left to her grandson Guitto. More details of Marian Beste and her daughters can be found on *Sotonopedia* under ‘Marian Bird’.

Four of Richard’s children survived their father:

Katherine became a nun in the Convent of Mercy in Bermondsey, taking the religious name Sister Mary Martha. In this she followed her paternal aunt Cecilia Beste, who had joined the order shortly after its English foundation in 1838 and who had died in the convent, aged 37 years, on 11 March 1852. Sister Mary was one of eight volunteers from the convent who went to the Crimea in January 1856 to serve alongside Florence Nightingale in the hospital at Scutari. “I love her the most of all the sisters. She is a gentle, anxious, depressed, single-hearted, single-eyed conscientious girl, not energetic, but a worker and no talker” (Florence Nightingale, letter of 2 June 1856). Florence’s father William Nightingale of Embley Park - a fellow Hampshire magistrate with Richard and sharing a similar European background - forwarded letters from the hospital as often as they contained anything of personal interest (*Nowadays*, 1870, volume 2, p 367). In 1857 Sister Mary was sent, with four other Bermondsey sisters, to establish a convent at Wigton, a market town on the Solway Plain. She died there in spring 1875. Katherine’s experiences were markedly different to those of her adopted half-sister. Ellen Mary entered the Convent of Mercy in Chelsea on the same day that Katherine entered the convent at Bermondsey. A novitiate for three years, Ellen was declared unfit to join the community on the last day of her training. To Richard this was a fraud, a ruse to exact the full amount of her pension knowing that she would never become a full member of the order. He applied to the courts for protection, but in the end his only recourse was an *exposé* in the pages of *Nowadays*, in which he accused the sisters of kidnapping a vulnerable girl. The controversy lost him the long-time friendship of Cardinal Wiseman. Ellen married Robert Claude Evans, an insurance agent, in 1868.

Kenhelm was educated at Ampleforth College and St Edmund's College in Ware. Ordained in 1858, he became a priest at The Oratory in South Kensington. His many theological and religious publications include *The Victories of Rome* (1868), a chronicle of the contest between the Papacy and the world "from the first day even until now". The eldest surviving son, he inherited Wildern Farm in South Stoneham. He died on 14 September 1914, with effects of £534.16s.5d.

Bruno married Josephine Mary Alleyne, daughter and co-heiress of the Reverend Joseph Lowe Alleyne of Buttals Plantation in Barbados, in 1875. He was the only one of Richard's children to marry. Their first son – also Bruno – was born at Olmo on 27 January 1876. Bruno *pere* died at 66 Westwood Road, Southampton on 19 March 1912, leaving effects of £8,108.1s.4d. His widow, now of Hillingdon Court in Middlesex, died on 24 March 1942. She was survived by one of her younger sons, Henry Aloysius Bruno Digby-Beste, born in Hampshire on 5 November 1883 and educated at Stoneyhurst College. He was knighted in 1945 after a distinguished naval career and was a Knight of St Gregory, one of five orders of knighthood of the Holy See. He was Chief Scout's Commissioner in 1947 (*Who was who*, 1961-1970). Henry died, aged 80, on 5 September 1964.

Southampton Occasional Paper no. 14

December 2015