

## Bowers Tower: A Historical Monument in Ibadan, Southwestern Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The colonial political subjugation of Africa eroded the African peoples socio-political and economic structures while the emergence of the colonial project in itself created a new scenario, leaving bitter memories in the minds of the colonised. Despite this ugly episode, there were certain colonial officials who left memories in the hearts of the people among whom they administered. One of such was Captain Robert Lister Bower who served as Resident and Travelling Commissioner for the interior of Yorubaland in south-western Nigeria and in whose honour a tower was erected. The memorial tower symbolises a plethora of meanings. On the one hand, it is perceived that the peoples reflection of the footprints of Bower in the annals of their history necessitated the erection of that historic monument as a memorial of his relatively peaceful era, socio-economic development as well as his general administrative acumen in the course of his service among them which remain indelible. As a rider to this, the monument serves as a reminder to the Ibadan people in particular and the Yoruba in general, of the man who firmly established the loyalty of their forebears to the British imperial crown. Paradoxically, many perceive the tower as a monument of humiliation and diplomatic manoeuvring. The various sides of the pendulum are vividly encapsulated in this study.

**Key words:** Bowers tower, historical monument, colonial political subjugation, economic structure, Socio-political, Nigeria

### INTRODUCTION

On the top of the highest hill in the centre of Ibadan the *Òkè-Àrè* Hill is conspicuously located a historical monument called the Bowers Tower. The tower, also known as *Láyipo* is sited in a government reserved forest called *Igbü-Àgàlà*, near *Sápátí* area. That monument was erected to immortalise the first Resident and Travelling Commissioner for the interior of Yorubaland, Nigeria, Captain Robert Lister Bower, who served between 1893 and 1897.

With his headquarters at Ibadan, Bowers area of operation in the Yoruba country covered all Ibadan, Awyawa (Oyo), Ifẹ, Igbomina, Ijesha and Ikiti (Ekiti) territory (Lagos Annual Report, 1899). This was the area which, excluding Ekiti, was later constituted into Oyo Province (Atanda, 1973).

Bowers Tower is 60 feet high and 11 feet square with two entrances. It has 45 double spiral staircases and was designed by Taffy Jones who, as Provincial Engineer, equally supervised its construction. Taffy Jones name is also associated with the design and construction of another historical edifice in Ibadan namely, the *Mapo* Hall:

- Layipo is a Yoruba word which refers to manoeuvring. The tower is so-called because of the spiral nature of its 39-step stair case.

The monumental Bowers Tower project was executed by the then Ibadan Native Authority. It was unveiled on Tuesday 15, December, 1936, amidst pomp and pageantry by Commander Bower, accompanied by his daughter, both of whom came from England for the occasion. The historic ceremony was witnessed by about 3,000 spectators, including important dignitaries like the *Olubadan* of Ibadanland and other high ranking chiefs in Yorubaland (Okunmubi, 1983). Written on the side of the tower are the following words:

- To the memory of Sir Robert Lister Bower, K.B.E., C.M.E. First Resident of Ibadan, 1893-1897 whose fine character, courage and administrative ability won the universal and lasting esteem of the Yorubas and firmly established the loyalty of the people to the imperial crown.

Against this background, we proceed to highlight the career of the man who, as Resident, represented the might of the British in Ibadan in particular and Yorubaland in general, between 1893 and 1897. Besides, the events culminating in Captain Bowers name being immortalised, as well as the significance of the historical tower through the ages, are given a degree of attention.

### **BOWER THE RESIDENT AND TRAVELLING COMMISSIONER**

The appointment of Captain Robert Lister Bower as the first Resident and Travelling Commissioner in the hinterland of the Yoruba country in South-western Nigeria, an area that later constituted the Oyo Province, was sequel to an Agreement signed between the British Colonial Government in Lagos, with Ibadan on 15 August 1893 (Johnson, 1921/1976; Atanda, 1973). That treaty which succeeded in making the rulers of Ibadan, one time terror of Yorubaland, accept the stationing of a British Resident among them, ushered in a new era of British administration in the town. And, as shall be shown presently, not only did they lose their own independence but Oyo and other parts of Yorubaland also lost their sovereignty as well.

Bower assumed duties at Ibadan in the middle of December 1893 (NAI CSO, 1893). On arrival, he chose to reside outside the town wall, near the ancient city of Owu. That area, called *Idi-Ogunun*, is where the present Government House is sited at *Agodi* in Ibadan. As has been rightly pointed out by Atanda (1973), Bower, on arrival in Ibadan, was not completely new to Yorubaland. For, following his earlier appointment to the Constabulary Department of the Lagos Government in September 1892, he had served on the entourage of Sir Gilbert Thomas Carter, the then Governor of Lagos, on a peace mission to Yorubaland. Bower had equally taken part in various military expeditions and campaigns among a number of Yoruba groups including the Ijebu, the Egba, Ilorin, Ife, Ijesa and the Ekiti, among others, between 1892 and 1893. He had thus travelled far and wide within the Yoruba country before finally settling in Ibadan. As a matter of fact, it was this initial acquaintance with the Yoruba country that partly informed Governor Carter's choice of Captain Bower for his new assignment as Resident and Travelling Commissioner (NAI CSO, 1893).

While coming to Ibadan on his new posting, Bower was accompanied by Captain D. W. Stewart who was to command a detachment of Hausa soldiers, a hundred non-commissioned Hausa soldiers and men, a clerk and an interpreter. That a British military force accompanied the Resident (as embodied in the second part of clause 4 of the August 1893 Agreement) needs not surprise anyone. It was not only meant to ensure the enforcement of the treaty but the consolidation of the British authority which Bower represented. That was more so, as that treaty, which purported to rob the *Baale* and Authorities of Ibadan of their freedom and the sovereignty of their domain was never willingly nor sincerely signed by them in the first instance. For, if the people had had a choice,

they would never have entered into such an Agreement. The implication of the obnoxious and diabolical clause became only obvious because of the use that was subsequently made by the Lagos Constabulary in parts of Yorubaland (Atanda, 1973).

Captain Bowers first dealings with the people of the Yoruba country began in his immediate abode and these involved bullying and intimidating the Ibadan chiefs, one after the other, beginning from January 1894. This involved arrests of some leading chiefs in the town, with the aim of striking terror into the whole country (The Lagos Record, *passim*) in order to keep order (Johnson, 1921/1976). Such chiefs were often held responsible for the sins of their people who sometimes engaged in confrontation and clashes with his soldiers. The first of such Ibadan chiefs to be so arrested and detained was Chief Sanusi (Akinyele, 1946). This was closely followed by the arrest of Akintola, the *Balogun* of Ibadan, in August 1894, during a traditional festival when, someone in the crowd shook the fist on the horse back of Captain Holland, the assistant of Captain Bower. This was apparently a usual salutation often accorded the gentleman on horseback but this time, it was mistaken for a threat. Bower insisted that the *Balogun* would not be released until the man was found who had insulted Captain Holland (Johnson, 1921/1946). The justice of this is itself questionable as there was no way the *Balogun* could have identified the culprit in an episode that took place miles away from his residence, in a city of the size of Ibadan, in a festivity involving a large crowd from within and outside Ibadan and then being revisited days after the event itself. Even though that injustice was never taken kindly by the people of Ibadan, they dared not make the mistake of resisting or fighting the Resident and Travelling Commissioner, having learnt lessons from how the *Ijebu* people were ruthlessly dealt with by the same British agents in an expedition in 1892 (Aderibigbe, 1962; Atanda, 1973). There followed, however, an unusual silence in Ibadan throughout the four days which the *Balogun* spent in the custody, as there was no drumming while trading activities were virtually at a standstill.

The 3rd Ibadan Chief to be arrested was Fajinmi, the *Osi Baale* of Ibadan, barely four weeks after the episode involving *Balogun* Akintela. He was, however, released when Captain Bower realised that nobody was actually keen to apologise or plead for the Chief. The Resident and Travelling Commissioner was not alone in these draconian engagements. His soldiers, messengers and clerks became equally associated with the atrocities of bullying and cheating and extorting money and properties from the people of Ibadan.

Apart from the Ibadan chiefs and people, other groups in Yorubaland suffered the intimidation and humiliation of Captain Bower and his cohorts. In Ilesha, for instance, the strongman of the *Ekitiparapo* fame, Chief Ogedengbe and his former war boys were so treated. Ogedengbe was detained for two weeks in Ibadan, after which he was exiled to Iwo when Bower realised the danger inherent in keeping him in the midst of his former enemies.

### **BOWER AND THE BOMBARDMENT OF OYO**

Compared with the few other Yoruba towns, Oyo was quite peaceful by 1893 when Bower arrived. Despite this, she never escaped the onslaught of the British might which Captain Bower and his soldiers represented. For, by the 1890s, the British and other European powers in Africa had one goal: To deal with African monarchs who did not readily collaborate with them or co-operate in accepting British authority in their domain through the naked use of force (Atanda, 1973). It is not surprising therefore how, on various occasions between 1894 and 1895, Bower treated the *Alaafin* with contempt and utter disrespect, in what appeared as a prelude to the eventual formal establishment of British presence in Oyo. The climax of the increasingly tense Anglo-Oyo relations and the concomitant premeditated bombardment of Oyo came in 1895 when, under the guise of championing the cause of the oppressed, Captain Bower and his Hausa soldiers made a swift march on the town (Atanda, 1973).

The pretext, rather than the cause, was an unfortunate incident in November 1895 when news reached Captain Bower that a man who had intercourse with the wife of the *Aseyin* had been sent to the *Alaafin* of Oyo who ordered his castration as the penalty for his offence (Aje, 1984). To Bower, such an act was barbaric and he called for investigation and a halt to such a practice. He also slapped the *Aseyin* and even went to the extent of asking him to be tied to a tree and be publicly flogged (Aje, 1984).

Following this, Bower proceeded to Oyo where the *Alaafin* confirmed that he actually castrated the man: For as contained in the unwritten constitution of the people, that was the customary punishment for anyone caught flirting with the wife of a chief or a king. Captain Bower reacted by using very stern words and abused the *Alaafin*. He later asked him and his chiefs to come and prostrate publicly before him at *Akesan* but the *Alaafin* refused, on the grounds that, that was an affront and an insult on his own personality and the institution which he represented.

The above episode provided the favourable opportunity for Captain Bower who commanded his

troops to open fire on Oyo town. The palace and all the houses of the chiefs of Oyo were burnt down. *Alaafin* Adeyemi had no option than to flee for his dear life on seeing his palace set ablaze due to repeated shelling. He was only allowed to return to his throne after giving an assurance of his readiness to accept British authority (Atanda, 1980). Thus was the *Alaafin* and his domain brought to submission by Captain Bower.

### **ERA OF RECONCILIATION AND HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIP**

The above was the general trend of the relationship between Captain Bower and the people of Ibadan in particular and the Yoruba in general during the early phase of the tenure of the British Resident and Travelling Commissioner. It is significant, however, to note at this juncture that this situation never went on for long. In the course of his stay, the Resident and the people got to understand each other better—a development that culminated in harmony and friendship between the two parties (Johnson, 1946). For it was subsequently found out that the mistakes and misunderstandings of the past were all due to communication gaps in which the part played by the interpreter was not only dishonourable but highly reprehensible (Johnson, 1921). The said interpreter was recorded to have been reprimanded accordingly.

Be that as it may, Captain R. L. Bower was seen as an energetic and courageous administrator whose tenure as Resident in Ibadan during the reign of *Baale Fijabi* has been described as one of the most peaceful periods in the history of the town. Before his arrival most of the important chiefs in Ibadan were re-named warriors while inter-communal wars were known to be very rampant among the people. This was a development which earned the town the appellation-*Ija Igboro ni arun Ibadan* (Brochure, 1997) (that is, street-fighting is the major weakness of the Ibadan people) (Watson, 2005). It was customary in Ibadan after conferring new titles that they should go to war to enable such a new chief, especially the *Balogun*, to prove himself to his people that he possessed the military feat and acumen for the title he held. As a matter of fact even when Bower assumed duty at Ibadan, tension was still high between Ibadan and one of her traditional opponents, Ilorin and many in Ibadan earnestly yearned for a war, the course of which they expected the Resident administrator to champion. As Samuel Johnson indicates, there were incessant calls from many quarters in Ibadan saying: *Nje Bower ko ni si ogun Ilorin yi fun wa?* (Will not Capt. Bower open for us an Ilorin campaign?) (Johnson, 1976). To prevent further blood-shed, however, the Resident personally took the risk of mediating in the hostility and made the rank and file

of Ibadan people to realise that intertribal wars were for ever over in the Yoruba country. Even after Bower had made the people see the need for peace, burglaries, arson and the like were still rife in the community especially among warlike people who had nothing definite to do, such people in the course of time settled down to subsistence farming. But, Bowers peace initiatives and campaigns were consistently threatened by the sporadic assaults of the Fulani jihadists. It was only after the Government in Lagos enlisted two battalions of men from Ibadan for military service in the north-eastern frontier of Yorubaland that the menace of the Fulanis was checkmated and peace finally reined in Ibadan.

Coupled with his peace moves and conflict mediation, Bower opened the way for the release of all the war captives as well as those still bounded in slavery, soon after settling down at *Idi-Ogungun* in Ibadan. Besides, incessant cases of kidnapping and child stealing which were recorded in the era preceding the arrival of Captain Bower ceased (Akinyele, 1946).

In general, the last few years of Bowers operation in Ibadan in particular and Yorubaland in general were noted to be relatively peaceful and progressive. Apart from the developments highlighted above, the internecine Yoruba Civil Wars of the 19th century were brought to an end partly through the mediatory efforts of Captain Bower. It was during one of his expeditions to see to the final restoration of peace in the entire Yoruba region that he had an accident in Ogbomoso, following which he was flown home for treatment.

By the end of his tenure as Resident and Travelling Commissioner, Bower had so much endeared himself in the hearts of many that he was given the appellation *Oninuure idi Ogungun to wi pe ki eru wa di omo* (meaning: the kind hearted man under *Ogungun* tree (in Ibadan) whose concern was always that peasants should live a meaningful life) (Bello, Tunji, 1997). It was in appreciation to Captain Bowers efforts of maintaining peace, tranquillity and overall socio-economic development in Ibadan and other parts of Yorubaland that a memorial tower was erected in his honour.

## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MEMORIAL TOWER**

Though Bowers Tower is located in Ibadan, it has historical significance not only for Ibadan but the defunct Oyo Province and the entire Yoruba race. The man-Robert Lister Bower has been described as a man whose fine character, courage and administrative ability won the universal and lasting esteem of the Yorubas. As the tower was erected when Nigeria was still under colonial rule (its erection commenced in 1936 and the commissioning

was in 1939), the above description of Bower, for which a monument was erected in his memory, could, to an extent, be said to have represented colonial official assessment of the Resident. For at least, on one occasion during the colonial era, Bower had received official commendation for the many distinguished services he has performed since he has been connected with this (Lagos) Government (Carter, 1896). It is significant to stress that such commendations, no doubt, demonstrate that even if the monument serves no other significance for the Yoruba people, it reminds them of the man who firmly established the loyalty of the people to the imperial crown.

And for the various Yoruba groups, the historical monument symbolised a plethora of meanings. Among other things, it serves the purpose of reminding the people of the day when a Yoruba traditional ruler-the *Aseyin* of Iseyin-was slapped, after which he was ordered to be whipped. In Oyo, it serves as a reminder to the day when the *Alaafin* was asked to come and prostrate to a white man in the public and when the town was totally burnt down by the white officials. For the Ibadan people among whom the pillar is situated, it is a remembrance of the period of humiliation of their chiefs-a:

- This is part of the inscription boldly written on the monumental pillar at Oke-Are in Ibadan.

period when an Ibadan ruler and the authorities had to get permission from a white man before instructing their people on anything relating to their own town. That a memorial structure was erected in memory of the high-handedness and disrespect of African tradition is, as Akinlolu Aje rightly demonstrates, a pointer to such anachronisms as were bred by the British colonial masters (Aje, 1984). In a nutshell, if at all the pillar serves no other purpose, it can still be remembered by the Ibadan people in particular and the Yoruba in general, as a monument to humiliation.

If from different angles Captain R. L. Bower has been viewed as a man of great virtues and as a man who symbolised tyranny and oppression, the erection of a monument in his memory, by implication, seriously conforms to a Yoruba saying:

- Oba to je ti ilu roju to tooro, ati eyi to je ti ilu daru, oruko won o ni pare laelae.
- (The king whose reign ushered in peace and progress will always be remembered for his good works and the king whose reign spelt doom and ruin for the people, will all be remembered forever).

As indicated elsewhere above, the spiral nature of the Towers 39 steps explains why it is also known as *Layipo* which literally means 'Honour turned around' but metaphorically or allegorically implying diplomatic manoeuvring. Its design is said to depict the Cadbury of England's package of chocolate bars sent to Nigeria (Okunubi, 1983). To this day, there is a saying in Yorubaland thus: *Ibadan lo mo, o ò mo Layipo* meaning (knowing Ibadan as a town is one thing, knowledge of the cunningness or diplomacy of its indigenes is a different matter altogether).

Following the erection of the monument, a large portion of land was acquired in the vicinity and made a Government Reserved Forest also known by the inhabitants of Ibadan as *Igbü Agälä*. Trees were planted round the tower, which, apart from beautifying the monuments surrounding, also served as a source of income to the government.

The 60 feet high tower also provided and still provides, a good opportunity for a panoramic view of the city of Ibadan at a glance. From the top of this monument, it is possible to see the large size of Ibadan city, covered with a sea of rusty corrugated iron roofs and the occasional shinning of the roof tops in the newly built or renovated houses. Standing from any point of the square-shaped gallery, therefore, it is possible to view the large expanse of the city of Ibadan at a glance.

The site of the tower was for several years after commissioning, a centre of tourist attraction in Ibadan. Until the recent past, people from within and outside the town used to swarm the site to see the tower and its double spiral steps, while some utilised the advantage offered by the tower to visit Ibadan for the first time. And with its serene environment decorated with beautiful flowers, it served as a conducive environment for picnic, excursion and other get-together programmes. Such visits often enhanced the social and commercial life of people living in the vicinity of the tower.

#### **THE PERIOD OF NEGLECT AND DISUSE**

No sooner after the attainment of independence, especially after the civil war of 1967-70, than the once attractive and ever bubbling site of the Bowers Tower entered into a period of neglect and disuse. Patronage declined steadily while the popularity with which it was greeted from inception to the immediate post-independence era waned as the attitude of people changed towards the monument. That was a trend that continued until 1994 when the acute shortage of fuel especially kerosene and electricity forced people to the once-dreaded *Agala* forest to fell many of the big trees in the site for use as firewood. This was what opened up the

tower once again for public attention, until the recent renovation and modernisation exercises by agencies of the Federal and Oyo State Governments.

Meanwhile, the poor patronage of the pre-1994 period was due to a number of factors. The *Igbo Agala* remained for long unkempt and uncared for by both the State and Local Governments. Most indigenous inhabitants of the area therefore held tenaciously to their age long belief that such an unusually quiet location in the centre of an ever-busy city like Ibadan must have been accommodating certain evil spirits (Azeez, 1997).

The original motive of the architects of the monument for which trees were planted in the vicinity of the tower-to add to its aesthetic values, as well as preserve such trees for future economic uses-were later subjected to abuses and diabolical uses. Men of the underworld did turn the area into hiding spots where they camped themselves. The menace of these men of dubious characters was so frightening that prior to the recent renovation and modernisation carried out on the site, people stopped passing through such routes like *Oniyanrin-Adeoyo* and others linking the reserved forest with other parts of the city.

As mentioned elsewhere above, the lack of serious attention to the tower and its site, by the state and local governments was a contributory factor to the poor state of the monument. The tower, as earlier stated, was erected by the Native Authority who financed, supervised and maintained it. These responsibilities were later transferred to the then Ibadan City Council (ICC) and thereafter, Ibadan Municipal Government (IMG) (IMG File No 732). All these successive supervising agencies did not show adequate commitments to the proper maintenance of the monument. Apart from the access roads which became poor, the renovation of the Towers fence which was started in 1983 by members of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme, lingered on for years, while the floodlights meant to illuminate the Tower remained for a long time, non-functional. Worse still, the spiral steps which earned the monument the name *Layipo* was left in a state of disrepair. Moreover, the metallic balcony of the Tower got rusted making it unsafe to stand on the top of the 60 feet structure.

The result of the various supervising agencies nonchalant attitude culminated in the abuse of the facilities of the site. The laterite soil of the tower site was constantly excavated by certain members of the public for their own personal uses (Azeez, 1997). The beautiful trees planted around the monument, apart from harbouring vagabonds, were constantly subjected to felling by members of the public despite the incessant campaigns on afforestation by governments. The climax of this constant deforestation was the 1994 episode earlier referred to

above and this was what appeared to have opened the eyes of government to resuscitate the historical monument.

### CONCLUSION

After decades of neglect and disuse, it is noteworthy that today, the over sixty year old historical monument was, not long ago, renovated and is continually being modernised by the Federal Government of Nigeria through the Nigeria Tourism Development Corporation. To this end, a sum of Twenty Million Naira (N20,000,000:00) was committed towards the resuscitation of the monument, after which it is expected to be contracted out to private individuals and corporate bodies to manage (Gbadamosi, 1997). On completion, the proposed multi-purpose Amusement Park being constructed as part of the modernisation exercise on the site of the Bowers Tower, is expected to have a number of ultra-modern facilities and conveniences such as a restaurant of international standard, an amphitheatre, kiosks, a borehole to ensure uninterrupted water supply, toilet facilities, childrens playing ground, indoor games room and a car park. Besides, a binocular is to be installed by the balcony on top of the tower to enable tourists have a clearer panoramic view of Ibadan. With all these facilities being put in place, coupled with a proposal by the Olubadan Traditional Council to construct a new and ultra-modern Olubadan Palace at a site adjacent to the monument, it is hoped that the Bowers Tower is not only bouncing back to its old glory but it will, in the very near future, become an international centre of tourist attraction which its founding architects envisaged.

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