

Landed Estates in Northamptonshire: the rural rental economy, 1800-1881

Georgina Dockry

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ABSTRACT

The nineteenth century was a period of extensive change in English rural society, in terms of both agriculture itself and the rural economy as a whole. Northamptonshire in this period, whilst remaining a predominantly rural county, underwent a significant transformation. This transformation, along with an extensive quantity of surviving data, has made nineteenth-century Northamptonshire a subject of great interest to historians.

Within this context this study examines the rural rental economy in Northamptonshire across the period 1801-1881 – with particular focus on the recession years 1815-1831 – and is centred on the factors affecting the setting and payment of rents. Central to the study is a wealth of rental data, primarily extrapolated from estate account books. This is used to examine how the rental economy operated on landed estates within the context of the wider economy and prevailing agricultural prices. The importance of the relative roles of landowners, stewards and tenants in setting rents, extracting payments and negotiating reductions are the central focus, with investment in the land and changes in the wider economy also being examined in terms of their effect on the rental economy.

The study began life as an examination of the moral economy of the landed estate but developed into an analysis of rental data, particularly estate accounts, and a study of the rental economy. The account books themselves provide evidence of the rental economy on the landed estate in the nineteenth century but do have their limitations. Whilst the books provide figures for agreed rents, payment of rents and abatements of rent, plus various memoranda, they do not provide acreages for holdings or distinguish types of holding. As a result a study of agreed and paid rents has been undertaken but figures for rent per acre and differences by type of farming cannot be identified. Instead, the study focuses on the flexibility of the rental economy and the importance of arrears and abatements in enabling the long-term survival of the landed income in Northamptonshire.

The study examines accounts and rental data in terms of rent levels, the payment of rents and both temporary abatements and permanent rent reductions. The accounts evidence is supplemented by a number of other sources including landlord and estate correspondence plus annotations and memoranda in the account books themselves. The data is then placed in wider context (particularly that of Turner, Beckett and Afton's 1997 study *Agricultural Rent in England, 1690-1914*) and examined in depth in terms of both what it tells us about the landed estate in Northamptonshire and the strengths and limitations of the accounts data.

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Abbreviations

AgHR	Agricultural History Review
NRO	Northamptonshire Record Office
ONS	Office of National Statistics
TRHS	Transactions of the Royal Historical Society

Chapter One: Rural Society in the Nineteenth Century

Introduction

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a period of great change in rural England. Lands were improved and productivity increased dramatically. Enclosure took place on a grand scale, reorganizing the rural landscape, while a rapidly expanding population and increasing urbanization increased demand for agricultural produce. As a result historians have identified extensive changes in rural society in this period. A substantial amount of research has been undertaken into the social impact of these changes and the short-term impact of the reorganization of the English landscape but comparatively little work has been done regarding landed estate management in this period.

This study aims to shed some light on landed estate management and the rural rental economy 1800-1881. It shall be shown that rent levels, along with other estate management decisions, were closely linked to changes in prices, farm sizes, and agricultural improvement, but were also affected by social factors, tenants' and landlords' powers of negotiation and the preservation of the long-term profitability of the land. The payment of rents will be distinguished from rent levels themselves and the economic and social factors affecting payment and abatement of rents will also be examined. Estate accounts and landlord correspondence have been used extensively in order to produce an in-depth local study which demonstrates how estate management decisions were often as reliant on the tenantry as they were on the economy.

This chapter will set out the framework of historical research which has already been undertaken on rural English society in this period, and establish the place and importance of this thesis in the context of both local and national studies of rural society in this period. The following chapter will then introduce the estate of this study, those who managed them and the roles of various parties in managing the landed estate before the remainder of the thesis examines investment and costs of farming and the rental economy in detail.

Purpose of This Study

Historians of rural England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have predominantly concerned themselves with issues that concerned commentators at the time, meaning there has been a great focus on enclosure and the social impact of change. Whilst these subjects are important for discussion one cannot understand rural society of this period without adequate

knowledge of the factors which writers of the time took for granted, such as the agricultural rental economy. Indeed, the result of this has been that a great deal of research has been done on changes such as enclosure whilst very little has been done on subjects such as rent levels or even estate management in the context of the wider agricultural economy. This study aims to go some way towards rectifying this, adding a further dimension to our understanding of agricultural society 1800-1881 by strengthening our knowledge of the way landed estates were managed, the economic factors driving estate management decisions, and the resultant changes in rural society and landlord-tenant relations.

The study is based on the main factor connecting tenants and landlords – rents. Rent levels worked to provide both landowners and tenants with an income and can be used to identify the relative economic power of the two groups over time. This, in turn, had a knock-on effect on decisions to enclose or improve lands, farm sizes and tenant numbers on an estate, as well as social effects, all of which shall be discussed in the course of this study. Furthermore, the factors covered by this study also had an effect on issues which have been the subject of other studies such as wages and the number of labourers employed. Importantly, the role of tenants in instigating changes and improvements to the land and in negotiating their rents is given consideration, providing evidence contrary to the assumption that all-powerful landlords implemented changes which often worked to the detriment of those residing on their estates. Thus this study adds a further dimension to our understanding of rural society and the factors which led to the changes historians have been so eager to discuss. The study concentrates on post-enclosure parishes and estates of the nineteenth century, examining the effects of other improvements and changing economic factors on the landed estate; a move away from the traditional examination of enclosure as a turning point and a look at other changes on the estate in this period.

F.M.L. Thompson noted both the importance of rental data and its limitations. He pointed out that ‘the level of rents is normally a reasonable indicator of the general state of farming’.¹ Rental accounts are one of the main forms of evidence used to support this thesis and rent levels and payments form a central theme. They add a further dimension to the body of extant research. Changes in farming and improvements to the land, as well as the relative roles of landlords and stewards and the changing place of tenants in society, have all been studied in terms of the agricultural rental economy. Furthermore, correspondence of landlords has been used to add further information on estate management, landlord opinions on their estates and their tenants, and often the thinking behind their decisions and actions. These can all be used in order to

¹ F.M.L. Thompson., ‘An Anatomy of English Agriculture, 1870-1914’ in B.A Holderness. and M. Turner, *Land, Labour and Agriculture, 1700-1920: Essays for Gordon Mingay* (London, 1991), p.227.

determine why landed estates were managed as they were and whether landlords were wholly liable for negative social effects of estate management decisions. John Steane has noted the interest which Northamptonshire landlords had in their estates but here their correspondence is used more closely with rental data in order to ascertain, in so far as is possible, the social and economic reasons for and the impact of their estate management decisions.² Overall this study uses accounts and correspondence to analyze not only the rural economy but also the social changes created by the fluctuating agricultural economy and estate responses to it, adding a further dimension to existing studies of the rural economy in general and of rural Northamptonshire in this period in particular.

This study examines the rental economy of the Northamptonshire landed estate in detail. G.E. Mingay found that local estate evidence adds detail to a study such as how the role of great landlords and their stewards worked in practice, what problems were faced on landed estates and how they were dealt with.³ It is within this context that this study aims to discover the dynamics of the rural rental economy in Northamptonshire. The agreement of rent levels and the adjustment of the rural rental economy across the period are of particular interest with agreed rent levels, arrears and abatements and the flexibility of the rental economy in Northamptonshire forming the central themes.

Why Northamptonshire?

Northamptonshire has been the subject of several important studies regarding enclosure and common rights in particular, most notably J.M. Neeson's 1993 study of commons in the county.⁴ Not only does it have a wealth of documents surviving for a large number of landed estates across the nineteenth century but it was one of the counties of England which was most affected by parliamentary enclosure. As a result there has been a great deal of work undertaken on Northamptonshire in this period. However, there has been little work done on estate management or the changing nature of the landed estate in this period, with work concentrating on the impact of enclosure on tenants, small owners and labourers in the county. As a result the work on the county provides a skewed picture, concentrating on the negative effects of changes in agriculture and only those social groups worst affected. This study provides information on

² J.M. Steane, *The Northamptonshire Landscape: Northamptonshire and the Soke of Peterborough* (London, 1974). p.223.

³ G.E. Mingay, 'Estate Management in Eighteenth-Century Kent', *AgHR* 4:2 (1956), p.108.

⁴ J.M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Changing England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge, 1993).

another aspect of rural society, the reasoning behind the decisions of landowners and the effects of these on both the landowners and their tenants.

Estate Management and its Impact

Despite the lack of attention the subject has received from historians, estate management decisions were central to rural society and form the context within which the agricultural community operated, affecting not only tenants but also the place of labourers in society, the impact of investment and economic change and the operation of the landed estate in rural society. Indeed the place of tenants in society and the function of the landed estate were central to English rural society in the nineteenth century and how the landlord-tenant economy operated was central in dictating changes in rural society in this period.

Overall this study adds a further dimension to the history of English rural society in the nineteenth century, taking a local study of Northamptonshire to demonstrate the complexities of landed estates and estate management. This in turn adds further detail to the body of extant research on the subject. Models such as E.P Thompson's moral economy, the Hammonds' work on the village labourer and even J.M. Neeson's work on Northamptonshire do not acknowledge the importance of estate management or its operation but remain dominant models on which historians rely. As a result landlords are generally portrayed as interested solely in their profits, irrespective of the social harm they were causing and tenants (those who were not proletarianized by enclosure in any case) have been completely overlooked. In practice, as this study will show, landowners took a great interest in their estates and tenants – even where they employed stewards and estate managers – whereas it was often the case that tenants sought to maximise their profits and sought investment in their lands, larger farms and lower costs, and both groups were reliant on the agricultural economy. Thus the landed estate was more complex than previous studies have implied and this study provides a further dimension to the extant body of research and looks at those who have been overlooked or misrepresented in the current dominant work in the field.

The Historical Context of This Study

The 'Agricultural Revolution'

The changes in English agriculture which occurred across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have often been considered to form an agricultural revolution. Lord Ernle is often accredited with identifying the agricultural revolution as taking place in this period, although his work has been challenged since. In his work of 1912 Ernle wrote that the agricultural revolution took place c.1750-1850 and consisted of large-scale enclosure, the adoption of new crops, the improvement of livestock and the introduction of new farming machinery. This enabled England's growing industrial population to be fed. However, Williamson pointed out that his views were not new and his definition of the agricultural revolution was 'defined in the terms' of eighteenth and nineteenth-century writers such as Arthur Young. He found that Ernle's ideas were based on the assumption that English agriculture at the beginning of the eighteenth century had changed little since medieval times until the agricultural revolution, which was pioneered by large landowners and their largest tenants.⁵

The idea of an agricultural revolution has since been challenged by a number of historians, most notably Eric Kerridge who wrote in the 1960s that the break from medieval farming practices took place before 1750 and some significant changes had been adopted before 1700, including convertible husbandry and artificial irrigation.⁶ Furthermore, he argued that much of England had been enclosed by 1700 and a great deal of this before 1500. But Kerridge too has been challenged on a number of points. Bruce Campbell suggested there was no post-medieval 'revolution' simply because medieval farming was not as backward as historians assumed, and G.E. Mingay pointed out that what is referred to as the agricultural revolution actually occurred over a number of centuries, from the development of convertible husbandry in the sixteenth century, as a part of

a long-term process of reorganization and change in land-use, accompanied by expansion of the cultivated area, that made possible a greater output without making a correspondingly larger demand on the labour supply.⁷

⁵ T. Williamson, *The Transformation of Rural England: Farming and the Landscape 1700-1870* (Exeter, 2002), pp.1-2.

⁶ Williamson, *Transformation.*, p.2; E.F. Genovese, 'The Many Faces of the Moral Economy; A Contribution to a Debate', *Past and Present* 58 (1973), p.163.

⁷ G.E. Mingay., *Enclosure and the Small Farmer in the Age of the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1968), pp.17-18; B.M.S. Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture, 1250-1450* (Cambridge, 2000), pp.3-4.

However, F.M.L. Thompson suggested that significant improvements did take place in the nineteenth century but only after 1830 whilst Mingay suggested they took place after 1850.⁸ Mingay's argument is reinforced by Williamson and Wade-Martins, who found that the investment in new agricultural machinery was a characteristic of the 'high farming' period of the mid-nineteenth century rather than of 1750-1850, which was instead characterised by techniques and improvements which were labour intensive but cheap in materials.⁹

High farming itself, which is generally deemed to have been adopted across England in the 1850s and is discussed in more detail in chapter 3, was defined by Eric Nash thus:

Farming that employs a high volume of inputs per acre and aims at a high volume of output. Its success or failure is measured by the yield of income, and income depends upon the difference between output and input.

However, he found that this definition was not applied uniformly, and contemporaries often used the term based on abstract criteria covering improvements intended to dramatically increase profits and it was often used to describe almost any farmer who invested in the soil, seeds or livestock although the notion behind it was one of maximising income whatever the cost.¹⁰ Thus despite its having a narrow definition, the term high farming was often used to describe a number of varied changes in farming which were intended to increase profits, regardless of whether or not they were actually what we would consider to be farming high.

Thus, even though the general consensus amongst historians is that there was no 'agricultural revolution', with improvements in agriculture beginning long before 1750 and continuing after 1850, considerable changes did take place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as demand for produce rose and greater profits could be made in agriculture. These improvements form an important part of this thesis as they were often carried out with the intention of increasing profits and had a knock-on effect on the rental economy, estate management as well as wider implications for rural society.

⁸ Williamson, *Transformation*, pp.2-3.

⁹ S. Wade-Martins and T. Williamson, 'Labour and Improvement: Agricultural Change in East Anglia, circa 1750-1870', *Labour History Review* 62 (1997), p.288.

¹⁰ B.A. Holderness, 'The Origins of High Farming' in Holderness and Turner, *Land, Labour and Agriculture*, pp.150-1.

Enclosure

One of the main changes to the English rural landscape has been the enclosure of the open fields. Whilst this study examines estates which had already been enclosed before 1801, the historiography of enclosure not only explains the organization of enclosed landscapes but also discusses a number of changes which are attributed to enclosure. However, this study will show that these investments and changes continued to take place long after lands were enclosed. Therefore, enclosure and the changes it is accredited with bringing are of importance here.

Enclosure changed the physical appearance of the landscape and was noted for its startling effect in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by writers such as Northamptonshire poet John Clare. Lands were enclosed for a variety of reasons, usually with the intention of increasing the estate profits and productivity or enabling the improvement of the land. Land was enclosed in a number of ways but in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries parliamentary enclosure became the principal form of enclosure in England and was undertaken on a grand scale, changing the landscape and the way farms and rural society were constructed.

David Eastwood calculated that 5.8 million acres of land were enclosed after 1730 by 3,945 Acts of Parliament. This comprised of 18 percent of England's land and covered around one-third of English parishes.¹¹ However, Act of Parliament was not the only way land was enclosed. Wade-Martins discussed two other methods which were used to enclose lands before and throughout this period – piecemeal enclosure of their own lands by farmers and enclosure of parishes by agreement of all the landowners. Piecemeal enclosure was undertaken by farmers exchanging strips between themselves and then fencing in their lands once they had an adequately large piece of land amalgamated. Enclosure by agreement usually took place where there were few owners involved and an agreement could be reached. Both were informal methods and open to legal challenge but avoided the costs of parliamentary enclosure, making them worthwhile options where possible and options which were frequently used even in the peak age of parliamentary enclosure.¹² Northamptonshire underwent a great deal of parliamentary enclosure, in fact W.E. Tate described it as '*the county of Parliamentary inclosure*'

¹¹ D. Eastwood, *Government and Community in the English Provinces, 1700-1870* (London, 1997), p.121.

¹² S. Wade-Martins, *Farmers, Landlords and Landscapes: Rural Britain, 1720-1870* (Macclesfield, 2004), pp.23-4, 31.

and J.M. Neeson calculated that two-thirds of its agricultural land was enclosed between 1750 and 1815.¹³

Eastwood saw the enclosure of land, particularly by Act of Parliament, to be a move from the old customary method of landholding to a more structured method of landholding, set out in statute:

As customary patterns of land-holding gave way to a new propertied order so customary modes of communal regulation gave way to stronger legal definitions of status and entitlement. Enclosure Acts either subordinated custom to statute or, implicitly, translated the language of custom into the currency of a new propertied allocation.¹⁴

Mingay, on the other hand, suggested that Parliament and the landed interest which undertook parliamentary enclosure considered it to be 'a redistribution of property carried out in the interests of more efficient and more productive farming' and not a loss of customs or subordination of the rights of tenants or labourers. And within this Parliament's concern with an enclosure was simply to establish rules for the redistribution of the land.¹⁵

Even though the peak period of parliamentary enclosure was between around 1750 and 1850 enclosure was, in fact, a long-term process, beginning long before 1750 and continuing after 1850.¹⁶ Rachel Crawford emphasised the co-existence of open field and enclosed landscapes in England prior to the parliamentary enclosure of the eighteenth century and commented that

By the middle of the sixteenth century the process had shifted from vicious land grabbing by unscrupulous lords and informal hedging-in of plots by smallholders toward enclosure by agreement until the middle of the eighteenth century.¹⁷

¹³ J.M. Neeson, 'The Opponents of Enclosure in Eighteenth-Century Northamptonshire', *Past and Present* 105 (1984), p.116.

¹⁴ Eastwood, *Government and Community*, pp.123, 165.

¹⁵ G.E. Mingay (ed.), J.L. Hammond and B. Hammond, *The Village Labourer* (London, 1978), p.xxiii.

¹⁶ Wade-Martins, *Farmers, Landlords and Landscape*, p.18.

¹⁷ R. Crawford, *Poetry, Enclosure and the Vernacular Landscape 1700-1830* (Cambridge, 2002), p.46.

Whatever the reason of landlords for enclosing their lands, enclosure was taking place before the eighteenth century. Wordie placed the beginning of the enclosure movement as c.1500 but viewed the seventeenth century as the most important time in the history of enclosure. Even though the acreages enclosed in this century cannot be accurately calculated, he argued, contemporary writers' commentary, along with historians' calculations, suggest that the piecemeal enclosure of the seventeenth century was more significant than the parliamentary enclosure which followed.¹⁸ He found that 1600-1760 was the most crucial period in the history of enclosure and England had moved from being a mostly open field to a mostly enclosed country in the course of the seventeenth century.¹⁹

However, Wordie's statistics, in this case, leave a lot to be desired. For example, he calculated that 75 percent of England was enclosed by 1760. If one assumes the majority of this to have been post-1600, as implicit in his thesis that the majority of enclosures took place between these two dates, this averages out to around 5 percent per decade. If one takes it from what he suggests was the beginning of enclosure – 1400 – it is still an average of over 2 percent per decade. Yet between 1760 and 1780 he considered the fact that almost 5 percent of the country was enclosed over these 20 years to be an increase on what had gone before, unlikely even if one does not account for peaks and troughs in previous decades.²⁰ However, what is certain is that enclosure took place at a dramatic rate from the early-eighteenth century and that parliamentary enclosure became the dominant type from around the 1750s. Gregory and Anthony Clark concluded that Parliamentary enclosure served to enclose only 22 percent of England's land but by 1850 'virtually all agricultural land was privately held', meaning that the majority of enclosure must have taken place by non-Parliamentary means. They did find, however, that even in 1600 there was little more common land than was later enclosed by Act of Parliament, implying that common land was only enclosed in this manner.²¹

Therefore, enclosure had a huge impact on the Northamptonshire landscape, rural society and the landed estate. The primary concern of historians has been the loss of commons and common rights at enclosure, which I will come to shortly, but this thesis concentrates on the post-enclosure landscape of Northamptonshire. Whilst enclosure itself has been viewed as

¹⁸ J.R. Wordie, 'The Chronology of English Enclosure, 1500-1914', *Economic History Review* 36 (1983), pp.483-4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.483-503.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.486.

²¹ G. Clark and A. Clark, 'Common Rights to Land in England, 1475-1839', *The Journal of Economic History* 61:4 (2001) pp.1010-1.

causing extensive short-term destruction and immediate change to farm sizes and rent levels, it has also been seen to have had a longer-term impact. Therefore, enclosure provides a foundation for this work, enabling an examination of the landed estate, improvements and investment and the agricultural rental economy in the longer term, rather than a short-term study of the period directly following enclosure. Examining economic change and estate management on already enclosed lands further enables an examination of estate responses to economic fluctuations using data which does not contain the short-term fluctuations often attributed to enclosure alone.

Impact of Enclosure: Loss of Commons and the Small Farmer

The principal work on rural Northamptonshire in this period is J.M. Neeson's *Commoners*. Neeson's work is primarily concerned with changing common rights and the changing place in society of those exploiting them as economic structures and ideologies changed, particularly at enclosure.²² Her work on the loss of commons and the proletarianization of the labouring classes provides not only a social picture of Northamptonshire to which this study adds a more economic viewpoint, but also provides further detail on social and economic changes in rural society in this period. With the loss of commons and common rights, it is argued labourers and some small tenants were proletarianized but, at the same time, little has been discussed in the way of tenant demand for land leading to such enclosures or the economic reasoning behind such decisions. The long-term impact of such enclosures has, again, been neglected by historians.

The proletarianization of the labouring classes and the fate of the small farmer has been discussed at length by historians. The majority of the research on this subject is based upon the work of John and Barbara Hammond. In *The Village Labourer* (1911) the Hammonds argued that changes to agriculture in this period, particularly parliamentary enclosure, dispossessed the rural labouring classes, who were forced to migrate to new industrial cities and join the English proletariat. The Hammonds changed the focus of studies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from the rural elite to the labouring poor.²³ In the years since the publication of *The Village Labourer* there have been a number of criticisms of the Hammonds' work. Yet it remains an important study and has been the basis of many others on enclosure and its effect on the lower classes of agricultural society. The idea of the labouring classes (and often the small farmer) being proletarianized remaining central to a number of works, primarily those

²² Neeson, *Commoners*.

²³ Hammonds, *The Village Labourer*.

concerning themselves with enclosure and commons, including the works of G.E. Mingay and J.D. Chambers and more recently formed an important theme in the otherwise contrasting theories of Neeson and Shaw-Taylor.

The second wave of parliamentary enclosure (1790-1815) has been identified as the main period in which wasteland was reclaimed and historians have suggested that such reclamation was deemed necessary as the extant open field system was under the stress of rapidly increasing demand in the 1760s.²⁴ It was a mixture of expanding agricultural land and increasing yields on existing agricultural lands which eased this stress and around 1.8 million acres of common land were enclosed before 1836 and a further half million acres after.²⁵ It must be stated, however, that much wasteland had been left uncultivated for so long due to its poor quality. So much so, in fact, that some was cultivated in the French Wars (1792-1815) but reverted to waste afterwards when it was no longer profitable. The North York Moors were predominantly lands of such poor quality that enclosure acts did not require lands to be fenced. Other acts excluded areas of land which would not have been profitable. However, John Chapman discovered that enclosure could make commons and wastes extremely profitable as even though rents on enclosed wasteland were lower than average for the time such lands could bring in a significant income on the basis of the quantity of land brought into the rental economy.²⁶

Between 6 and 7.35 million acres of common land were abolished by enclosure and with this common rights were lost.²⁷ The most widespread common rights were 'the right to graze cattle on land (common of pasture), to cut turf or gorse for fuel (common of turbay), and take wood for building, repair, or fuel (common of estover)' and ownership of such rights adhered to lands or dwellings in a parish, rather than individuals.²⁸ The extent of the common rights held by agricultural labourers is much debated by historians. Neeson calculated that around half the households in open field villages held common rights, including labourers and tenant farmers.²⁹

²⁴ Crawford, *Poetry, Enclosure*, p.11; J. Chapman, 'The Extent and Nature of Parliamentary Enclosure', *AgHR* 35:1 (1987), pp.33-4.

²⁵ Wade-Martins and Williamson 'Labour and Improvement', p.275; Williamson, *Transformation*, p.15.

²⁶ J. Chapman, 'Rent and Enclosure: A Comment on Clark', *The Journal of Economic History* 59:2 (1999), p.450.

²⁷ Mingay, *Parliamentary Enclosure in England* (London, 1997), p.85; I. Whyte, "'Wild, Barren and Frightful" – Parliamentary Enclosure in Upland County: Westmorland 1767-1890', *Rural History* 14:1 (2003), pp.27-8; Chapman, 'Parliamentary Enclosure', p.28.

²⁸ J. Blum, 'Review: English Parliamentary Enclosure', *Journal of Modern History* 53:3 (1981), p.478.

²⁹ L. Shaw-Taylor, 'Parliamentary Enclosure and the Emergence of an English Agricultural Proletariat', *Journal of Economic history* 61:3 (2001), pp.644-7.

The extent to which the poor could keep cows on the common has also been questioned in recent years. However, Clark and Clark calculated that before 1750 'the amount of waste per person was...probably less than half an acre' which, considering common tended to be marginal land, meant there would be too little land for the landless to keep cows on the common.³⁰ Enclosure also stopped problems associated with common pasture – damage caused by over-grazing could be prevented, as could theft of sheep and 'dogging' (driving others' sheep off the best parts of the common with dogs).³¹

Therefore, even though historians' primary concern with regards to commons has been the social cost of the loss of common rights, the increase to the amount of land in cultivation and the reorganization of estates and farms at enclosure enabled further improvements to take place and, in itself, had an impact on the landed estate, its income and management.

Rents and Estate Management

In 1907 Robert J. Thompson undertook a study of nineteenth-century agricultural rents in the interests of improving the agricultural economy of England at the time. Whilst his analysis of improvements and statistics on agricultural incomes are of great interest, the nature and timing of his study meant his sources remained anonymous so his figures cannot be verified and the estate used may provide a skewed picture. However, his interest in rents and improvements provide a concise statistical study almost contemporary with the period. In the introduction to his study Thompson noted that

Until we come to the royal Commission on Agriculture of 1893-96 very little effort seems to have been made to obtain actual records over a series of years.³²

Despite this concern with the rental economy and estate incomes, the primary focus of historians since has been the social impact of economic changes in agriculture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

³⁰ Clark and Clark, 'Common Rights', pp.1032-3.

³¹ Whyte, 'Wild, Barren and Frightful', pp.28-9.

³² R.J. Thompson, 'An Inquiry into the Rent of Agricultural land in England and Wales During the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 70:4 (1907), p.587.

Whilst historians such as G.E. Mingay, H.G. Hunt and David R. Stead have done some work on the economic workings of the landed estate, the principal study of rents across this period, and therefore the work central to this study, is that of Turner, Beckett and Afton, who studied national rent levels for the period 1690-1914. Rent levels and rents paid demonstrate not only the state of the agricultural economy but how this affected supply and demand for land and how it was affected by enclosure and other improvements and developments in agriculture. However, as Turner *et al* pointed out, rents were as much a social construct as they were an economic one, relying on negotiations and individual personalities as much as economic factors.³³ Thus a study of the landed estate based on the rental economy is not simply an economic study but a study of how landed estates operated within the prevailing economy, in terms of the relative place and power of individuals, the power of landlords and tenurial relations as well as when it was most beneficial to enclose or improve the land and the reasons for doing so. However, the national rental index does leave some detail to be desired. This detail can be built using a local study to identify the differences in estate management and the function of individual estates and this is what this study aims to do. This study will examine the different aspects of estate management in the agricultural economy, studying improvements and investment (chapter 3) and the setting and collection of rents (chapters 4 and 5)

The Agricultural Economy of the Nineteenth Century: An Introduction

This study takes as its basis the primary function of the rural economy – farming. However, it must be stressed that the rural economy was much wider than this, with farmers and estates relying on third parties and external tradesmen for tools and services. Richard Moore-Colyer pointed out that husbandry in turn required the services of the miller, wheelwright and carpenter amongst other local craftsmen, making the overall rural economy and community much broader than simply those involved in farming and the land.³⁴ Owing to its good soils, high productivity and proximity to London, Northamptonshire's economy closely followed the trend of the national agricultural economy. Furthermore, the trends discussed here are the general trends of the agricultural economy, covering both arable farming and animal products. A significant amount of work has been done on the rural economy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and therefore a strong background for this study has already been provided, in terms of the general economic trends and changes occurring nationally throughout this period.

³³ M.R. Turner, J.V. Beckett and B. Afton (eds.), *Agricultural Rent in England, 1690-1914* (Cambridge, 1997), pp.2-3.

³⁴ R. Moore-Colyer, 'Land and People in Northamptonshire: Great Oakley, c1750-1850', *AgHR* 45:1 (1997), p.164.

Before the period of this study, there were a number of changes which moved England away from its previous patterns of farming and changed the agricultural economy. In line with the expansion of industry, Mingay established that from the eighteenth century, due to its dramatically rising population and therefore rising domestic demand for corn, England 'lost its old position as an exporter of corn', particularly as the population became increasingly urbanized. This, he noted, was one of the reasons for another major change which took place in England on an immense scale at the time – enclosure, particularly parliamentary enclosure.³⁵ But population growth certainly increased demand for agricultural produce (and as a result agricultural profits). Prices (and rents) rose steadily until 1792, with the advent of the French Wars, when French blockades led to a rapid increase in prices and thus demand for land and rents also increased. Following the wars these artificially high prices fell and led to recession in the 1820s through to the early 1830s, with high farming (farming for maximum income, regardless of the costs incurred) becoming widely adopted in the 1840s and 50s.³⁶

In 1846 the Corn Laws were repealed, preventing the protection of domestic crop prices and no longer limiting import levels. But the long-term depression predicted to result from this did not occur. Over the next twenty years grain imports did increase but, Howell found, despite this, farmers remained prosperous, with increases in domestic demand buying up the increased imports, with only 1848-1852 being years of depression.³⁷ Indeed, Tom Williamson found that even by 1851 imports provided only 16 percent of agricultural produce consumed in England and Wales.³⁸ And with increased productivity came great profit. The ability of England's farmers to feed the growing industrial populations both enabled industrial growth and minimized losses to gross domestic product which would have been made by purchasing imports. As a result of this, Martin Daunton found, by 1851 Britain had the highest *per capita* income in the world, despite its extensive population growth.³⁹ Daunton's figure fails to distinguish agricultural and industrial income and the latter outweighed the former by the mid-nineteenth century. This was a significant drop in the importance of agriculture - in 1770 Arthur Young estimated agriculture to account for 45 percent of England's production which

³⁵ Hammonds, *The Village Labourer*, p.xvii.

³⁶ J. Davies, *Cardiff and the Marquesses of Bute* (Cardiff, 1981), p.184.

³⁷ D.W. Howell, *Land and People in Nineteenth-Century Wales* (London, 1977), p.6.

³⁸ Williamson, *Transformation*, p.4.

³⁹ M. Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare: An Economic and Social History of Britain 1851-1951* (Oxford, 2007), p.3.

modern calculations suggest had fallen to 33 percent by 1800.⁴⁰ Added to this the Corn Laws (until 1846) and transport limitations (which limited import levels until around the 1870s) meant that the increasing industrial population increased demand for domestic produce and kept food prices high for the majority of this period. Thus even when it was no longer providing the majority of England's GNP landowning (and to a lesser extent farming) was still a highly profitable occupation.

With regards to Northamptonshire in particular, Steane established that even by 1850 the county remained predominantly dependent on agriculture.⁴¹ Northamptonshire remained rural yet suffered comparatively little civil unrest than other agricultural counties and regions across this period, indicating that lands were improved and remained profitable to farmers (even when paying their labourers liveable wages). This, Mingay noted, was in contrast to counties which did not develop industrial centres or have expansion in agriculture which were subject to a great deal of civil unrest in the nineteenth century.⁴² Evidence of this study further demonstrates that agriculture in the county remained profitable in this period and lands were being invested in and improved in order to keep it that way enabling the county to survive economically despite its lack of industry.

In all, there were a significant number of other factors contributing to the increasing demand for agricultural produce in the nineteenth century and the primary trend was towards growth until the 1870s. The repeal of the Corn Laws had had little immediate effect resulting in a belief that demand for corn would continue to rise indefinitely. This belief was shattered by the crash in domestic agriculture in the 1870s.⁴³ From the 1870s onwards, improved transport enabled the middle-west of America to send far greater quantities of goods to England which, Howell argued, was of better quality than the domestic variety.⁴⁴

Lord Ernle wrote in the early-twentieth century that 'from time to time, circumstances combine to produce acute conditions of industrial collapse which may be accurately called depression.

⁴⁰ J.R. Wordie, *Estate Management in Eighteenth-Century England: The Building of the Leveson-Gower Fortune* (London, 1982), p.2.

⁴¹ Steane, *Northamptonshire Landscape*, p.281.

⁴² Hammonds, *Village Labourer*, p.xii.

⁴³ Wade-Martins, *Farmers, Landlords and Landscapes*, p.17; Lord Ernle, 'The Great Depression and Recovery, 1874-1914' in P.J. Perry (ed.), *British Agriculture 1875-1914* (London, 1973), pp.1, 3.

⁴⁴ Howell, *Land and People*, p.5.

Such a crisis occurred in agriculture from 1875-84, and again 1881-9' and the general consensus is that this was the case.⁴⁵ Steane found that this was not just a result of increased imports but also due to poor domestic harvests and cattle plague, both of which hit Northamptonshire in the 1870s.⁴⁶ With a prolonged fall in prices rents also fell. Cannadine calculated that by the mid-1890s rents were back around the level they had been in the 1840s and did not begin to rise again until around 1914. The fall in rents passed on the struggle to landlords, many of whom had large mortgages and whose incomes fell dramatically.⁴⁷

Further to this the type of farming undertaken had an impact on the profitability of the land. Until 1750 pasture rents were higher but arable profits increased and rents balanced out.⁴⁸ From the 1870s arable rents fell first, then pasture (as refrigeration techniques improved to enable imports) and in the 1880s-90s dairying and market gardening survived better than other types of farming.⁴⁹

The fluctuations in the wider agricultural economy affected the profitability of the land and therefore are an ongoing, underlying theme of this thesis. These general trends provide the background to the rises and falls in the economy and the thesis will demonstrate how rural society and the landed estate responded to these changes. Rent levels themselves were closely affected by price levels too, but this will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, where rent levels and payments are examined in their economic context.

The Agricultural Community

The agricultural community changed over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the economic and social ties between landlords and tenants altered and demand for labour, poor laws and even the extended franchise, all worked to change how landed society and therefore the agricultural community operated. The Hammonds, writing in 1911, commented that

⁴⁵ Ernle, 'The Great Depression', p.1.

⁴⁶ Steane, *The Northamptonshire Landscape*, p.281.

⁴⁷ D. Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London, 1992), p.93.

⁴⁸ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, pp.55-7.

⁴⁹ F.M.L. Thompson, 'Private Property and Public Policy' in Blake, and Cecil, H. (eds.), *Salisbury: The Man and his Policies* (Basingstoke, 1987), p.253; R. Perren, 'The Landlord and Agricultural Transformation, 1870-1900' in P.J. Perry (ed.), *British Agriculture 1875-1914* (London, 1973), p.113; Williamson, *Transformation*, p.171.

The agricultural community which was taken to pieces in the eighteenth century and reconstructed in the manner in which a dictator reconstructs a free government, was threatened from many points. It was not killed by avarice alone.⁵⁰

There has been a great deal of debate since the Hammonds were writing, including on the scale of enclosure and its effects, but their idea that rural society was changed for the worse as a result of the actions of wealthy landowners remains central to research on the period, including debates regarding the effect of enclosure and models such as Thompson's moral economy. However, in practice, landlords did not seek simply to maximise rents and increase productivity but sought to preserve the long-term profitability of their estates, including maintaining tenants. Thus, overall, agricultural society changed significantly across this period but not with intent to harm the lower classes or indeed indifference to them, but with the intention of preserving a degree of tenant prosperity.

Central to the transition which occurred in rural society in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were changes to farming itself, from enclosure to the adoption of different farming types and methods and increasing farm sizes. On top of this Williamson and Wade Martins established that after around 1840 transport networks improved, allowing farmers to bring in materials from further afield or even overseas and as a result farms no longer depended on local resources but brought in materials such as marl and manufactures such as tile pipes, to improve their lands.⁵¹ More generally, the 'changing geography of agricultural production' plus the increasing area under cultivation also affected the agricultural community as commons and wastes were brought under cultivation and the skills required and numbers of labourers needed varied as the type of farming undertaken changed.⁵² Thus as agriculture developed the landscape of England's countryside changed and so did the agricultural community. Along with developments in farming came developments in the way the landed estate was managed. Steane observed that the increasing professionalization of stewards, surveyors and other land management agencies came with the increasing interest of landlords in agriculture and improving their estates.⁵³

⁵⁰ Hammonds, *The Village Labourer*, p.7.

⁵¹ Wade-Martins and Williamson, 'Labour and Improvement', p.293.

⁵² Williamson, *Transformation*, p.159.

⁵³ Steane, *The Northamptonshire Landscape*, p.223.

The Importance of Landed Society and Landowners

In his 1963 work *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century*, F.M.L. Thompson wrote that

The landed interest... at least until 1851, formed the largest group in society. Besides the landowners who formed the nobility and gentry of the country it comprised the great body of the agricultural community, the farmers and labourers who were the producers, and the blacksmiths, wheelwrights and publicans who provided them with services. It provided direct employment for a high proportion of the large class of domestic servants and for the sizeable body of estate workers of varied skills and trades. But it also provided the chief means of livelihood for most of the professional men and retail traders of the country towns.⁵⁴

Despite Thompson's assertion of the importance of studying agricultural society as a whole more recent scholarship has failed to do so, concentrating on the lower classes in society and ignoring those influential in determining how landed estates operated.⁵⁵ This study seeks to go some way towards redressing the balance, examining how the landed estates on which the rest of agricultural society relied operated and providing this information in the context of extant studies of other groups in and aspects of society.

Thompson found that the nineteenth century in particular was characterised by a changing social order, not one of rigidity changing only in the rapid decline from the 1880s. Instead he found that as a result of economic change the structure of society was constantly changing, although landed magnates remained at the apex of society the character and relative importance of their status altered 'under the pressures generated by industrialization'.⁵⁶ Indeed, David Spring pointed out that until the 1880s the landed gentry believed that 'ownership of an estate was the hallmark of England's governing class'.⁵⁷ As a result it becomes

⁵⁴ F.M.L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1963), p.5.

⁵⁵ For example, Edwin Jaggard commented that since the 1970s historians have moved their focus 'from a preoccupation with the role of aristocratic and gentry landlords to a greater focus on the yeoman and tenant farmers, rural tradesmen and those voters making up the rural middle class'. E. Jaggard, 'Farmers and English County Politics 1832-80', *Rural History* 16:2 (2005), p.192:

⁵⁶ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p.2.

⁵⁷ D. Spring, 'The English Landed Estate in the Age of Coal and Iron: 1830-1880', *The Journal of Economic History* 11:1 (1951), p.23.

clear that landed estates and landed estate management are essential to our understanding of English rural society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The Importance of the Landed Elite

The landed elite as a class underwent a great change over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, primarily as a result of the dramatic changes which took place in the economy. However, the greatest change in their position in society took place in the 1880s when cheap, better quality imports rendered domestic agriculture all but obsolete. Up until the 1880s English society was, F.M.L. Thompson noted, both socially and politically dominated by the landed elite.⁵⁸ The importance and wealth of this landed elite is therefore central to our understanding of landed estates and why they were managed as they were. Thus this section will show the place of the landed elite as a group in society and demonstrate their importance to rural society, whilst the specific landlords and estates of this study, and how they fit into this background, will be discussed in chapter 2.

Until the 1880s land was of great importance to England's economy and as a result the landed elite were of great importance in English society and politics. J.R. Wordie commented that between 1700 and 1800 it was the aristocracy who ruled England, although he was keen to stress that this ruling class was not limited to members of the House of Lords, with social standing based more on the amount of land a man owned than on any title he possessed, with the wealth and power which came with landowning enduring even into the 1880s.⁵⁹

Prior to the late-nineteenth century, Thompson found, the landed aristocracy, although not dominant in every aspect of society, were the dominant group in politics, the church and the army and were the social group in which newspapers took the greatest interest.⁶⁰ David Howell suggested there were three economic features which defined the landed gentry – a family mansion, a home farm adjoining and a landed estate which was let out to tenants.⁶¹ Indeed, the families of this study all fell into Howell's definition of landed gentry but invariably had interests in politics and local society too, demonstrating that significant landed estates brought some degree of influence in society even where the landowners were not aristocratic. Within

⁵⁸ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p.14.

⁵⁹ Wordie, *Estate Management in Eighteenth-Century England*, p.8.

⁶⁰ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p.1.

⁶¹ Howell, *Land and People*, p.34.

this context they also shared a way of life and manner of upbringing which, Thompson found, resulted in shared ideas of gentlemanly conduct, a prioritizing of the family interest over that of the individual and intermarriage, forming ties between a series of families.⁶²

In terms of estate management the conduct and beliefs of the landed elite had two effects – the strong links between landowners and stewards on different estates aided the dissemination of ideas and influenced how they ran and improved their estates, whilst prioritizing the family over the individual usually resulted in landowners acting to preserve the long-term profitability of the land even at the expense of their own short-term profits. The latter can be identified where landlords abated rents in the short term to keep tenants on the land in the long term or where they improved the land or invested elsewhere to maintain long-term profits, often at the expense of short-term gain.⁶³ Sons were also trained to manage the estates in their youth so that they could take over competently upon inheritance.

Bogart and Richardson also suggested a further possible reason for the interest of the landed classes to preserve the long-term profitability of their estates. In their work on property rights they found that prior to Estate Acts property rights were governed by settlements, which did not contain absolute rights over property but deemed the holder of the land to be holding the land in trust – a life tenant preserving the land for his beneficiaries. They ascertained that settlements required both the current holder and his heir to agree changes in land use and were, from 1660, becoming obsolete with landowners seeking Estate Acts to gain full control over their estates.⁶⁴ However, the system of settlements brought with it ideas of the longevity of the estate not dissimilar to those held by the landowners of this study and, indeed, preserving the family over the individual interest as Thompson described. Thus, even where landlords were changing land use and obtaining Estate Acts to change settlements, one can identify ideas of long-term profitability over short-term throughout this period.

With regards to ties between landlords influencing estate management, the dissemination of ideas occurred simply through the discussion of estates when speaking with or writing to friends or relatives. This was not limited to familial ties, with Lord Overstone, for example, regularly discussing estates and improvements with old school friends and fellow politicians

⁶² Thompson, *English Landed Society*, pp.15,17.

⁶³ J.P. Bowen, 'A Landscape of Improvement: The Impact of James Loch, Chief Agent to the Marquis of Stafford, on the Lilleshall Estate, Shropshire', *Midland History* 35:2 (2010), p.197.

⁶⁴ D. Bogart and G. Richardson, 'Making Property Productive: Reorganizing Rights to Real and Equitable Estates in Britain, 1660-1830', *European Review of Economic History* 13 (2009), pp.3-6.

sharing advice, problems and even arranging meetings for their stewards to do the same throughout the nineteenth century.

The ties between landed estates also enabled landowners to be influential in politics. The political dominance of the landed elite enabled them to retain both social power and political preference (i.e. policies favouring the agricultural sector over the industrial). Furthermore, as mentioned above ideas disseminated through political groups just as they did those tied by kinship. Matthew Cragoe has observed that the landed elite continued to have considerable political power right through to the end of the nineteenth century. In 1832, for example, he found that landowners had a great deal of political influence in their local communities and were able to 'wage political warfare' and influence votes, and even in 1867, following the extension of the franchise, their influence and power remained extensive. This political influence and position was, he commented, maintained 'through the careful cultivation of alliances' – primarily kinship with other great estates and the loyalty of owners of smaller estates, to whom such loyalty could lead to personal advancements such as Justice of the Peace (JP) positions or employment for their younger sons.⁶⁵ In the second half of the nineteenth century however Mingay has identified the political domination of the landed classes as being challenged by increasing industrial sentiment demanding better political representation for industrial interests.⁶⁶

F.M.L. Thompson found that by the end of the eighteenth century the wealthy landowner 'already admitted some others as his social or near equals' although these individuals were always wealthy and tended to invest in their own estates. By 1850, he noted, the landed classes were often equalled in terms of wealth by those of industrial wealth and the structure of English politics was no longer weighted in the favour of the landed interest. But, despite this, landed magnates remained at the top of the social order.⁶⁷ As a result of the importance of landowning in society and politics, successful businessmen often invested their wealth in land. Tom Nicholas determined that the changing place of the landed estate in this period is evident from whether or not businessmen invested their wealth in purchasing land. In particular, in the late-nineteenth century, Nicholas identified only a small minority of those who made their fortunes in business and industry investing in land. This was because land was no longer necessary for men of industrial wealth to gain social position, as it once had been, but for a few it could still

⁶⁵ M. Cragoe, *Culture, Politics and National Identity in Wales, 1832-1886* (Oxford, 2004), pp.142-6.

⁶⁶ G.E. Mingay, *The Gentry: The Rise and Fall of a Ruling Class* (London, 1976), p.77.

⁶⁷ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, pp.2, 7.

aid their political standing or provide a beneficial financial investment.⁶⁸ The shift of political power from land to industry took place in the late-nineteenth century and, Mingay and Cannadine observed, it accompanied a shift in the balance of the economy from agriculture to industry and a shift in the economic, social and political power of the aristocracy in the nineteenth century.⁶⁹

Even though Mingay accredited the decline of the landed aristocracy in part to the reform and extension of the franchise in 1867, their loss of power and influence in society (and politics) was primarily a result of the reduced economic importance of land in England at this time, as agriculture had become subsidiary in the English and Welsh economies by the late-nineteenth century.⁷⁰ Added to this, F.M.L. Thompson commented that from the 1880s agriculture was a contracting sector of the economy. However, he found that as agricultural wages fell so did prices and the cost of living, resulting in little fall in real wages. Unfortunately in practice falling monetary wages and agricultural incomes were viewed by contemporaries as a fall in real income leading to further loss of confidence in the land.⁷¹ As a result demand for land fell in terms of both rents and sales, further contracting the agricultural sector and diminishing the power of the landed estate and those reliant upon it.

However, as stated above one of the characteristics of the landed gentry was that they sought to preserve the family income in the long term, not simply their own lifetimes. David Eastwood pointed out that the landed elite were “an old class, used to protecting their position and prepared to do things they did not like in order to preserve their power”. As a result they sought to defend their property rights using their political power and influence in the nineteenth century.⁷² This could not protect them from the recession of the late-nineteenth century but in practice by this point, Mingay noted, the landed classes had adapted to the changing economy and many were involved in industry as well as large landowners.⁷³ Thus even as the power and wealth of landowning diminished, diversification enabled the landed

⁶⁸ T. Nicholas, ‘Businessmen and Landownership in the Late Nineteenth Century Revisited’, *Economic History Review* 53:4 (2000), pp.777-8, 782.

⁶⁹ Cannadine, *Decline and Fall*, p.27; Mingay, *The Gentry*, p.165.

⁷⁰ Mingay, *The Gentry*, p.77; Davies, *Marquesses of Bute*, p.146.

⁷¹ Thompson, ‘Anatomy of English Agriculture’, p.212.

⁷² A. Brundage and D. Eastwood, ‘The Making of the New Poor Law Redivivus’, *Past and Present* 127 (1990), p.189, 194.

⁷³ Mingay, *The Gentry*, p.167.

elite to survive. Only now, rather than land being the most secure method of investment, the poor incomes of landed estates were being propped up by industrial wealth.

Thus the landed aristocracy themselves, their power and their place in society affected both the place of the landed estate in society and its management across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Their power initially lay in the wealth which the land brought them but in this period fortunes could be made and their incomes equalled in the industrial sector. But the old wealth of the landed elite brought with it political and social power which new wealth did not, creating a trend of industrial magnates buying into the land. In the late-nineteenth century, as landed power and profits were eroded, land became a less desirable commodity and many of the old landed magnates needed to adapt their investment patterns to survive. However, for the majority of the nineteenth century landowning brought great wealth which was infrequently equalled by industry and social and political power which came from the old institution of the landed estate, not simply wealth or income.

The Social Functions of Landed Estates

Whilst this study takes as its primary focus the economic workings of the landed estate and their implications, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have often been studied by historians in terms of social change. As shown above, the most significant works on Northamptonshire have been more concerned with the social impact of changes to the landscape than the rural economy. More widely, historians have been concerned with the 'paternal' role of landlords and the 'moral economy' of the English countryside.

Central to studies of rural society in this period is E.P. Thompson's model of the moral economy which he defined as

grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community.

These obligations were, he argued, fuelled by notions of the common weal and a belief that crowd actions were legitimate and supported by the wider community.⁷⁴ The model of the moral economy had its origins in the paternalist model, although Thompson argued the moral economy could be identified in all aspects of rural life, the paternalist model all but disappearing outside of periods of high prices and civil unrest.⁷⁵ Paternalism itself is the idea

⁷⁴ E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London, 1991), p.188.

⁷⁵ Thompson, *Customs in Common*, pp.188-9, 200, 245; Genovese, 'The Many Faces of Moral Economy', p.167.

that landlords aided their tenants for social and not just economic reasons. Factors such as improving farm land or buildings, allowing tenants to fall into arrears for a time or even providing medical help for tenants have all been identified as paternal actions.

Whilst eighteenth-century society had been built upon tradition, with all social groups from landlords to labourers bound by custom, the nineteenth century saw a move from tradition to the new market economy. With this move, both Graham Seal and E.P. Thompson (amongst others) have noted, the rural poor saw their common rights being eroded and customary measures for addressing grievances disappearing.⁷⁶ This Thompson identified as leading to the moral economy – “a selective reconstruction of the paternalist one”, including only those aspects which most aided the poor.⁷⁷

The move from a paternalist to a capitalist economy has been blamed on increased landlord absenteeism. Robert Ashton blamed “prolonged periods of residence in London” for widening the distance between landowners and those resident on their estates, and F.M.L. Thompson identified it as a result of changing estate management as the role and presence of stewards increased in the nineteenth century.⁷⁸ However, as has been identified elsewhere and as shall be shown throughout this thesis, landlords worked closely with stewards and took a great interest if not an active role in the management of their estates throughout the nineteenth century. Brundage and Eastwood argued that this was because a landlord could be both a good paternalist *and* a good capitalist as paternalism covered a wide range of acts and value systems, with an ethos which was both durable and highly adaptable.⁷⁹

In terms of what landlord actions could be construed to be paternalist, Matthew Cragoe provided the most comprehensive list. Cragoe found that landlords in Wales invested in a variety of improvements, in particular land drainage and new farm buildings and that even beyond enclosure landlords would keep ‘good breeding animals’ and allow tenants to use them

⁷⁶ G. Seal, ‘Tradition and Agrarian Protest in Nineteenth-Century England and Wales’, *Folklore* 99:2 (1988), pp.149-50; Thompson, *Customs in Common*, pp.188-9.

⁷⁷ Thompson, *Customs in Common*, p.212.

⁷⁸ R. Ashton, ‘The Aristocracy in Transition’, *The Economic History Review* 22:2 (1969), p.318; Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p.183.

⁷⁹ Brundage & Eastwood, ‘The Making of the New Poor Law’, pp.184-5.

at a reduced fee if not for free.⁸⁰ However, whilst Cragoe considered investment in farm buildings as a method of keeping rent levels up, Barbara English, in her study of the Sledmere Estate in the late-nineteenth century, noted that farm tenants were obliged to maintain their own buildings in their leases but, in practice, landlords would pay out a great deal of money in order to maintain, repair or even replace buildings for tenants, a practice all landlords agreed was unprofitable.⁸¹ Even though such investment did not bring in monetary income, it would be likely to help keep tenants on the land and ensure lands were in re-lettable condition if tenants did quit, therefore maintaining the long-term profitability of the estate. Added to this, David Stead observed that sometimes landlords undertook what would be perceived as paternalist actions in order to be considered good landlords, not simply out of a sense of responsibility to their tenants.⁸² This could be for economic reasons, such as attracting tenants when demand for land was low, or for other reasons such as furthering political ambition. Lord Overstone, for example, can be identified undertaking (or at least claiming to have undertaken) a number of actions which appear paternal but worked to enhance his political persona.

Thus, in all, landlords played a significant role in improving husbandry and invested a great deal in their estates but the idea that this was a result of paternalist notions is unconvincing. Seemingly paternal actions were set against a background of attempting to maximize and maintain estate profits.⁸³ The long-term profitability of the land required a degree of tenant maintenance and negotiation as well as a great deal of investment in the nineteenth century and such actions will be discussed throughout this thesis. However, as has been shown, historians to date have generally studied a number of investments in their social, not their economic, context whilst the social aspects of rental accounts management have received relatively little attention from historians.

⁸⁰ M. Cragoe, *An Anglican Aristocracy: The Moral Economy of the Landed Estate in Carmarthenshire 1832-1895* (Oxford, 1996), pp.60-1, 63.

⁸¹ B. English, 'On the Eve of the Great Depression: The Economy of the Sledmere Estate 1869-1878', *Business History* 24 (1982), pp.34-6.

⁸² D.R. Stead, 'The Mobility of English Tenant Farmers, c.1700-1850', *AgHR* 51:2 (2003), p.174.

⁸³ As well as the findings of Cragoe and English, Mackillop drew similar conclusions in his study of nineteenth-century Scotland: A. Mackillop, 'Highland Estate Change and Tenant Emigration' in T.M. Devine and J.R. Young (eds.), *Eighteenth Century Scotland: New Perspectives* (East Linton, 1999), p.239.

Conclusion

Thus, overall, the English landed estate was changing significantly in this period, with the management of landed estates adapting to (and causing) developments in the agricultural economy and advances in farming. It is an era which has been of great interest to historians owing to the huge social, political and economic impact of changes in rural society but in the main research has been concerned with social change, including enclosure and the loss of common rights, and rural depopulation. In terms of economic studies, little work has been done on the economic changes and decisions in rural society although their social impact has been looked at in terms of the moral economy and paternalist models. Considering the fact that landed estates and rural communities were attached by economic ties as much as they were by social bonds there has been little work done on the economic bonds of the landed estate and how this affected rural society. This thesis aims to go some way to redressing this balance, providing the economic ties and the social networks of the landed estate which relied on them in order to add a further dimension to the extant body of research.

A small amount of work has been done regarding agricultural rents and their place in the English economy but there is a lack of detailed local research considering developments in both the social and economic ties within rural society in the nineteenth century. Thus overall this study provides a detailed local study of rents and the economic business of the landed estate to both bolster the local knowledge we have of Northamptonshire and provide insight into landed estate management and its ties both social and economic across this period. Chapter two will introduce the estates of this study; provide details of how they were managed and an overview of changes in both the agricultural economy and the operation of landed estates themselves across the period 1800-1881. Chapter three will then discuss the impact of improvements in agriculture and changes across the period. This will be discussed in terms of both landlord and tenant desire to improve lands and increase profits. The place of the small farmer and his survival throughout this period, as well as social mobility of tenant and labourers, will also be considered.

Chapters four and five then take an in-depth look at the rental economy and the social and economic factors affecting it across the period. Chapter four looks at rents across the period and compares the Northamptonshire evidence to the national rental index, as well as considering the reasons for fluctuations in rental levels, the impact of prices and how landed estates operated in terms of setting rents. Finally, chapter five is concerned with the payment of rents. This includes two sections – arrears and abatements. The levels of both across the period will be examined and compared to national trends in arrears and abatements as well as prices and the wider agricultural economy. An overview of the period 1800-1881 will be examined,

followed by a case study of the post-French Wars recession (1815-1831). Thus, overall, rent levels and their payment as well as improvements to estates will be studied in the context of estate management and the desire of both owners and tenants of the estates, demonstrating the dynamics of the operation of landed estates and the necessity of tenant will and cooperation for them to operate successfully.

Chapter 2: Landed Estates and Their Management

Introduction

The business of the estate and how it was actually managed could have a significant effect upon its economic survival and that of the tenants. Estate management is a central interest of this thesis owing to the role of landowners and their stewards in setting rent levels, collecting payments, and encouraging or implementing improvements on their estates. It shall be shown in later chapters how tenants were keen improvers as well as landlords and, indeed, how tenants negotiated their rent levels. The principal concern of this chapter, however, is the landed estate and its management.

The chapter shall begin by introducing Northamptonshire as a county and explaining the society in which the landed estate operated before going on to examine the business of the estate itself. The relative roles of landowners and estate stewards in managing estates will be examined and the estates, families and stewards of this study introduced. The different types of estate management will then be discussed along with the possible responses of estates to economic changes. Having established the role and place of the landed estate and how estates were managed, the chapter will then go on to contextualize the landed estate in terms of the landlord's desire to maintain the long-term profitability of his land and introduce the changes and improvements in farming which were implemented in this period. It shall be shown that improvements to the land were usually undertaken with the desire of maintaining long-term profits whilst taking advantage of short-term economic trends. Improvements to the land and investment are the subject of chapter 3, which will build upon the analysis of estate management and the reasons to improve which are covered in this chapter.

The Northamptonshire Landscape

The landscape itself affected farming types and improvements to the land, with this, the topography of the land, and the quality of the soil affecting both the profits of farming and type of farming which took place. Landscape and soil type thus affected estate management decisions as landlords and tenants alike sought to maximise the profit from their land, with stewards often bringing technical knowledge of the land to aid them in this. The subject of improvements will be discussed in detail in chapter 3 but the topography of the land and changes in farming are introduced below.

Both James Donaldson's 1794 survey of the county and William Pitt's of 1809 provide a great deal of evidence regarding Northamptonshire agriculture and topography in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Both calculated Northamptonshire to be 65-66 miles long and 24 miles across at its widest point, with a total area of between 910 and 1,000 square miles (or 582,400-640,000 acres). They found the county was comprised of 316 parishes (falling from 330 in recent years) which were spread across 20 hundreds.⁸⁴ Of these parishes Pitt calculated that 227 were enclosed but 89 (28%) were still open field, with 600,000 acres of the county employed as farmland.⁸⁵

Topographically Northamptonshire can be split into two distinct areas – a highland area to the north and east where the land is typically over 150 metres above sea level with around a third of the area over 200 metres above sea level and a lowland area to the south characterised by flat lands usually less than 150 metres above sea level. These two areas also had different soil types, with the highland area of the county roughly correlating with an area of heavy clay soils, compared to light and medium loams of the lowlands. In terms of farming the land, David Hall found the county can be classified as three main types – the arable-dominated champagne area, the forest regions of Rockingham, Salsey and Whittlewood (which were over 70 percent woodland but had some arable land) and the Soke of Peterborough which had both a large area of high heath ground and extensive marsh in the Borough Great Fen.⁸⁶

The attributes of the land were only of advantage where they were understood by the farmers. For example, in his 1797 work *Elements of Agriculture* James Hutton emphasized the need for understanding of both climate and soil for farmers to select the correct crops and crop rotations to employ as well as the correct farming implements.⁸⁷ Donaldson, in his survey of the county, found varying soil types to be problematic in Northamptonshire farming. Rather than employ different techniques and implements for different soil types he noticed that all soils were ploughed in the same way.⁸⁸ Indeed, the *Victoria County History* of Northamptonshire also suggested the soil was not always farmed in the manner to which it was best suited. For

⁸⁴ W. Pitt, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Northampton* (London, 1809), pp.1-2; J. Donaldson, *General View of Agriculture in the county of Northampton: with observations on the means of its improvement* (Edinburgh, 1794), p.9.

⁸⁵ Pitt, *General View of Agriculture*, pp.38-9.

⁸⁶ D. Hall, *The Open Fields of Northamptonshire* (Northampton, 1995), p.95.

⁸⁷ J. Jones, 'James Hutton's Agricultural Research and His Life as a Farmer', *Annals of Science* 42:6 (1985), p.575.

⁸⁸ Donaldson, *General View of Agriculture*, p.14.

example, on lowland soils in parishes such as Ringstead and Irchester wheat and barley were grown whilst in the highland parishes of Great Addington and Finedon clay soils were also historically used to grow wheat and barley, despite being less suited to doing so.⁸⁹

The precise agricultural split of the county cannot be firmly identified but sources show that mixed farming was prevalent with some farmers changing land usage (with the landlord's permission) on some of their holdings and many being recorded as holding amounts of arable and pasture land. However, John Steane ascertained the north and east of Northamptonshire to be predominantly arable by the mid-nineteenth century whilst the south and west were dominated by pasture. But there was a shift towards arable farming between 1850 and 1870 resulting in two-thirds of the county being put down to crops.⁹⁰ However, evidence of the exact nature of farming in this period is limited. The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments noted in 1980 that a great deal of evidence of arable farming had been 'obliterated' by the growth of towns and the use of modern farming methods and even where evidence remained, ridge and furrow only tended to survive on heavy clay soils.⁹¹ But overall it appears that farming was generally mixed in the majority of the county although this mix changed over time.

It was not just the type of soil and landscape which was important in agriculture but also the quality of the land. Greenall observed in his 1979 study that Northamptonshire's soil was nowhere unproductive, with soil that was unsuited to crops providing good quality grazing land and even in the seventeenth century there was little wasteland in the county.⁹² Indeed Reverend J. Howlett, in his pro-enclosure leaflet of 1786, noted Arthur Young's comment that the quality of Northamptonshire's soil was so high, particularly for grazing land, that it was in itself a reason to enclose and to convert arable land to pasture.⁹³ Yet landlords still expected to find poorer quality land within the county. In 1860, for example, Lord Overstone described his recently purchased lands as including 'not one acre of inferior or even second rate land'.⁹⁴ And

⁸⁹ W. Page, *The Victoria History of the County of Northampton* vol.3 (London, 1930), pp.155, 196; L.F. Salzman, *The Victoria History of the County of Northampton* vol.4 (London, 1937), pp.39-40, 45, 51.

⁹⁰ J.M. Steane, *The Northamptonshire Landscape: Northamptonshire and the Soke of Peterborough* (London, 1974), p.281.

⁹¹ Royal Commissions on Historical Monuments - England, *Northamptonshire: An Archaeological Atlas* (London, 1980), pp.9-10.

⁹² R.G. Greenall, *A History of Northamptonshire* (London, 1979), p.16.

⁹³ Arthur Young, 'Political Arithmetic' quoted in Rev. J. Howlett, *An Enquiry into the Influence which Enclosures have had upon the Population of England* (London, 1786), pp.5-6.

⁹⁴ University of London MS804/1223.

the 1980 survey of Northamptonshire by the *Royal Commission on Historical Monuments* also identified variance in the land and soil of the county in terms of both quality and the type of farming to which it was best suited, correlating with both the different soil types and the split identified by Steane.⁹⁵

The amount of land under cultivation was also increasing across this period. J.M. Neeson calculated from land tax returns that before 1750 as much as one acre in six of the unenclosed land in Northamptonshire was uncultivated wasteland, which fell to little more than a tenth of the county by 1800 and 'almost no waste' remained by 1850.⁹⁶ However, as Greenall's work and other studies have shown, even the wasteland of the county could be employed as profitable farmland.

Population of the County and Owners of Land

One of the major changes in nineteenth-century England occurred in terms of population growth. Population in England increased dramatically in this period, rising from 5.74 million in 1750 to 8.3 million in 1801 and by 1851 it had doubled to 18.6 million.⁹⁷ This increase had not only to be supplied with food and goods but also needed to be utilized in the English economy. J.D. Chambers found that in practice the majority of this increased population was absorbed by the increasing demand for industrial labour.⁹⁸ What is more important here, however, is the effect this increased population and its absorption by industry had on English agriculture, the agricultural economy and landed estate management.

Landowners (large landowners in particular) only formed a small minority of the population of Northamptonshire, although a significant proportion of the population relied on them for their incomes. In his 1794 report *General View of Agriculture in the County of Northampton*, James Donaldson estimated the total population of Northamptonshire to be around 167,000 with around 400 living in every parish and around 3,000 in each market town.⁹⁹ In his 1809 report on the county, however, Pitt revised this estimate downwards to 150,000 and the 1811 census

⁹⁵ Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *Northamptonshire*, pp.1-10.

⁹⁶ J.M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge, 1993), pp.172-3

⁹⁷ ONS, www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme-compendia/form2005/01_fopm_population.pdf.

⁹⁸ J.D. Chambers, 'Enclosure and Labour Supply in the Industrial Revolution', *Economic History Review* 5:3 (1953), p.336.

⁹⁹ Donaldson, *A General View of Agriculture*, pp.9-10.

identified the population to be 141,353, close to Pitt's estimate. Of these he calculated that 48.5 in every 100 people worked in agriculture.¹⁰⁰ By 1871 the population had increased to 243,891, the majority of these were still employed in agriculture but less than 5,000 (2%) owned more than an acre of land (see Table 2:1).¹⁰¹

	ENGLAND & WALES	NORTHAMPTONSHIRE	Northamptonshire as a % of Total
POPULATION	19,458,009	243,891	1.25
INHABITED HOUSES	3,841,354	52,539	1.37
No PARISHES	14,700	346	2.35
TOTAL OWNERS	No 972,836	14,465	1.49
OWNERS OF >1 ACRE	703,289	10,010	1.42
OWNERS OF 1 ACRE +	269,547	4,455	1.65

Table 2:1 Owners of Land 1873

SOURCE: *Return of Owners of Land 1873 [In England and Wales exclusive of the Metropolis]* vol.2 (London, 1875), p.15.

In terms of land value, in 1809 21 people owned lands worth £3,000-£5,000 *per annum* and a further 16 owned lands worth between £5,000 and £10,000 *per annum* with 'few' holding lands worth over £10,000 *per annum*.¹⁰² These valuations were only of the lands owned within Northamptonshire and, as large landowners often owned lands in several counties, landownership on a national scale was more concentrated than the Northamptonshire figures imply. As with external investments, extensive landowning outside the county also had an effect on how landlords managed their estates. Landlords with extensive lands were more able to prop up their income if there was a problem in one county or if they wished to purchase further lands or wanted to invest in their estates and when prices were low they could also manage to obtain a liveable income from their landed estates in a way smaller landowners could not.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.9-10; Pitt, *General View of the Agriculture*, pp.246-8.

¹⁰¹ Further to this Cannadine found that in England and Wales combined just 4,200 people owned land. D. Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London, 1992), p.9.

¹⁰² Pitt, *General View of Agriculture*, p.21; Donaldson, *General View of the Agriculture*, p.12.

Ownership of land was not consistent and land was sold and estates extended and consolidated throughout the nineteenth century. However, what is evident from extant studies is that landowning was becoming more consolidated in the nineteenth century with new men of industrial wealth purchasing large estates whilst landowners and owner-occupiers sold their lands. Neeson attributed small landowners selling their lands almost entirely to enclosure, as their costs were disproportionate and many could not afford the prospect.¹⁰³ Whether this can be attributed entirely to enclosure alone, which is unlikely given the variations in the economy of the nineteenth century, what is certain is that by the late-nineteenth century small owner-occupiers constituted a small fraction of the landholding body of England. David Stead, for example, found that by the late-1880s small owner-occupiers comprised only 18% of the total number of farmers and farmed only 15% of cultivated acreage.¹⁰⁴ Added to this, J.V. Beckett noted that by 1873 English and Welsh landownership was the most concentrated in Europe and contemporaries noted that the vast majority of land was owned by a “relatively small number of families”. Rather than attributing this change to small owners selling their lands at enclosure, however, Beckett noted that until the recession of the 1870s land ownership remained concentrated due to the social standing which could be achieved by sinking one’s wealth into land and the possession of an extensive landed estate.¹⁰⁵

For as long as land remained profitable in the nineteenth century, Beckett found, men who had made their money in industry were buying into the land for the social and political power it brought, not simply the income and profit that could be made. Following the extension of the franchise in 1867 it was also suggested that a man could further his political career by owning extensive tenanted lands in order to secure the votes of his tenants. Howard Evans, writing in the 1870s, suggested the most prominent example of this type of landholding to be Samuel Jones Loyd, Lord Overstone, although this was a claim Loyd himself heavily refuted.¹⁰⁶

Within this context sources provide only snapshots of changing ownership. However, some landowning families in the county had been resident for hundreds of years, estates tended to be

¹⁰³ J.M. Neeson, ‘The Opponents of Enclosure in Eighteenth-century Northamptonshire’, *Past and Present* 105 (1984) p.119.

¹⁰⁴ D.R. Stead, ‘Risk and Risk Management in English Agriculture, c.1750-1850’ *Economic History Review* 57:2 (2004), p.334.

¹⁰⁵ J.V. Beckett, ‘Agricultural Landownership and Estate Management’ in E.J.T. Collins (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Volume 7 1850-1914* (Cambridge, 2000), pp.693-4.

¹⁰⁶ Beckett, ‘Agricultural Landownership’, pp.710; Beckett, ‘Landownership and Estate Management’, in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Volume 6, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, 1989), pp.546, 553. For Lord Overstone’s response to accusations of vote-rigging, see University of London MS804 1386/4; MS804 1386/5.

bought and sold whole and landownership consisted of a core of old families holding extensive estates and new families building large estates. Within this the general composition of estates tended to remain the same even where lands were sold and it is unlikely that large landowners ever numbered much more than the 37 holding more than £3,000 of land in 1809. Thus what is evident is that Northamptonshire had a number of estates of various sizes, including some of significant size within the county and even extending beyond it. Those focussed on here were all of significant wealth and size, with a majority of the rural population reliant on landed estates and their management forming a crucial part of rural society. With the recession after 1879 landed estates' fortunes changed and, as Beckett pointed out, those who were reliant on agricultural incomes at this time had to adapt, often selling lands.¹⁰⁷ What is examined in this thesis is the fortune of the agricultural estate and therefore the fall in fortunes can be identified. However, it must be stressed there is little suggestion of the landlords of this study struggling to survive as all had adapted to the changing economic climate and had other forms of income outside of their estates.

The Business of the Estate and Estate Income

The main source of income from landed estates was usually in the form of rents. The rental income of landlords can, Beckett argued, be used to determine the general financial position of a landlord. Whilst costs of living and external incomes did vary, a general picture can be built up using the estate income of landlords and wealth and social status were related to the acreages owned and the fortunes of agriculture.¹⁰⁸ Others have made a more detailed comparison of the fortunes of farming and the income of landed estates. H.G. Hunt, for example, in his study of the Kent estates of Lord Darnley in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, noted that in the early-nineteenth century, as prices rose, not only did rents increase but landlords moved from longer tenancies to tenancies-at-will, enabling them to take a greater proportion of tenurial incomes and therefore increasing estate incomes more rapidly as agriculture increased in profitability.¹⁰⁹ This view was also shared by R.C. Allen, who argued that at enclosure landlords were able to increase their income from their estates without contributing towards economic growth by way of re-organizing their estates and raising rents, creating greater financial inequality rather than increased prosperity in agriculture.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Beckett, 'Agricultural Landownership', pp.757-8.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.747.

¹⁰⁹ H.G. Hunt, 'Agricultural Rent in South-East England, 1788-1825', *AgHR* (1958), p.107.

¹¹⁰ R.C. Allen, 'Enclosure and the Yeoman: The Agricultural Development of the South Midlands 1450-1850' (Oxford, 1992), pp.7, 20-1, 179, 283.

The estates covered in this study all relied primarily on their rental income. However, they also sourced timber and ran an estate farm which brought in income and supplied produce for use on the estate. Further to this, landowners also had external incomes – such as industrial incomes or investment in commerce - which could further act as a ‘buffer’ and ensure they were still able to maintain their standard of living when prices were low and rents poorly paid. External sources of income, it will become evident throughout this thesis, affected estate management and rental management because the estate was less reliant on rents for its survival, providing more flexible options in how the estate was managed. Indeed, Beckett identified estates in the late-1870s redirecting assets away from agriculture in order to survive and noted that in Northamptonshire, amongst other counties, those reliant solely on their landed incomes had little prospect of economic survival.¹¹¹ However, Northamptonshire will also be shown to have been a county in which the primary profit was agricultural and what enabled the survival of estates through agricultural recession would usually be interests and investments outside of the county.

How far landlords were reliant on their landed incomes has been debated by historians. In 1940 Habakkuk suggested that by 1700 landlords were earning a large proportion of their incomes from external sources in a way they had not been doing 60 years previously, through army colonelcies and pensions amongst other sources.¹¹² In 1985 however, Clay argued the majority of landlords were actually reliant on rental income as their main source of income up to 1750.¹¹³ Yet what appears to have happened on the Northamptonshire estates of this study is that the older, extensive estates were more than capable of managing on their rental incomes and other monies obtained from the land whilst new men were buying their way into the land in a manner significant enough that they too could survive on the income their estates brought them. Even the Loyd family, who bought into the land with wealth from banking, retired from their banking concerns to manage their estate, making them as reliant on their landed income as their old aristocratic counterparts. Thus the principal income of landed estates came from leasing the land to tenants but other types of income could be made from the land.

¹¹¹ Beckett, ‘Agricultural Landownership’, pp.710-711.

¹¹² H.J. Habakkuk, ‘English Landownership, 1680-1740’, *Economic History Review* 10:1 (1940), pp.10-11.

¹¹³ C.G.A. Clay, ‘Landlords and Estate Management in England’ in Thirsk, J. (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Volume 5* (Cambridge, 1985), p.170.

F.M.L. Thompson pointed out that canals had brought great benefits to landed estates, in lowering costs of bringing in goods and materials to the estate whilst at the same time extending the market for estate produce, and as a result landlords were eager to invest in railways and many made great profits from doing so.¹¹⁴ One such example was the Earl Fitzwilliam who, David Spring noted, invested in the South Yorkshire Railway in the 1840s.¹¹⁵ Landed estates could also be exploited for mineral and coal deposits, which could bring a substantial income or simply provide the estate with resources which would otherwise have been brought in from elsewhere. The subsoil belonged to the owner of the top soil and therefore resources could be mined by the landowner. Spring identified a great number of landlords – of both large and small estates - in Cumberland, Lancashire, South Yorkshire and Staffordshire worked minerals on their estates to increase their estate incomes. Less common was mining for coal but Spring found that this was also undertaken by some landowners, particularly those with substantial coal deposits on their estates including Earl Fitzwilliam on his Yorkshire estates, the Lowthers in Cumberland and the Earl of Durham.¹¹⁶ Landowners could also profit from the rapid urban growth in the nineteenth century. Those who owned lands which could be amalgamated into expanding towns and cities could profit from ground rents or even sell their land outright.¹¹⁷ However, in Northamptonshire itself, leasing land, farming and timber sales appear to have been the predominant occupation of landed estates throughout the nineteenth century.

On landed estates themselves John Davies observed that on the Cardiff estate of the Marquesses of Bute the agricultural function of the estate became less dominant throughout the nineteenth century and was replaced by a non-agricultural income, with the rise of the urban estate more than balancing out the decline of the agricultural.¹¹⁸ Yet the responses of Northamptonshire landlords to the recession of the late-nineteenth century, added to evidence of the produce of the county, suggests the Northamptonshire landscape was different, with Lord Overstone

¹¹⁴ F.M.L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1963), pp.257, 262.

¹¹⁵ D. Spring, 'The English Landed Estate in the Age of Coal and Iron: 1830-1880', *Journal of Economic History* 11:1 (1951) p.7.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.5.

¹¹⁷ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p.267.

¹¹⁸ J. Davies, *Cardiff and the Marquesses of Bute* (Cardiff, 1981), pp.146, 187.

commenting on facing ruin and proposing that an alternative way to profit from the land should be found.¹¹⁹

In 1794 Donaldson commented that 'there are no large manufacturing towns situated in this district' and indeed Northamptonshire was and remained a primarily agricultural county throughout this period.¹²⁰ Donaldson established that the produce of the county was significant and flour was sent to neighbouring counties as were beans. Furthermore, in 1809, Pitt listed the primary produce of Northamptonshire as 'wheat, wheat-flour, oats, beans, timber, oak-bark, fat cattle, fat sheep, wool, butter, and cheese' as well as leather. What manufacture was undertaken in the county was reliant on agriculture as a source of raw materials, consisting of 'shoes, lace and woollen stuffs' but including providing such manufactures for the army.¹²¹ Thus Northamptonshire was not a poor county and farming was certainly productive and profitable, with enough output to supply produce to both neighbouring counties and the military. However, economic activity in the county was fundamentally reliant on agriculture.

Outside of the produce of agriculture the land itself could be used to cultivate timber or exploit mineral deposits. There is no mention in the Northamptonshire correspondence of mineral deposits. However, timber sales do appear to have formed an important part of estate incomes. Timber sales were not a way of profiting from the land unique to Northamptonshire – Barbara English commented that in 1861 Yorkshire landlords were alleged to be making more money from timber sales than from letting land.¹²² Within Northamptonshire there are many examples of estates cultivating and profiting from timber, despite Donaldson's suggestion in 1794 that more profit could have been made by cutting down the forests and letting the land for farming, even after compensating any common rights.¹²³ Throughout the period the Montagu account books all included timber accounts following the rentals, implying the sale of timber to be the second most important source of estate income. As with the rentals no acreage is given but the total income from timber sales was always considerably lower than that from rents, indicating that the majority of the land was leased out. Timber was important to other estates too - in 1818 Pearce wrote to James Langham explaining how to calculate the girth of trees and in 1820 sent

¹¹⁹ University of London, 804/1575; D.P. O'Brien, *The Correspondence of Lord Overstone* (Cambridge, 1971), p.1324.

¹²⁰ Donaldson, *General View of Agriculture*, p.44.

¹²¹ Pitt, *General View of Agriculture*, p.239-40; Donaldson, *General View of Agriculture*, p.10, 47.

¹²² English, 'On The Eve of the Great Depression', p.28.

¹²³ Donaldson, *General View of Agriculture* p.37.

details of the sale of timber at auction and in 1830 the Ashley estate was investing in timber, purchasing a total of 347 trees, including 174 Ash and 133 Elm.¹²⁴ Thus Northamptonshire estates were reliant on the land. Within this significant incomes were made from selling timber but they relied primarily on tenants and their rental incomes.

Thus, overall, Northamptonshire agriculture was extensive and the county as a whole was reliant on agriculture to sustain its income and wealth. Whether landlords had a background in industry or were old landed magnates they were all reliant on the land to a significant degree. Some income was generated through timber sales but the majority always came from rents. As a result landlords were extremely reliant on their tenants and, where prices of agricultural produce were good, made a significant profit from them. The reliance of Northamptonshire landlords on their tenants in turn affected their estate management decisions and policies, as did the extent of their estates and whether or not they had any external income.

Estates of This Study

The choice of estates for this study has been shaped by the available sources and the longevity of ownership for families and estates. The Stopford family, despite their longevity, geographical location within Northamptonshire and significant holdings, have little archival evidence for this period and therefore have not been included, whilst the Loyd family, who only came into the county at the beginning of the nineteenth century, have extensive archival sources regarding the management of the estate throughout this period and thus have been included.

The two central estates of this study are therefore the Overston estate of the Loyd family and the Boughton estate of the Lords Montagu, both of which have significant accounts in the archive, reinforced with correspondence evidence in the case of the former and annotations on the account books in the case of the latter. Added to this, the Cottesbrooke estate of the Langham family has been utilized to provide further qualitative evidence on estate management decisions and the interactions of landlords, stewards and tenants on the estate. Finally, the Fitzwilliam estate at Milton has been used to provide some examples, although the majority of documents for this estate cover the eighteenth and not the nineteenth century.

Estates were often formed of grouped parishes but could be formed of two or three separate groups of parishes or even extended to further estates in other counties and C.G.A Clay identified a trend for consolidation of estates from the early eighteenth century onwards which

¹²⁴ NRO L(C)1098, 1101; NRO ASL392.

varied by degree but was present across every county in England.¹²⁵ The estates of this study are concentrated primarily within the centre of the county, all falling in the lowland area with good arable soils but with some outlying parishes in the highlands of the county. The two principal estates – the Overston and the Boughton – are also of comparable size with one another and were a part of greater estates covering a number of counties. The Milton estate was one of the largest in the county, again providing a snapshot of the workings of a far greater estate which extended over a number of counties. The Langham estate provides an example of a different type of estate, where Cottesbrooke was the centre of a Northampton-focussed estate with little land elsewhere and a middling landed family seat. All the estates had their principal seat in Northamptonshire, although Lord Overstone himself did relocate to Berkshire later in his life.

The size of estates was not constant but there are points where one can be certain of the size or value of certain estates. In 1830 estate manager William Pearce valued the Langham estate at £18,000 *per annum* and described it as ‘a truly noble estate’.¹²⁶ A number of Northamptonshire landowners also held significant lands outside of Northamptonshire as well as their estates within the county, which can be used to give us some idea of the extent of their holdings and their incomes. For example, the size of the Finch Hatton estate in Nottinghamshire was 1,420 acres but all we know of their Northamptonshire estates is that they were much more significant in size.¹²⁷ Within this study, A.D.M. Phillips found that the Loyd estate at Overston consisted of just 3,681 acres in Northamptonshire in 1832, rising to 17,161 acres in 1850 and 18,816 by 1877.¹²⁸ In 1870, however, Lord Overstone himself noted his estate consisted of 15,045 acres in Northamptonshire (worth £30,679 *per annum*) plus lands in Berkshire, Carmarthen and Middlesex, totalling 30,849 acres worth £58,098.¹²⁹ Phillips also examined the Montagu estate at Boughton, which he calculated to be 11,423 acres in 1834, increasing to 12,110 acres in 1896.¹³⁰ Estates outside the county were sometimes significant and, as shall be shown, did influence management decisions because they added considerably to estate incomes.

¹²⁵ Clay, ‘Landlords and Estate Management’, pp.163-4.

¹²⁶ NRO L(C)1501.

¹²⁷ NRO FH1549.

¹²⁸ A.D.M. Phillips, *The Underdraining of Farmland in England During the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1989), p.103.

¹²⁹ O’Brien, *Correspondence of Lord Overstone*, p.727; University of London MS804/2298.

¹³⁰ Phillips, *Underdraining*, p.101.

Introduction to the Families of this Study

The families that owned the estates as well as the staff they employed provide an essential element in our understanding of estate management and the rural economy. Landlords seldom managed their estates directly in this period but often had significant knowledge of landed estate management and sought to preserve the long-term profitability of the land.

Barbara English observed that in East Yorkshire in the second half of the nineteenth century most landowners had significant knowledge of their estates and were often keen improvers with a great interest in agriculture.¹³¹ In Northamptonshire there is significant evidence of landlords being involved in managing their estates throughout the period at least insofar as auditing accounts and reprimanding stewards, and many even went further and discussed their estates with stewards and friends. In his survey of the county in 1809, William Pitt assumed landlords had the best knowledge of their estates. In fact he only obtained information from estate stewards when they would not forward his enquiries to absentee landlords.¹³² Therefore, in the nineteenth century landowners were expected to be knowledgeable about their estates, despite absenteeism and despite the fact they employed men to manage their estates for them, and in Northamptonshire evidence shows that landlords lived up to this expectation throughout the eighteenth as well as the nineteenth century.

Montagu (Boughton)

The Montagu estate was centred on Boughton and included lands in the majority of the parishes surrounding it. The family also held lands in other counties, including significant lands in Nottinghamshire and Scotland.

The pedigree of the Montagu family changed over time. Habakkuk observed that in 1640 the Montagu family were considered a part of Northamptonshire's squirearchy but a hundred years later had been socially elevated to the ranks of the aristocracy and had moved from the social status of families such as the Drydens and the Ishams to that of the Fitzwilliams, one of the grandest, richest families of the county.¹³³ The family held the titles of Dukes of Buccleuch and Queensbury, making them aristocratic by title as well as in the same social circles as the lords Fitzwilliam and other major landholders.

¹³¹ B. English, 'Patterns of Estate Management in East Yorkshire c1840 – c1880', *AgHR* 32 (1984), p.41.

¹³² Pitt, *A General View of Agriculture*, pp.x-xi.

¹³³ Habakkuk, 'English Landownership', pp.3-4.

Furthermore, it should be mentioned here that the Montagu estate was for a time held by a dowager (whose accounts cover 1801-1821 in the sample). This is the only estate of this study for which there are records covering a woman's management of the estate, or at least a significant part thereof. However, she did not act significantly differently to her male counterparts in the majority of matters and maintained the estate management team of her predecessor. Her second husband, Henry Scott, Duke of Buccleuch was accredited by Donaldson with being an improving landlord, having employed the use of marl as a fertilizer across the estates and therefore appears to have undertaken at least some of the duties in managing his dowager wife's estates.¹³⁴

Loyd (Overston)

The Overstone archive provides the most significant collection of social data in the study, predominantly in the form of correspondence from both Lewis Loyd's and Samuel Jones Loyd's ownership. The Loyd family did not buy into Northamptonshire until the early nineteenth century and before their purchase Overston changed hands several times.¹³⁵ But the stability provided by the Loyd ownership makes Overston a useful estate to our study. The Loyd estates were not limited to Northamptonshire and also included lands in Berkshire (centred on Wantage).¹³⁶ Added to this, some accounts for the estate are available, covering the post-French wars recession, enabling a comparison with the Montagu estate accounts and, of course, adding a social dimension to the account data.

The Loyd family made their money in banking and invested it in the land. Lewis Loyd retired in 1844 to make the full transition to landlord.¹³⁷ Samuel Jones Loyd was born in 1796, followed his father into the banking profession before being elevated to the peerage as Lord Overstone in 1850. He died in 1882.¹³⁸ Samuel did not inherit the Overston estate until 1860 but corresponded with his father and discussed the estate and general state of agriculture with friends and acquaintances before his formal inheritance and even managed the estate in his father's absence or illness. In 1834, for example, Lewis Loyd was often absent from his estate

¹³⁴ Donaldson, *A General View of Agriculture*, pp.21-2.

¹³⁵ G. Baker, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Northampton* vol.1 (London, 1822-30), pp.57-8.

¹³⁶ University of London MS804/2298; *Overstone Correspondence*, p.1065

¹³⁷ University of London MS804/1632.

¹³⁸ University of London MS804/2174, MS804/1000/2.

and he and Samuel exchanged letters, including Lewis sending instructions to be passed on to the steward. Samuel Jones Loyd himself, in his later years, made over his Berkshire estates to his son-in-law Col. Loyd Lindsey (although no mention is made of his making over the Northamptonshire estates in the same way anywhere within the archive).¹³⁹

Langham (Cottesbrooke)

The Langham estate was of significant size within, but did not extend outside of, Northamptonshire. The family seat was at Cottesbrooke but from the extant correspondence (1799-1832) it appears that both Sir William and his successor Sir James Langham spent the majority of their time at the family's London residence. Added to this, the estate was managed by the London firm *Kent, Claridge and Pearce*. However, despite both landowner and estate manager being based predominantly in London, both parties took a great interest in ensuring the profitability and smooth running of the estate. James Langham even calculated all rents, increases and abatements personally, showing him to be one of the more involved landlords of this study. Whilst there is limited evidence from the estate, landlord-steward correspondence primarily discusses arrears and abatements, including some figures and calculations, reinforcing the evidence from the Montagu and Overstone estates as well as adding the perspective of a middling estate.

Sources

The sources employed for this study are varied but the principal sources used are rental accounts and landlord correspondence which provide not only financial but also social data for this period.

The Montagu archive contains extensive accounts data and family correspondence. The correspondence does not concern itself with the estate but the accounts provide an invaluable source for the study of rent levels of this period and can be compared to Turner, Beckett and Afton's rent index (see chapters four and five). A sample of every ten years has been used, covering the period 1800-1881. Further to this, the Overstone estate provides comprehensive accounts for the years 1828-1831. As a result the years 1815-1831 have been used as a central focus, looking at the Montagu and Overstone data covering the French Wars and the recession which followed. Whilst the Montagu accounts cover a longer period and are more comprehensive, the Overstone estate provides significant correspondence data for the majority

¹³⁹ *Overstone Correspondence*, p.1065.

of the nineteenth century, adding a further dimension to the figures alone. However, the accounts themselves were not devoid of qualitative evidence, with landlords looking over account books and various memoranda and comments adorning the books and providing evidence of the reasons for arrears and rent levels as well as the action taken.

In terms of the qualitative data itself, the Overstone and Langham archives all provide correspondence evidence, including letters to and from stewards and estate managers as well as friends and acquaintances. The Overstone correspondence is the most significant collection, including over 2,000 letters of Lord Overstone covering the majority of the period 1830 to 1882 and being heavily concerned with estate management, prices and the state of the land. A significant collection of correspondence also comes from the Langham estate, covering 1800-1832 but with replies to some letters missing. However, this archive is entirely estate correspondence between the Langhams and their estate steward William Pearce and his sub-stewards, providing data on changes in rent levels, estate views on tenants and the behaviour of estate stewards.

Thus, even though archives are varied and some are limited, together they provide data on a number of aspects of estate management and social and economic views contained therein. Even the smaller archives such as that of the Langhams provide invaluable data comparable with other estates as well as data unique to the estate to which they pertained. Overall, in the context of the wider economy and extant studies, one can go some way to identifying patterns of estate management and the economic circumstances leading to various management decisions.

The Role of Landlords in Managing their Estates

C.G.A. Clay argued that what has been viewed as paternalism on the part of landlords by many historians was often simply neglect. He suggested that increasing landlord absenteeism was accompanied by increasing neglect and disinterest in their estates and the employment of agents who were not necessarily competent or honest.¹⁴⁰ However, evidence elsewhere points to - and this study will show - landlord absenteeism being coupled with a great interest in estates and the work of stewards. Particularly where a landlord relied on his estate for a large proportion of his income, he would take a great interest in his estates if not an active role in managing them. Indeed, Martin Daunton noticed that even by the 1870s, as prices for agricultural produce fell dramatically, landlords were still intent on having good tenants on

¹⁴⁰ Clay, C.G.A., 'Landlords', p.242.

their lands and even maintaining their reputations as paternal landlords.¹⁴¹ Thus landlords took an interest in managing their estates both for profit and social reputation. However, what we are primarily concerned with here are the economic motives for their actions and options available to certain landlords in particular economic circumstances.

As well as neglect, a significant charge made against landowners has been that they charged the maximum rents they could, to the detriment and immiseration of their tenants.¹⁴² This has been suggested both as a way of maximising estate income and a way of driving out smaller, poorer tenants in favour of large capitalist farmers. Peter Edwards identified evidence of tenants in Rushock, Worcestershire, being driven off the land by landlords dramatically increasing their rents whilst Habakkuk described what was generally considered to be a 'perfect' estate as one where 'income most closely approximates to a rent charge' but where tenants were able to pay their rents in full and maintain their own holdings.¹⁴³

Whilst a great deal of the historiography has been concerned with the effect of changes in the economy on tenants, portraying landlords as wealthy men who didn't need money raising rents as high as possible to the detriment of their impoverished tenants, one has to remember that if rents were unpaid a landlord may well have had to reduce his outgoings to compensate or even have been left unable to pay his own mortgages and debts. As David Howell pointed out, where landlords relied heavily on their landed income and had large mortgages or other debts they could end up in greater financial trouble than their tenants were there a prolonged recession.¹⁴⁴ When one acknowledges that in many cases landlords were as reliant on the land for their incomes as their tenants were, the issue of estate management can be viewed in a very different light. Even though landlords had a far higher income than their tenants they had considerable outgoings and often debts. It must also be noted that landlords did often take a practical role in the running of their estates or at the very least checked on their accounts and any problems with tenants.

Where new tenants were coming into the land, whether they were relatives of the old tenants or new to the land, estate managers and landlords took a great interest in establishing that the

¹⁴¹ M. Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare: An Economic and Social History of Britain 1851-1951* (Oxford, 2007), p.50.

¹⁴² See, for example, Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman*, p.237.

¹⁴³ P. Edwards, 'The Decline of the Small Farmer: The Case of Rushock, Worcestershire', *Midland History* 21 (1996), pp.80-5; Habakkuk, 'English Landownership', p.14.

¹⁴⁴ D.W. Howell, *Land and People in Nineteenth-Century Wales* (London, 1977), p.57.

tenant would be a good tenant before lands were let. For example, Mingay discovered that in the early-eighteenth century, on Sir Jacob Bouverie's estate in Kent, Sir Jacob would need a reference from the tenant's old landlord as well as the recommendation of his own stewards.¹⁴⁵ Even persons already resident on the estate would be assessed when their circumstances changed. In 1822, for example, Pearce wrote to James Langham for his decisions as to whether Mrs Hales (who had been widowed and whose relatives had paid her rent as she could not) should be allowed to remain on her farm or if her son (whom it was noted would be heavily financially supported by his in-laws) should be granted the lands.¹⁴⁶

Where rents were not paid landlords did not automatically evict tenants and stewards often discussed accounts with landlords before any action was taken. There is not only considerable evidence of stewards negotiating payments with tenants to recoup a part or the entirety of the tenant's arrears but they could also seize tenants' goods to sell to recoup their losses.¹⁴⁷ Daunton suggested that the power of 'distress' was a common law power on which landlords relied when tenants fell into debt. However, this power was limited in the nineteenth century, primarily by judges being sympathetic to the indebted tenants and not granting notices of distraint. But the nineteenth century also brought the right of landlords to summarily evict tenants who were in arrears. Under the 1838 Small Tenants Recovery Act tenants with annual rents under £20 could be evicted following one week's notice followed by a 21-day warrant for ejection being served upon them. However, having to collect and sell a tenant's goods or evict him (leaving him with 21 days rent-free in the property too) was not the ideal situation for landlords to recoup monies owed.¹⁴⁸ Thus records generally show arrears being tolerated or other arrangements being made to recoup estate losses. The collection of rents, state of arrears and landlord and estate actions where tenants became heavily indebted are central aspects of estate management and crucial parts of this thesis and will be discussed in detail throughout, with arrears being the subject of chapter 5.

Thus landlords did take an active role in managing their estates. They played a part in directing their stewards and checking their actions and made decisions regarding tenants and rent levels.

¹⁴⁵ G.E. Mingay, 'Estate Management in Eighteenth-Century Kent', *AgHR* 4:2 (1956) p.110.

¹⁴⁶ NRO L(C)1107.

¹⁴⁷ The Montagu accounts note a number of tenants having good distrained or agreeing to pay a proportion of their arrears across this period. In 1831, for example, Joseph Newman is noted as having his good seized whilst in 1871 Thomas Everitt agreed a compromise of 10s in the £ payment of his arrear. NRO, Montagu Estate Accounts, Nos. 379, 421.

¹⁴⁸ Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare*, p.427.

The role and personality of individual landlords was central to the way an estate was managed and many had far greater awareness of how their estates were run than historians often accredited them with.

Stewards

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brought with them an increased use of stewards to manage estates and make some of the decisions regarding rent levels, tenants and even land purchases. After the landowner the steward was often the most important person on the estate. English ascertained that the men employed to manage the land were referred to by a number of titles including land agents, land stewards, estate agents (although these were usually the sellers of land) and bailiffs (though these were generally of inferior status) and there was no definitive title.¹⁴⁹ Here, for simplicity, these men are referred to as stewards throughout.

Peter Mandler noted that one way landlords improved their estate management was to increase the professionalization of their stewards in order to improve their estates and make greater profits.¹⁵⁰ Indeed the role of stewards in estate management was as essential as that of the landlords. Stewards would usually have a technical knowledge of farming as well as management strategies and acted as an interface between landlords and tenants. Their duties were varied and often included rent collection and other estate management tasks as well as advising landowners to whom they should let lands, how best to approach arrears and sometimes even what level they should set rents at. Alongside this they often had a role in the day-to-day running of the estate and advised tenants and landlords on farming techniques and suggested improvements and changes to be made.

It is generally believed that the role of stewards became increasingly professionalized in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries although there is debate regarding when this occurred and some historians have even questioned whether it happened at all. T.J. Raybould identified 'an increase in the scale and complexity of estate economic enterprise' which led landowners to seek men more capable of handling these complexities in the second half of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century.¹⁵¹ Indeed, James Hutton cited an example in his *Elements of Agriculture* (1797) of a ploughman he had hoped to train as steward who 'proved

¹⁴⁹ English, 'Patterns of Estate Management', p.29.

¹⁵⁰ P. Mandler, 'The Making of the New Poor Law Redivivus: Reply', *Past and Present* 127 (1990), p.194.

¹⁵¹ T.J.R. Raybould, 'Systems of Management and Administration on the Dudley Estates 1744-1833', *Business History* 10 (1968), p.1.

unequal to the task'.¹⁵² This may have been simply a poor choice in the man he was training but may equally have been that a ploughman no longer had the education necessary to undertake the increasingly complex role of steward.

Webster discussed the considerable variation in when historians believe the professionalization of stewards occurred. Whilst Mingay argued that estate administration was improved due to increasingly professional stewards in the eighteenth century, Beckett and F.M.L. Thompson suggested this professionalization did not take place until the nineteenth century.¹⁵³ Falling between these two dates is Steane's argument. Steane noted that Arthur Young, James Donaldson and a number of other agricultural writers of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries judged that stewards were becoming more professionalized as landlords developed 'enlightened self interest'.¹⁵⁴ The argument stands that as landlords became more interested in efficiency and profits they sought more efficient and capable stewards to undertake a more complex role and, as a result, stewards became more professionalized.

What is certain is that steward numbers rose in this period. P. Roebuck stated that as absentee landlord numbers increased in the early-eighteenth century demand for full-time stewards rose, having previously been limited only to the largest estates. As numbers rose, he claimed, the role of stewards became increasingly professionalized and stewards' capabilities rose by the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁵⁵ However, in her study of nineteenth-century East Yorkshire English calculated that stewards did increase in number (although by less than 1 percent in the East Riding between 1840 and 1880) but they were no more professionally qualified in 1880 than they had been forty years previously.¹⁵⁶

Whether or not they became more professionalized in the course of the nineteenth century there were different types or levels of stewards which can be identified across the period. In Northamptonshire one finds three types of stewards – those resident on the estates who collected rents, supervised work and met with tenants; a higher stratum who essentially

¹⁵² Jones, 'James Hutton's Agricultural Research', p.596.

¹⁵³ S. Webster, 'Estate Improvement and the Professionalization of Land Agents on the Egremont Estates in Sussex and Yorkshire, 1770-1835', *Rural History* 18:1 (2007), p.49.

¹⁵⁴ Steane, *Northamptonshire Landscape*, p.223.

¹⁵⁵ P. Roebuck, 'Absentee Landownership in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries: A Neglected Factor in English Agrarian History', *AgHR* 21 (1973) pp.15-16.

¹⁵⁶ English, 'Patterns of Estate Management', p.30.

managed the first group, compiled the annual accounts and managed the estate finances but were not necessarily resident on the estate; and a smaller but significant group who undertook the duties of both the other groups being resident on the estate, personally chasing and collecting rents and supervising work but also managing other stewards and the estate finances. The Langham estate in the 1820s and 1830s, for example, employed William Pearce who managed the estate from his London office whilst William Dean, William Fellows and others undertook the majority of the work on the estate itself. Lord Overstone's steward Beasley, in the second half of the nineteenth century, on the other hand, undertook the same duties as Pearce in the early-eighteenth century but also the work on the estate (Overstone even implies Beasley undertook some of the manual work himself) and he also managed other stewards on the estate.

English noted that even by the second half of the nineteenth century some Yorkshire landlords would run their estates personally, employing only low level bailiffs to aid them. At the other end of the spectrum she identified professional land management companies which had appeared by the 1840s, usually firms of surveyors or occasionally solicitors. One of the witnesses questioned for the 1881 report of the *Royal Commission on Depressed Condition of Agricultural Interests*, John Coleman from Derbyshire, commented that landlords let their estate be managed by lawyers out of necessity and many of these firms did not manage estates well although he believed non-resident estate managers *could* manage estates well so long as they had knowledge of practical farming.¹⁵⁷ Thus management firms and professional stewards were becoming commonplace by the 1880s but knowledge of farming was still viewed as necessary in estate management.

The majority of stewards appear to have been conscientious and efficient in their role. Webster concluded that stewards played an important role in improving the estate by implementing efficient management and aiding the dissemination of agricultural and 'moral' knowledge to the tenants. However, as a result of their role in collecting monies and chasing arrears stewards were often unpopular with the tenants of the estate.¹⁵⁸

Thus stewards undertook similar duties at varying levels and were often responsible for managing the estate, although their work was closely overseen by the landowner. The role of an individual steward and how much control he had over an estate varied and, in itself, had an

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.38-9.

¹⁵⁸ Webster, 'Estate Improvement', pp.48, 54.

effect on estate management, particularly where a steward advised his landlord on matters of rents, abatements or allowing tenants to fall into arrears.

Stewards of this Study

The evidence of stewards in this study, their roles and their work often arises from their own correspondence and accounts. Additionally, there are instances of landlords discussing their role with the stewards themselves or external persons and higher level stewards discussing those under their management. Pearce and Beasley communicated directly with their landlords by frequent letters but there is less evidence of other stewards. Those on the Montagu estate are evident only from their accounts, although these often included justification of their actions.

Lord Overstone's steward Beasley has few letters to Overstone extant and most of the knowledge gleaned about him comes from Overstone's references to him in letters to others. His role involved advising, accounting and having a detailed knowledge of the estate. Beasley also appears to have had a hands-on role and significant knowledge of practical farming. Beasley advised others on animal feed mixes for the winter, advised on the treatment of crops after frost and seemingly managed the demesne farm personally as well as managing the estate rentals.¹⁵⁹ Yet at the same time Beasley appears to have been highly respected and trusted, with Overstone undertaking some of the financial work and checking accounts when present on the estate but not seeing fit to complain about or to his steward in his correspondence.

The Montagu stewards are the least represented of those in the sample, evident only in the accounts they made up. However, the role of the stewards in collecting rents and chasing arrears can be seen in their comments in the account margins and the Lords Montagu enquiring why arrears are outstanding. The accounts were checked and the actions of the stewards checked but how closely they were managed and whether they managed sub-agents is not clear. However, they were probably also knowledgeable about the estate and farming too. In 1794 the steward of the Montagu estate, Mr Edmonds, was acknowledged as providing information to help with the agricultural survey of Northamptonshire, in particular the types of woodland and management of such in the county.¹⁶⁰

William Pearce, who managed the Langham estate, was nephew of Nathaniel Kent and from the 1790s a part of his company *Kent, Claridge and Pearce* who managed several estates

¹⁵⁹ *Overstone Correspondence*, pp.411, 605.

¹⁶⁰ Donaldson, *General View of Agriculture*, p.37.

simultaneously, undertaking what Webster described as 'a systematic and commercial approach to estate management'.¹⁶¹ He also managed several stewards on the estate who are represented predominantly by his and James Langham's correspondence. One of these - William Fellows - was discussed at length including his cutting the trees on the estate (which Pearce complained looked like brooms), monies left with him to arrange management on the estate itself and his eventual fraud hearing.¹⁶² Following Fellows leaving there are mentions of William Dean being brought in and Pearce enquired if Langham was happy with his work. Dean appears to have been a more educated man than Fellows and wrote to Langham personally about matters of the estate on a number of occasions but his duties appear to have been the same as his predecessor's.¹⁶³

Thus landlords required trust in their stewards. They generally employed men they deemed capable and trustworthy but also had a hierarchy of stewards and gained information from tenants were there any problems as well as making their own checks. The levels of checks, trust in and respect for stewards did differ though. Whilst Pearce was a professional and discussed issues with Langham, managing sub-agents on the estate, William Dean, Beasley and Mr Edmonds were all resident on the estate, had a good knowledge of farming and how to manage the land itself and were also responsible for collecting monies and managing the estate on a day-to-day basis.

Webster argued that often neither stewards nor landlords had a detailed knowledge of estate finances and that this could result in incompetence or dishonesty, with little ability to distinguish between them. Indeed there was a widely held belief that stewards cheated their landlords.¹⁶⁴ Yet in Northamptonshire landlords appear to have taken a great interest in their estates and finances, calculating their own abatements and rent levels, checking their accounts and questioning the actions of their stewards where things did not add up. Indeed the only case of fraud within the sample occurred under Pearce's watch, where the estate was managed from a distance. In this case Fellows, resident steward, was reported by the tenants for irregular accounting in 1818, showing limits to both Pearce and Langham's knowledge of the estate finances. However, this irregular accounting (in which payment of meat bills for Fellow's

¹⁶¹ Webster, 'Estate Improvement', p.60; Horn, P., 'An Eighteenth-Century Land Agent: The Career of Nathaniel Kent (1737-1810)', pp.3,15.

¹⁶² NRO L(C)1091, L(C)1174.

¹⁶³ His letters to Langham discussing estate management and his and Pearce's roles begin in 1825 (following a gap in the archive). NRO L(C)1175.

¹⁶⁴ Webster, 'Estate Improvement', p.53; English, 'Patterns of Estate Management', p.47.

brother's butchers was taken from the rent monies) appears to have been done in such a way that the accounts did not show the irregularities although a resident manager may have spotted the problem sooner.¹⁶⁵

Thus stewards were a vital part of estate management in this period, although their level of power and importance varied as did their duties and all were subject to management and overseen by landowners. With regards to the debate on the professionalization of stewards in this period, highly trained men such as William Pearce did come into the county and undertook management of several estates from offices in London. However, the majority of landlords appear to have undertaken the role of estate manager themselves, employing men who undertook day-to-day management of estates and even gave advice but whose role did not include making important decisions. This group includes Lord Overstone who managed his father's estates as a young man and managed Beasley in the mid- to late-nineteenth century as Pearce did Fellows and Dean at the beginning of the century. Thus in some respects stewards did become more professionalized as a group but were employed with different levels of power and responsibility dependent on the amount of control a landlord wanted over his estates.

Methods of Estate Management

How an estate was managed was dependent upon a number of factors but primarily landlords were interested in long-term not short-term gain and sought to use their resources to this effect. The size of an estate was an important factor in determining how the estate was managed, as was whether or not the estate income was the only income of its owners. Where an estate was extensive and/or the landowner had a significant external income more choice was available, whether it be to support the tenants and prop up the landed income with money from other sources, the ability to survive on a lower income when rents were depressed or unpaid or even to leave lands empty rather than compromise on rent levels in order to fill holdings or maintain rent levels in times of depressed prices, risking tenants quitting the land or becoming bankrupts.

Smaller estates, particularly where there was no external income to fall back on, were more reliant on their rental income and needed to keep holdings tenanted in order to maintain the best income they could from their estates. The state of the wider economy also had an effect on estate management decisions, with landlords and stewards making decisions depending on prices, productivity and demand for land. For example, Habakkuk claimed that during the

¹⁶⁵NRO L(C)1174.

French Wars (1792-1815) smaller gentry landlords were more likely to raise their rents as high as possible as prices rose and that 'their best tenants' would, as a result, tend to move onto the lands of larger landlords where rents were not so high.¹⁶⁶ However, landlords so reliant on their tenantry would be unlikely to allow many of their best tenants to leave unless they knew suitable replacements could be found as this would cause them problems in the longer term and if they raised their rents high enough for tenants to quit the land it is doubtful replacements would be available.

Overall responsibility and command of estate management ultimately lay with the landowner. A landlord would be influenced in his decisions by the economic and social situation and the impact this had on his estates, plus the advice of estate stewards who were perhaps more familiar with the estate and tenants. However, despite the influence of these external factors, the personality of an individual landlord would still affect how he reacted to changes in economic circumstances.¹⁶⁷ For example, on the Montagu estate in 1831 Lord Walter Montagu did not help tenants in arrears, resulting in several bankruptcies. In 1821, however, his predecessor had written off tenant arrears in order to avoid such an occurrence.¹⁶⁸

Tenants were often the key to landed profit, preferred over the estate taking on large farms itself. Tenants would provide a more consistent income than running the estate as a farm, maintain their own holdings and required less work to manage. Therefore landlord-tenant relations, choice of tenants, maintaining tenants on the land and landlords' views of tenants were vital factors which would be considered in making estate management decisions. E.P. Thompson linked landlord-tenant relations to Rostow's 'Social Tension Chart' which linked high unemployment and food prices directly to social disturbance or, as Thompson summed it up, 'people protest when they are hungry'.¹⁶⁹ Yet tenants usually had more options than the unemployed when prices were high – negotiating lower rent levels, falling into arrears or quitting the land. Requests for abatements, high arrears and notices to quit were therefore a signal to landlords that rents were too high in the same way that social disturbance was an indication that prices were too high or wages too low.

¹⁶⁶ Habakkuk, 'English Landownership', p.12.

¹⁶⁷ Clay, 'Landlords', pp.241-2.

¹⁶⁸ NRO Montagu Estate Accounts Nos. 378, 388.

¹⁶⁹ E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common*, (London, 1991), pp.186-7.

However, quitting the land, the main source of income to a tenant, was usually the last resort and many tenants would tolerate high rents and low prices for as long as they could. Even though abatements could be granted if prices were low and tenants complained *en masse*, chapter 5 will show that many tolerated this struggle without complaint for a time and even where requested abatements were not granted only a small proportion of tenants would quit the land. Within this context of tenant demand for land and the setting of rent levels in accordance with prices, landlords did keep a great deal of control of their estates. Leases would often specify not just rent levels, but also the type of farming to take place on the holding and penalties were this deviated from without special agreement.¹⁷⁰ But landlord control was limited. Andrew Appleby observed that it was very rare for tenants to be evicted in any significant number. Tenants would be evicted individually if they defaulted on rents but were not evicted in large numbers as landlords required them for their landed income.¹⁷¹ Turner *et al* also pointed out that landlords re-invested a considerable proportion of their incomes in improving and repairing tenants' holdings as well as often keeping rents low enough so that tenants could invest in their holdings and still enjoy a 'reasonable standard of living'.¹⁷² Thus landlords had a degree of control over tenants but were more limited when the economy was poor, relying on tenants for a large proportion of their incomes and even investing in the land to maintain or attract tenants.

The choice of tenants was also an important factor in landed estate management. Tenants were chosen based on their perceived ability to pay but also their perceived ability to work the land, keep the holding profitable and pay the rent in full and on time. There was some compassion for tenants already on the land who could no longer afford to pay, often in a hope of recovery and payment of debts in the long term. Habakkuk suggested another reason tenants could be unreliable to landlords. On the Montagu estate in 1660, he found, the majority of the land was held by small freeholders who neglected it in favour of the land they owned, although by 1730 strips had been consolidated and larger tenants moved in.¹⁷³ Thus tenants were chosen based on who was most likely to run a holding successfully and who would negotiate a lease most favourable to the landlord. Yet the relative negotiating powers of landlord and tenant changed with the economy. Where the economy was strong a landlord could usually find a tenant but

¹⁷⁰ M.E. Turner, J.V. Beckett, B. Afton, *Agricultural Rent in England, 1690-1914* (Cambridge, 1997), p.15

¹⁷¹ A.B. Appleby, 'Agrarian Capitalism or Seigneurial Reaction? The Northwest of England, 1500-1700', *The American History Review* 80:3 (1975), pp.582-3.

¹⁷² Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, pp.21-2.

¹⁷³ Habakkuk, 'English Landownership', p.15.

where recession hit tenants would be more difficult to come by and thus could negotiate lower rents which did, as Turner *et al* commented, affect the class relationships of the two groups, especially where the landlords had negligible power in setting the rents.¹⁷⁴

What has been identified by a number of historians and is often assumed to be the principal focus and function of large landowners is maximizing their profits from the land and, by association, their tenants. To maximise profits in the sense the term is applied here involved increasing rents whenever prices increased and a reluctance to abate rents. In this way profits could be maximised in the short term although tenants may be lost in the medium to long term. Appleby noted that rent increases occurred not only as agriculture improved but also where demand for land increased and thus where landlords could make greater profit from their tenants.¹⁷⁵ That these increased profits should go to the landowner was a belief widely held in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1797, for example, after his reorganization of the Windsor estate, Nathaniel Kent was surprised that farms were not making profits for their landlords. He felt that this was not because farmers were making undue profits on their lands or that rents were set too high or low but simply that those collecting the rents did not feel the same responsibility to ensure they gained the maximum amount possible as farmers did in profiting from their farms.¹⁷⁶ Thus profit maximization was considered to be the economic ideal of how an estate should be managed in this period, even though only a proportion of landlords adhered to it and even then in the worst circumstances abatements would still be granted.

Against this background of maximizing profits, an estate also needed to ensure tenants did not leave the land. Where large numbers of tenants left the land an estate would be left with lands in hand which not only brought no rental income in but also required some investment to keep the lands in workable condition and maintain the farm buildings and homestead as well as the costs in finding a new tenant. However, balancing the estate profit and setting of rent levels with the necessity to keep tenants on the land was, in itself, dependent on the size of an estate, income of the landlord and whether another tenant could be found willing to pay the rent asked in the prevailing agricultural economy.

Turner *et al* commented that 'at different times and in different places landlords had negligible powers.'¹⁷⁷ In other words, there were times a landlord could be forced into a position whereby

¹⁷⁴ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*., p.10.

¹⁷⁵ Appleby, 'Agrarian Capitalism'. P.592.

¹⁷⁶ Horn, "An Eighteenth-Century Land Agent", p.14.

¹⁷⁷ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.10.

he had to maintain tenants on his lands (even at dramatically reduced levels of rent) as he could not afford to lose income on holdings entirely, nor the cost of improving a holding in order to re-let it or avoid lands going to ruin if there was no tenant to farm them. Thus in some situations it was expedient for a landlord to grant abatements or improve lands in order to maintain his lands in the short term and increase the estate profits in the longer term. This was not necessarily a case of landlords having negligible powers but often those undertaking this method of management did not feel they had another choice.

The need to maintain tenants can be identified by the obvious profit motives of landlords in granting abatements and negotiating rents. For example, where it was deemed that a new tenant could be found who would pay a higher rent than the current tenant was willing to no abatement would be granted. If the tenant chose to quit the land rather than pay this higher level of rent he would not be stopped. In the 1820s-1830s, for example, James Langham can be seen abating rents through fear of losing his existing tenantry and being unable to replace them. However, he did not consent to all reductions, aware of the importance of profiting from his lands.

Elsewhere, in a memorandum on his wealth c.1870 Overstone wrote of how he had invested in his estate in order to improve the conditions of those living and working upon it:

In the management of my Landed Property I have spared no expenditure for the purpose of bringing it into the best possible condition – into the state best calculated to augment the produce of the soil, and to improve the condition both of Tenants and Labourers, under the Judicious guidance of Mr Beasley. This I have done in respect of Farm Houses, Farm yards, Cottages, School Buildings &c.¹⁷⁸

Yet, whilst Loyd implied his actions were purely for the benefit of his tenants he also had limits on how well to treat his tenants or, more specifically, on when to abate rents. In 1879, when faced with a terrible recession, Overstone commented on the Duke of Bedford's actions in writing-off his lady day rents, condemning them as a 'rash and indiscriminate' gesture and although he advocated landlords sacrificing some luxuries in order to survive he did state that 'I intend to get what rent I can'.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ *Overstone Correspondence*, p.1276.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.1322.

Added to this he still calculated the value of purchasing land in terms of profit. He wrote to his life-long friend G.W. Norman in 1874 demonstrating a clear idea of the place of the labourer in particular and the necessity of profiting from land:

We know nothing here of the difficulties into which you have fallen, farm thrown into your hands, and labourers intoxicated by high wages. This must be disagreeable and troublesome – but I should feel some confidence that under a short course of temperate and judicious treatment the disease will abate, and you will find your Farm restored to a state of productive healthiness.¹⁸⁰

Here one can only take ‘productive healthiness’ to mean profit.

Therefore, a balance had to be struck between estate profits and a landlord receiving what he deemed to be his fair share of the estate income and aiding tenants to avoid bankruptcies, quittals and lands falling into hand. The idea of retaining tenants on the land was two-fold – firstly, rents could be increased once prices improved and therefore a fully tenanted estate may lose money in the short term in exchange for longer-term gains; secondly, keeping tenants on the land spared the estate the expense of maintaining the land and finding a new tenant. The balance between profits and keeping lands tenanted was a difficult one dependent not only on the size of the estate and income of a landlord but being principally dictated by agricultural prices and demand for land. The place of tenant retention and estate profits in the rental economy will be examined in detail throughout the remainder of this thesis as both were central factors in the setting of rents and the management of arrears and abatements throughout the nineteenth century.

Long-Term Profitability of Land

As landowners sought to maintain their family’s fortune in the long term, one needs to look at why land was chosen as an investment and how profitability was maintained. Investment in the land was believed to be a stable, long-term investment from the early eighteenth century through to the late-nineteenth.¹⁸¹ In 1856, for example, Lord Overstone commented:

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p.1269.

¹⁸¹ Roebuck, ‘Absentee Landownership’, p.16.

Land is the best form of permanent investment. I entertain little doubt on that point. But beyond that I think all is uncertain speculation.¹⁸²

As early as 1814, however, Overstone reported to his father what a friend (Mr. Douglas) had told him about France, including comments on the use of the land:

The Land itself is good, and in the best possible tillage, and no waste lands to be seen, and all that the land produces is consequently abundant and cheap there. In this respect the contrast between it and our own country is great, and much to our disadvantage.¹⁸³

Therefore the relative efficiency of foreign agriculture was something which landlords were aware of and sought to emulate on their own estates in the nineteenth century, to improve profits and maintain the competitiveness of English agriculture and profitability of land. Maintaining the long-term profitability of the land was an aspect of estate management which was shared by all estates and changes to rent levels, the granting of abatements or allowing of arrears plus decisions to improve the land, were often made with long-term profits in mind.

Where the economy was growing and prices were high, estates could turn over extensive amounts of money and provide a high income for the landowner. Improving the land by means of enclosure, artificial fertilizers, crop rotations or any other means was usually intended to keep the land profitable in the long term and not simply for short-term gain. Investment in land could also be a significant cost, especially where money was invested when prices were high but prices fell before costs were recouped. Habakkuk found that landlords often spent a great deal of money improving newly purchased lands, often as a result of the tenants' situation and not because this had been their intention upon buying the land and Phillips found that between 1845 and 1849 the Montagus' Boughton estate invested an average of £1.52 per acre in drainage and the Oveston estate an average of £0.98.¹⁸⁴ Added to this was the possibility of mortgages taken out being an increasing burden when prices were low and interest was still accruing. But overall estates were managed in such a way that they survived recessions and profited from high prices. Indeed, until the agricultural market crashed in the 1870s and 1880s, properly managed landed estates were a highly profitable long-term investment and possibly even, as

¹⁸² *Overstone Correspondence*, p.694.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.148.

¹⁸⁴ Habakkuk, 'English Landownership', p.14; Phillips, *Underdraining*, p.107.

Lord Overstone suggested, 'the best form of permanent investment', profitable to both landlords and their tenants.

Conclusion

Landed estates were defined by a number of factors and managed in a number of ways. The choice of estate management depended upon not only the size of individual estates but also the reliance of the landlord on his landed income, the other incomes available to him, his personality and, of course, the wider economy at the time. As the agricultural economy changed so did estate management but in the main decisions were intended to both maximise profits whilst retaining tenants. All were focussed on maintaining the long-term survival of the estate but differed in how far they sought to aid and protect their tenants from negative economic conditions. What is most important here is the fact that landlords did not take decisions in isolation. Those concentrating on the negative effects of estate policies often forget the reliance of landowners on their estate income and the levels of debt they may well have been encumbered with and few acknowledge the role of landlords in preserving the long-term profitability of the estate as a factor affecting their short-term decisions.

Many landowners employed stewards to manage their estates by this period but the majority still took an interest in their estates. They sought not only to ensure they were profiting from the land at what they considered a reasonable rate but also that the long-term profitability of the land was being maintained and quite often that their tenants were not facing bankruptcy and were able farmers, profiting from the land themselves. Estate management decisions were thus, in the main, responses to particular economic situations and aimed at maintaining a balance between short-term profit and the long-term survival of the estate.

The remainder of this study will examine the decisions of landlords in managing their estates in terms of both rent levels and improvements throughout the nineteenth century. These will be examined in the context of the options available to landlords at any one time within the prevailing agricultural economy. Chapter 3 will examine improvements to and investment in the land before chapters 4 and 5 look at the setting and payment of rents in detail.

Chapter 3: Improvements and Investment in Farming

Introduction

As shown in chapters 1 and 2, England underwent a transition in both rural society and the agricultural economy in the course of the nineteenth century, caused in part by increasing demand for produce and a number of improvements in farming. So much so, in fact, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* of 1797 claimed “Britain exceeds all modern nations in husbandry”.¹⁸⁵ Northamptonshire in particular was subject to significant changes in agriculture in this period - farm sizes were increasing, drainage was improved, artificial fertilizers and crop rotations became widely adopted, land use was changed and around 25% of the Northamptonshire landscape was enclosed between 1700 and 1870.¹⁸⁶

Throughout the nineteenth century landlords and their stewards took considerable efforts in re-organizing their estates, implementing improvements and increasing the efficiency of the land. In 1820s Kent, for example, Hunt found that Lord Darnley’s steward re-organized the land in terms of splitting some farms to make smaller holdings, increasing the size of others and taking some land out of cultivation for other uses. He also identified considerable amounts of land being bought and sold.¹⁸⁷ This chapter concerns itself with such re-distribution of landholding and farms upon landed estates as well as other types of investment and improvement and the factors such improvement was undertaken in response to, as well as who led the way and covered the costs.

Throughout the nineteenth century one can identify a consensus that to improve the land was to increase the income from an estate. Indeed, writing in 1907, Robert J. Thompson noted that the rent increases in the first twenty years of the nineteenth century were, in part, attributable to the advances in farming (he uses the example of improved breeding programmes) being implemented more widely. After the French Wars, as prices fell, he found that landlords undertook two courses of action – to reduce rents or to invest in the soil. He stated that where

¹⁸⁵ R.C. Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman: The Agricultural Development of the South Midlands 1450-1850* (Oxford, 1992), p.1.

¹⁸⁶ T. Williamson, *The Transformation of Rural England: Farming and the Landscape 1700-1870* (Exeter, 2002), p.35.

¹⁸⁷ H.G. Hunt, ‘Agricultural rent in South-East England, 1788-1825’, *AgHR* 1958, pp.103-4.

lands were improved in such a way rents did not fall.¹⁸⁸ Whilst chapters 4 and 5 will show that estates adopted other methods of rent management than simply reducing rents and investment did not necessarily prevent rents falling in this period, what is important here is the relationship between rents and investment. Whilst Thompson identified investing in the land as a method of maintaining rent levels in a recession, Robert C. Allen noted that investment in the land by the owner was usually recouped by way of increasing rents, transferring any financial benefit from the tenant to the landlord.¹⁸⁹

This chapter will therefore examine the changes taking place in agriculture in this period and how society caused or responded to developments in agriculture across the period. It will examine the relative roles of landowners and tenants in implementing improvements to the land and the economic and social factors driving the decisions. It shall be shown that enclosure was not vital in order to improve the land but did make it easier to implement other improvements. Who took on the financial risks of farming and how landed estates adapted in changing economic conditions will be the central focus of this chapter before chapters 4 and 5 move on to examining the rental system in detail.

Consolidation of Landowning

As noted in chapter 2, landowning was becoming increasingly consolidated across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Larger estates were more resilient against recession and offered their owners more security. They were also more profitable and a landowner could build up substantial wealth and an extensive annual income by increasing and consolidating his holdings. Indeed, Roebuck found that by the early-eighteenth century 'both socially and economically substantial landownership had come to acquire an almost unshakable stability and security'.¹⁹⁰ There are several examples of the Northamptonshire landlords of this study consolidating their holdings in this period, not only purchasing new lands but also selling those disconnected from their main estates.

¹⁸⁸ R.J. Thompson, 'An Inquiry into the Rent of Agricultural Land in England and Wales During the nineteenth century', *Journal of the royal Statistical Society* 70:4 (1907), pp.591-2.

¹⁸⁹ Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman*, p.178.

¹⁹⁰ P. Roebuck, 'Absentee Landownership in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries: A Neglected Factor in English Agrarian History', *AgHR* 21 (1973), p.16.

The trend towards the consolidation of estates ran across England to varying extents from the late-seventeenth century.¹⁹¹ Roebuck commented that Sir Marmaduke Constable expanded his East Riding estate 'whenever possible' in the early-eighteenth century.¹⁹² In Northamptonshire the most significant purchasers of land within the Northamptonshire sample were the Loyd family, with Lewis Loyd buying into the county in the early-nineteenth century and Samuel Jones-Loyd continuing to expand the estate after he inherited it in 1858.¹⁹³ Indeed F.M.L. Thompson noted the example of the Loyd family, finding that Lewis Loyd purchased lands from the Earl of Westmorland amongst others, building up substantial estates by buying smaller estates whole in the first half of the nineteenth century.¹⁹⁴ However, both Lewis Loyd and Samuel Jones-Loyd also sold some of their estates, consolidating holdings whilst still extending their ownership.¹⁹⁵ James Langham was also trying to expand his estate in 1800, when he wrote that he had failed to purchase lands at Gratton.¹⁹⁶ The sale of estates accompanying the buying of others also had advantages – Thompson found that landowners would sometimes sell a part of their estates for the money to invest in their remaining lands or to purchase other land with.¹⁹⁷

Between 1790 and 1873-83, as F.M.L. Thompson observed, great estates became more socially and politically important and this resulted in a concentration of landownership. Even where individual owners changed, estates tended to be sold in their entirety and/or to other great landowners.¹⁹⁸ Indeed, Tom Nicholas argued that businessmen sought to invest in land even beyond the economic downturn of the late-nineteenth century to gain social and political standing.¹⁹⁹ However, only 60-80 of the 550 MPs in the Commons were considered 'country

¹⁹¹ C.G.A. Clay, 'Landlords and Estate Management in England' in Thirsk, Joan (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales: Volume 5 Part 2, 1640-1750* (Cambridge, 1985), pp.163-4.

¹⁹² Roebuck, 'Absentee Landownership', pp.10-11.

¹⁹³ D.P. O'Brien, *The Correspondence of Lord Overstone* (Cambridge, 1971), pp.565, 903.

¹⁹⁴ F.M.L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1963), pp.39-41.

¹⁹⁵ For example, *Overstone Correspondence*, p.927, Overstone wrote about selling lands in the course of purchasing others.

¹⁹⁶ NRO, L(C)1080.

¹⁹⁷ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p.214.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.41-2.

¹⁹⁹ T. Nicholas, 'Businessmen and Landownership in the Late Nineteenth Century Revisited', *Economic History Review* 53:4 (2000), pp.777, 782.

gentlemen' in 1867, indicating that these men bought into land with the intention of influencing local politics or even sitting in the House of Lords in this period.²⁰⁰ Despite land still holding its appeal to some gentry in the 1870s and 1880s the decline in the agrarian economy led to a fall in demand for land by both tenants and purchasers alike, leaving many landowners with lands they could not sell and some unable to pay their mortgages or outgoings.²⁰¹

With regards to increasing farm sizes and improvements in agriculture in particular, the consolidation of estates was a factor in these changes taking place. Where an estate was consolidated rather than spread across a number of counties or even parishes it was easier to manage – soil types and farming types would usually be similar and stewards did not need to travel to collect rents, check on tenants and manage the estate in the way they would were it fragmented. Improvements would also be easier to implement where the topography of the landscape was similar as the same improvements or farming methods could be implemented. Enclosure would also have been easier to implement where a landlord owned the majority of land in few parishes than it would be if he owned a lesser quantity of land across a large number of parishes. Furthermore, consolidation of landowning in itself enabled farm sizes to increase – farmers increasingly wanted consolidated farms and where a landlord could purchase lands surrounding his estate farms could be increased without the displacement of any of his tenants.

Thus land ownership was becoming increasingly consolidated throughout this period. As shown in chapter 2 only a small minority ever owned land in Northamptonshire and a number of these men were increasing their holdings in the county across the nineteenth century whilst selling lands in other counties to consolidate their estates. There were several reasons for consolidating holdings in this way. In increasing their lands in Northamptonshire landlords were generally increasing the size of their estates overall even when, like the Loyd family, they were selling some lands elsewhere; but this was not the primary purpose of consolidating their holdings in the county. Consolidated estates were more convenient, easier for stewards to manage effectively, usually adopted similar farming types and improvements and enabled tenants to increase their farm sizes more easily. As a result there was a long-term trend towards increasing estate size and consolidating land ownership throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, lasting until the agricultural economy collapsed in the 1870s and 1880s and increasing in times when the highest profits could be made.

²⁰⁰ G.E. Mingay, *The Gentry: The Rise and Fall of a Ruling Class* (London 1976), p.74.

²⁰¹ Mingay, *The Gentry*, p.77; F.M.L. Thompson, 'Land and Politics in England in the Nineteenth Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5th series, vol.15 (1965), p.40; Thompson, *English Landed Society*, pp.318-9.

Improvements in Agriculture

The changes which could take place in farming were dependent to some extent on the topography of the land. However, Northamptonshire was predominantly a county of good quality soils, even though they were suited to different purposes. Thus a great deal of investment and improvement took place in the county in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including enclosure and changes in farming types between arable and pasture as well as many other improvements. This included a number of improvements to the quality of the land such as drainage and fertilizer but also the adoption of new machinery.

Sarah Webster noted that 'to improve' a landed estate was regarded as to increase profits or productivity and from the seventeenth century this was considered an important act on the part of landowners.²⁰² However, as Jean Jones pointed out, improving required a degree of understanding of the land and climate in order to optimise the productivity of the land, something which was noted by a number of writers on the subject of agriculture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²⁰³ Thus it was as a result of investment that 'changes in organisation and the development of new techniques' improved agricultural output and profits in this period.²⁰⁴

Improvements to the land, although they took place on a far greater scale in the nineteenth century, had been undertaken before enclosure and often long before the period of this study, becoming common from the seventeenth century. For example, Mingay observed that crop rotations had been used long before the eighteenth century whilst others identified a number of improvements which had begun before this period, including the rebuilding of farm houses.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, Whyte argued that after 1820 the majority of improvements which were implemented in English agriculture were concentrated on pasture lands and sheep farming.²⁰⁶

²⁰² S. Webster, 'Estate Improvement and the Professionalization of Land Agents on the Egremont Estates in Sussex and Yorkshire, 1770-1835', *Rural History* 18 (2007), p.47.

²⁰³ J. Jones, 'James Hutton's Agricultural Research and His Life as a Farmer', *Annals of Science* 42:6 (1985), p.575.

²⁰⁴ M. Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare: An Economic and Social History of Britain 1851-1951* (Oxford, 2007), p.3.

²⁰⁵ G.E. Mingay, *Enclosure and the Small Farmer in the Age of the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1968), p.18; S. Wade-Martins, *Farmers, Landlords and Landscapes: Rural Britain, 1720-1870* (Macclesfield, 2004), p.1; J.D. Chambers, 'Enclosure and Labour Supply in the Industrial Revolution', *Economic History Review* 5:3 (1953), p.342.

²⁰⁶ I. Whyte, "'Wild, Barren and Frightful" – Parliamentary Enclosure in an Upland County: Westmorland 1767-1890', *Rural History* 14 (2003), p.27.

Other improvements to the land which had been carried out prior to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were themselves modernised in this period including the planting of certain root crops on heavy soils even into the nineteenth century to improve drainage and under-drainage becoming more common from the 1830s.²⁰⁷ David R. Stead found that scientific advances enabled further agricultural advances, with animal medicines (“albeit somewhat dubious”) being developed as well as crop pests and fungi being identified, enabling farmers to better preserve their crops and livestock.²⁰⁸

Despite a number of historians examining improvements in the context of the harm they did to tenants and labourers, some have suggested that tenants prospered as a result of their lands being improved. Wordie suggested that enclosure of wastes and increasing farm sizes may well have promoted tenant prosperity, although he also emphasised the possibility that these changes were able to take place because of tenant prosperity, rather than being a cause of it.²⁰⁹ Indeed, the Northamptonshire evidence considered in this study certainly supports this view, demonstrating tenants taking on extra lands in times of general and personal prosperity and improving their lands when they saw the possibility of increasing their profits as a result. Further to this, J.D. Chambers pointed out that living standards of tenant farmers were also improving in this period, with the prosperity of farming being demonstrated by the rebuilding of farm houses on great estates which in itself provided a better standard of living for those living on the estate.²¹⁰

Whilst the improvement of the land took place on both tenants’ holdings and landlords’ demesne farms, the utilization of machinery was the prerogative of only the largest farm holders, including only the largest of tenants and those who owned their own large farms. Machinery, for example, had the advantage that it could save a large farm a significant amount in labour and increase efficiency but many smaller farmers did not employ enough labour to make the costs worthwhile. Lord Overstone wrote in 1862 that he had obtained a steam plough for his demesne farm in Berkshire yet the cost of improvement was still prohibitive to the tenant farmer:

²⁰⁷ Mingay, *Enclosure and the Small Farmer*, p.19; Williamson, *Transformation*, p.113.

²⁰⁸ D.R. Stead, ‘Risk and Risk Management in English Agriculture, c.1750-1850’, *The Economic History Review* 57:2 (2004), p.347.

²⁰⁹ J.R. Wordie, *Estate Management in Eighteenth-Century England: The Building of the Leveson-Gower Fortune* (London, 1982), p.177.

²¹⁰ Chambers, ‘Enclosure and Labour Supply’. p.342.

there is room for further improvement and simplification in the machinery; which must be made before it can become a remunerating investment for an ordinary farmer.²¹¹

Overstone clearly viewed the steam plough as a major improvement to the farming of his estates, still writing about its achievements in 1872 when he commented it was 'preparing for the next harvest, before the present crops are completely gathered into our barns'.²¹² Yet this does demonstrate the limitations of costly improvements as an asset to rich estate farms but unaffordable and not cost effective to the smaller farmer.

Thus landed incomes could also be maintained or increased by investment in the land. This increased short-term incomes and preserved the estate in the long-term as well as helped to retain tenants. However, these improvements often served to increase the supply of agricultural produce and therefore, even though they had in many cases been available for a significant period, improvements were adopted on an extensive scale in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when population and therefore demand for produce increased dramatically, making them profitable and worthwhile investments. The scale of a farm also had an impact on whether improvements took place or not, with some labour-saving measures only cost efficient where a significant amount of labour had previously been employed.

Changing Land Use

Alongside the investment in the soil, implementation of improvements on an estate and the reorganization of landowning in the nineteenth century, land use was also changed in order to increase the profits of both landowner and tenant farmer. However, whilst some changes appear to be led by the estate changing land use was often at the request of the tenant (with his landlord's permission) rather than a profit-making policy of the landlord.

One of the principal aims of improving the land was to increase production. Increased production would not only increase farm profits but would help domestic production to meet the increasing demand of the growing population of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Williamson noted three ways in which arable production could be increased – expanding the area under cultivation, raising yields per acre and improving the geography of arable farming.

²¹¹ *Overstone Correspondence*, p.1000.

²¹² University of London MS804/1891.

This third method is the subject of this section. Changing land use involved growing crops on lands better suited to them and less on worse soils and thus improving quantity and quality of the crops grown on the same area of land.²¹³ Thus changing land use could be of benefit to both landowners and their tenants, although if poor choices were made both parties would lose out. For example, if good arable land was put down to pasture, even if prices for meat and dairy were higher, it may still reduce the profitability of the land.²¹⁴

In the late-eighteenth century, Arthur Young credited enclosure with creating good, properly stocked pasture land from land which had previously been put down to arable and fallow in the counties of Leicestershire and Northamptonshire.²¹⁵ Leland J. Bellot pointed out that enclosure and changing land use were considered the actions of a good landlord. In the two decades following his inheritance of lands in Buckinghamshire in 1726, for example, Richard Grenville established himself as 'a country gentleman fully engaged in hands-on estate management' by beginning enclosure projects and putting lands down to grass for cattle grazing.²¹⁶ The evidence of this study shows, however, that enclosure, although a major changing point in land use, was not the only time when land use was changed and, indeed, land use was not always determined by the landowners.

With regards to Northamptonshire in particular, Steane observed that in the mid-nineteenth century the amount of land under arable cultivation was increasing and by 1870 two-thirds of the county was put down to crops. In this period (1840-1870), Steane commented, rents for such lands were high, enabling both great profits and a significant quantity of drainage and building work to be undertaken in the county.²¹⁷ By the late-nineteenth century demand increased for 'specialities' such as fruit and poultry had increased and these were often produced by small farmers who saw an opportunity to profit.²¹⁸ F.M.L. Thompson also commented on evidence of farmers themselves taking advantage of the market by changing land use. Whilst it has been

²¹³ Williamson, *Transformation*, p.159.

²¹⁴ G.E. Mingay, *Parliamentary Enclosure in England* (London, 1997), p.91.

²¹⁵ Rev. J. Howlett, *An Enquiry into the Influence which Enclosures have had upon the Population of England* (London, 1786), pp.5-6.

²¹⁶ L.J. Bellot, "'Wild Hares and Red Herrings': A Case Study of Estate Management in the Eighteenth-Century English Countryside", *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 56:1 (1993), p.16.

²¹⁷ J.M. Steane, *The Northamptonshire Landscape: Northamptonshire and the Soke of Peterborough* (London, 1974), p.281.

²¹⁸ Chambers, 'Enclosure and Labour Supply', p.328.

supposed that farmers increased production in times of low prices in an attempt to maintain profits (which in practice would just drive prices down further), in the period following 1870 Thompson suggested that some farmers actually produced fewer unprofitable goods and increased production of goods which remained profitable or for which prices were increasing.²¹⁹

As evident above, the reason behind changing land use was inevitably economic - John Broad found that landlords in the South Midlands (Leicestershire, Warwickshire, North Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire) frequently put lands down to grass in the years leading up to 1800 as they could obtain a considerably higher rent per acre than they could from arable lands.²²⁰ Thompson's comment that farmers could change production to increase that of profitable goods also indicates an important factor in changing land use in this period - security of income. In his study of risk management in agriculture, David R. Stead looked at methods tenants used to reduce their profit-risks. He found that

Many of the production decisions made by farmers were chosen in an attempt to lower the probability of a loss occurring, or to reduce the size of a loss once it had occurred.

Within this context he found farmers undertaking mixed farming (although a poor harvest of fodder crops would push up the cost of animal feed so the two were not mutually exclusive in terms of risk), diversifying in the types of crops grown so there was a fall-back if one harvest failed and even replacing crops with more resilient counterparts, such as the replacement of turnips with swedes as the latter were less vulnerable to frost. Added to these, he also identified the continuance of 'alternative farming' to minimize risk, including dairying, poultry keeping and growing industrial crops. However, overall, he noted that diversification in - farming was becoming less common throughout the period 1750-1850, as improvements led to farmers feeling their income risk was less than it had been previously.²²¹

Thus land use changed not only at enclosure but throughout the period. Enclosure enabled further changes to take place in order to improve landed incomes of both farmers and landlords but land use did not change because of enclosure alone. Both farmers and landlords sought to

²¹⁹ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p.220.

²²⁰ J. Broad, 'The Fate of the Midland Yeoman: Tenants, Copyholders, and Freeholders as Farmers in North Buckinghamshire, 1620-1800', *Continuity and Change* 14:3 (1999), p.331.

²²¹ Stead, 'Risk and Risk Management', pp.346-9.

increase their profits and changing the use of the land was a method of doing this without undertaking costly improvements to the land itself.

Enclosure

As noted in chapter 1, enclosure was a huge change to the English landscape and a point when farms were re-organised, rents re-negotiated and new lands brought into cultivation. Whilst the parishes of this study were all enclosed by the nineteenth century, enclosure and its lasting impact still necessitates discussion. The reasons for enclosing lands are an important part of estate management and the changes to estates and improvements implemented post-enclosure are of great interest owing to their economic and social implications on the estate. Indeed, Beckett pointed out that enclosure offered flexibility but the increased profits usually attributed to it could only be secured via further investment in the land, such as improving drainage.²²² It must also be noted here that enclosure was certainly not without its opponents or losers and historians have concerned themselves a great deal with the short-term social impact of enclosure rather than the long-term changes to estates and estate management which are of interest to this study.

Profits and Improvements

A landowner would enclose or wish to enclose his lands for a number of reasons. Jerome Blum observed that landowners might have wished to enclose in response to high prices for agricultural produce, proximity to markets, improved transport links improving travel times to markets, to create more grazing land or even simply in imitation of other landowners who had enclosed their lands and indeed others have identified some, if not all, of these as reasons to enclose.²²³ Enclosure did, of course, have advantages. Even though he found evidence of open-field farmers improving their lands, Mingay noted that compact enclosed farms could be managed more efficiently than the dispersed strips of the open-field system and animals could be protected from disease in a way they could not be on the common.²²⁴ Thus we come to the two main reasons to enclose the land – to increase profitability and to implement improvements to agriculture.

²²² J.V. Beckett, 'Landownership and Estate Management' in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales volume 6, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, 1989), p.599.

²²³ J. Blum, 'Review: English Parliamentary Enclosure', *The Journal of Modern History* 53:3 (1981), p.481.

²²⁴ Mingay, *Enclosure and the Small Farmer*, p.18.

The effects of enclosure were debated by contemporaries as well as historians. Reverend J. Howlett, in his 1796 pamphlet in favour of enclosure, commented that there had been much debate on the subject and that

Scarcely any thing at all connected with the improvements of modern agriculture, has been more eagerly contested, or more amply discussed, than the advantages or disadvantages of Enclosures.²²⁵

Indeed, whilst Howlett viewed enclosure as a means of increasing farm profits and productivity, Arthur Young suggested it merely redistributed the wealth, increasing the landlord's share of farming incomes.²²⁶

Mingay suggested that the main reason landlords enclosed their lands was to increase their profits:

From the landlord's point of view the principal gain to be obtained from enclosure was the increased value of the property, which made it possible for them to charge a higher rent for it.²²⁷

Indeed, it is widely agreed that the principal reason to enclose was to increase estate profits. Habakkuk, found that unimproved estates were a sought-after commodity as they could be enclosed to improve their value; Julian Hoppit suggested that enclosure was not an end in itself but enabled landlords to impose new sanctions on land use and improvement, although this was done with the intention of increasing rents.²²⁸

On average, landlords did increase rent at enclosure by 15-20 percent but, Mingay calculated, the increased profits enabled farmers to pay them.²²⁹ The contemporary view, here again provided from the work of Reverend Howlett, also saw rising prices as a result of enclosure.

²²⁵ Howlett, *An Inquiry*, pp.1-2.

²²⁶ Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman*, p.181.

²²⁷ Mingay, *Parliamentary Enclosure*, p.83.

²²⁸ H.J. Habakkuk, 'English Landownership, 1680-1740', *Economic History Review* 10:1 (1940), p.2; J. Hoppit, 'The Landed Interest and the National Interest, 1660-1800' in J. Hoppit (ed.), *Parliaments, Nations and Identities in Britain and Ireland, 1660-1850* (Manchester, 2003), p.86.

²²⁹ Mingay, *Enclosure and the Small Farmer*, pp.19-20.

Howlett even provided figures, commenting that corn prices across the country had increased as a result of enclosures, from 3/6-4s a bushel to 7s-7/6 per bushel. However, he also viewed this as a temporary effect, stating 'this will not be a permanent effect of enclosure' because farmers turning their lands to grass had pushed the price up and as they turned back to arable farming the price would fall again.²³⁰ Added to this, R.C. Allen found that yields were also increasing and accredited enclosure with increasing yields by about a quarter. However, he also noted that yields around 1800 were higher than they had been in previous years on both enclosed and open fields as a result of improvements. Further to this, he argued that the reason for higher yields on enclosed lands was that a higher proportion of these had adopted drainage, not simply that they were enclosed. Both these examples demonstrate the importance of enclosure as a catalyst but that improved farming was not a result of enclosure alone.²³¹

The principal focus of those discussing the negative impact of enclosure on tenants has been that rents were raised considerably at enclosure. However, there were also positive effects of enclosure, including in enabling improvements. Indeed, Arthur Young wrote in his *Political Arithmetic* that 'without Inclosures there can be no good husbandry' which Howlett interpreted to mean that enclosure enabled improvement in agriculture.²³² Increased yields and more productive farming are often attributed as effects of enclosure. However, both Blum and Williamson have suggested that this was not necessarily the case. According to Blum:

Better farming and increased yields per acre did not follow automatically after enclosure. The writers of the county reports to the Board of Agriculture found that enclosures had, indeed, often produced the desired results of improved husbandry with higher yields and increased income. But they also reported that often, for a variety of reasons, neither techniques, nor yields, nor incomes had increased after enclosure.²³³

Further to this, Williamson added that the majority of parliamentary enclosures affected grazing not arable land and therefore did nothing to increase arable production, although improvements to these lands (especially commons and wastes) increased good pasture land and

²³⁰ Howlett, *An Enquiry*, pp.8-9.

²³¹ Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman*, pp.15-16, 137-8.

²³² Howlett, *An Inquiry*, pp.16-17.

²³³ Blum, 'English Parliamentary Enclosure', pp.502-3.

thus food production.²³⁴ Contemporaries often assumed that improvement would follow enclosure. For example, Pitt, in his survey of Northamptonshire in 1809 calculated that enclosure could increase profits by decreasing costs including by concentrated farms requiring less labour, improvements to the land being easier to implement and productivity and the quality of livestock also being improved.²³⁵

Research has shown, however, that even though enclosure made improving the land easier lands could be, and indeed were, improved prior to enclosure. Mingay argued that there had been many improvements in open-field villages before 1760 and enclosure was often the last phase of improvement, not the first.²³⁶ However, the open-field system did have its limitations for although some improvements could be carried out farmers were tied into a communal farming system. The Hammonds pointed out for example that no farmer could cultivate his open-field strips as he wished and David Wykes also suggested that the spread of strips and communing of livestock prevented some improvements under open field farming. As a result he found that enclosure was not the only way the land could be improved but worked as a catalyst for improvement.²³⁷

Compared to the open fields, enclosed lands gave the tenant a choice in which improvements he adopted and how he farmed his lands, enabling more productive and efficient farming. Neeson argued that livestock could be improved prior to enclosure so long as fields were not overstocked because the marketplace was the principal source of infection and animals were no less prone to disease on enclosed lands than they had been when commoned.²³⁸ However, Mingay noted that the principal improvement in the quality of livestock following enclosure was the keeping of better breeds.²³⁹ The improvement of arable land was also viewed by contemporaries as something which could not be undertaken without enclosure. Pitt's comment that the quality of arable land improved at enclosure indicates that either lands were

²³⁴ Williamson, *Transformation*, p.15.

²³⁵ Steane, *Northamptonshire Landscape*. p.229.

²³⁶ Mingay, *Enclosure and the Small Farmer*, pp.18-19.

²³⁷ G.E. Mingay (ed.), J.L. Hammond & B. Hammond, *The Village Labourer* (London, 1978), pp.3-4; D.L. Wykes, 'Robert Bakewell (1725-1795) of Dishley: Farmer and Livestock Improver', *Agricultural History Review* 52:1 (2004), p.39.

²³⁸ J.M. Neeson, *Commoners: common Right, Enclosure and Social change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge, 1993), p.129.

²³⁹ Mingay, *Parliamentary Enclosure*, p.92.

improved or chosen more carefully in order to grow crops on better quality lands, resulting in higher productivity arable land. Added to this, Steane found that in 1712 Morton commented “I say enclosures, because there is no practising this or any other improvements in the open fields” indicating the increased ability of landholders to employ new methods and practices following enclosure.²⁴⁰ Thus enclosure made arable farming easier to improve as well as pasture and in practice many appear to have improved their lands following their enclosure.

The new compact farms created by enclosure did prove advantageous to tenants, as shown by not only the increased profitability of farming after enclosure but also by the compact nature of the new farms. Mingay noted that enclosed farms, split into fields, enabled tenants to use more complex patterns of crop rotations and fatten and keep livestock more efficiently.²⁴¹ However, he concluded that a great deal of the increase in agricultural output was not a result of improvements or increased yields but simply a result of more land being brought into cultivation.²⁴² Both Mingay and Blum also commented on the advantage of improved transport links which resulted from enclosure. Commissioners set aside land at enclosure for roads, drains and gravel pits for the maintenance of the roads.²⁴³ As a result of these seed and fertilizers could be brought in and crops and livestock could be taken to market in less time or even further afield.²⁴⁴ Improvements to infrastructure which came with enclosure aided the increase in productivity and farm profits both by enabling improvements to be undertaken more easily (if at all) than they could have been otherwise and goods to be transported further afield for sale.

Mingay also pointed out that the impact of improvements and changes in agriculture are difficult to distinguish from the impact of enclosure.²⁴⁵ Indeed, improvements continued long after the land was enclosed, with costs for drainage and buildings, amongst other improvements, being recorded in the Northamptonshire data.

²⁴⁰ Steane, *Northamptonshire Landscape*, p.229.

²⁴¹ Mingay, *Parliamentary Enclosure*, p.83.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p.96.

²⁴³ Blum, ‘English Parliamentary Enclosure’, p.483.

²⁴⁴ Mingay, *Parliamentary Enclosure*, p.83.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.147.

The increased output of England's farms following enclosure was not a result of improvements to the land alone. The amount of land in cultivation was increased dramatically and Mingay considered this to be more responsible than improvement to the land in increasing agricultural output.²⁴⁶ But the extra lands were usually only brought into cultivation by enclosure and often needed improving to make them into productive farmland. Whether productivity increased as a direct result of enclosure or because enclosure was followed by other improvements to the land is of great interest to this study. What is certain is that productivity did increase in the years following enclosure, increasing in England by a factor of 3.5 between 1750 and 1850 alone.²⁴⁷ Yields were increased in a number of ways, including bringing extra land into cultivation but also as a result of better seed selection, better organization and land use, greater use of fertilizers and better drainage plus the implementation of better farming machinery.²⁴⁸ Indeed Williamson calculated that between 1720 and the 1840s wheat yields increased from 20 to 30 bushels an acre (c.50%) whilst barley production had improved from 25 to 50 bushels an acre.²⁴⁹

Thus it was not enclosure alone but the continuing improvement of the land which increased productivity across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These improvements and the increased profits which both farmers and landlords obtained from them were in themselves a reason to enclose the land. More importantly, however, the continued improvement of the land beyond enclosure maintained high profits and high rents as long as the agricultural economy continued to grow. Thus, as shall be seen with regards to rents in chapter 4, it was not enclosure alone but continued improvement which caused a general upwards trend in rent levels in Northamptonshire across the period of this study.

Opposition to Enclosure

Noting the positive effects of enclosure is not to say that it did not have a negative impact or was wholly supported. Neeson calculated that in Northamptonshire two-thirds of successful enclosure bills had some landowners or cottagers who refused to sign them and in half of these cases those refusing to sign owned between 10 and 30 percent of the land. Not all enclosure

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.96.

²⁴⁷ S. Wade Martins and T. Williamson, 'Labour and Improvement: Agricultural Change in East Anglia, circa 1750-1870', *Labour History Review* 62:3 (1997), p.275.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.275-6; Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare*, p.3.

²⁴⁹ Williamson, *Transformation*, p.6.

was opposed but a significant amount was, including the enclosure of Geddington Chase in 1792.²⁵⁰ Where there was opposition, opponents often took every measure available to them to resist enclosure, legal and illegal. Jane Humphries identified opposition to enclosure even when opponents faced 'severe legal, economic and social sanctions' such was the extent of feeling against enclosure.²⁵¹

The actual opponents of enclosure consisted of several groups in rural society. The supporters of enclosure, Neeson found, usually encompassed all those hoping to profit from it. The main opponents, on the other hand, were poor farmers, labourers, local craftsmen and small owner-occupiers (who owned 40 acres or less). Added to these, neighbouring gentry with no material interest in the enclosure may well be approached to support the opposition. However, Neeson also observed that the majority of opposition to enclosure failed although, as Neeson put it 'if landlords and farmers eventually won the battle for enclosure, rural artisans and agricultural labourers may have had some say in the terms of surrender'.²⁵²

The groups which form the focus of this thesis – the landlords and tenant farmers Neeson viewed as 'winning the battle' – appear to have enjoyed the positive effects of enclosure and sought improvement and increased profitability of the land. So for these groups enclosure appears to have been a generally beneficial experience.

The Effect of Improvements to Transport Infrastructure

Roads were usually improved and the transport infrastructure made more logical and effective when a parish was enclosed. The improved roads, as well as the rise of canals and railways, themselves enabled further improvements to the land. As a result of improved transport networks materials such as fertilizers and seeds could be brought in and crops and animals taken to market more easily than had been possible before the parish was enclosed or the railway or canal had been constructed.²⁵³ Indeed, R.J. Thompson noted the importance of railway links for agriculture in enabling farmers to take their produce to better markets as well

²⁵⁰ J.M. Neeson, 'The Opponents of Enclosure in Eighteenth-Century Northamptonshire', *Past and Present* 105 (1984), pp.121, 134, 270.

²⁵¹ J. Humphries, 'Enclosures, Common Rights and Women: The Proletarianization of Families in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries', *The Journal of Economic History* 50:1 (1990), p.21.

²⁵² Neeson, 'Opponents of Enclosure', pp.128, 131-3.

²⁵³ Mingay, *Parliamentary Enclosure*, p.83.

as lowering production costs.²⁵⁴ As a result improved roads and transport infrastructure were a great asset to the rural communities of England, enabling the movement of stock and the bringing in of materials for changes and improvements to the land and agricultural practice. Steane suggested that it was generally accepted by landowners, farmers and merchants that roads needed improving when a parish was enclosed and land tended to be allotted for gravel pits for the upkeep of the roads, enabling better transport links following enclosure.²⁵⁵

Thus agriculture could be further improved as a result of improved transport infrastructure. This occurred in part as a result of enclosure, which improved the parish roads and as more enclosures took place led to an improved road network across significant parts of England. The rise of canals and railways further improved transport links across England. This meant that demand in towns and cities for agricultural produce could be more easily met and materials for the improvement of agriculture could be more easily brought into the countryside. As a result improved transport links acted as a catalyst for agricultural improvement and enabled farmers to increase their profits and widen their markets.

Initiators of Land Management Changes

As shown above changing land use was not always something imposed by landlords but was often desired by tenants who sought to increase their own profits. Yet it was not only the geography of farming which was changed by tenurial demand in this period. Tenants were often the instigators of improvement to the land and even increasing farm sizes. In this context one sees landlords investing in the land with the agreement (or even at the insistence of) their tenants and rents increasing as a result of the financial outlay, not directly due to the perceived increased profitability of the land.

There has been a degree of debate amongst historians regarding who wanted to improve the landscape and whether tenants were injured or proletarianized by the adoption of new farming techniques and machinery as well as increasing farm sizes. However, although landlords did wish to improve their lands to increase estate profits, tenants also sought to improve their holdings to increase their personal profits. Yet a landlord's role in improvement did go beyond approving his tenants' requests to improve their holdings. David Howell observed that landlords encouraged improvements in farming in a number of ways including 'supporting agricultural societies, ploughing societies, farmers' clubs, sheep dog trials and the like', not just

²⁵⁴ Thompson, 'An Inquiry', p.594.

²⁵⁵ Steane, *Northamptonshire Landscape*, pp.231, 251; Blum, 'English Parliamentary Enclosure', p.483.

by allowing farms to expand or farmers to change the type of farming undertaken on their lands.²⁵⁶ Furthermore, Cragoe found that in Wales landlords did not just support improvements in agriculture but also funded them, investing in drainage and building work as well as attempting to aid the dissemination of new ideas. Yet where landlords did invest in improvements the tenant was often expected to pay a proportion of the cost meaning the decision to improve farms on an estate did not lie solely with the landlord but also required some tenurial input.²⁵⁷ As shall be seen with Northamptonshire, landlords paying for improvements and tenants paying a proportion of the cost or repaying loans via increased rents were a common characteristic of rural society although landlords and stewards took a personal interest (as well as an economic interest) in how the estate was farmed.

Thus larger farms and improved, more profitable land were desired not only by landlords but also by tenants and often pressure could come from both directions in order for both parties to increase their profits. However, in practice both landlords and tenants had specific roles in implementing improvements to the land, with landlords able to impose changes on tenants and tenants being required to gain permission for any changes they wished to make and, as noted above, landlords often providing at least a proportion of the capital for improvements his tenants wished to make to their farms.

Landlord's Role

With regards to the landowners' role in both deciding on and funding improvements to the land, these were not always led by profit motive or desire to improve farming on the estate. An improvement which would benefit the tenant might have been costly and not something from which the landowner would have profited (such as rebuilding farmhouses) or the landowner might have invested the money upfront for an improvement the tenant requested. These improvements did occur and appear to have been undertaken almost as a duty of the landlord rather than as an investment. However, in such cases landlords did often seek to recoup at least some of their losses by way of a rent increase, their investment acting like a loan to a tenant but one which was only paid back as long as the tenant remained on his holding.

The Montagu accounts list a number of rent increases where lands had been improved at the landowner's expense - in 1861 alone two rents on the estate were increased due to landlord

²⁵⁶ D.W. Howell, *Land and People in Nineteenth Century Wales* (London, 1977), p.36.

²⁵⁷ M. Cragoe, *An Anglican Aristocracy: The Moral Economy of the Landed Estate in Carmarthenshire 1832-1895* (Oxford, 1996), pp.60-1.

expenditure on drainage for the lands and in the same year two tenants' houses were rebuilt.²⁵⁸ In the same period, in order for a tenant to pay upfront towards improvements, Cragoe pointed out that tenants needed assurances that their tenure would not be terminated before they were able to recoup their investment, particularly as many were men of little capital.²⁵⁹ Thus a landlord paying for improvements and the tenant paying him back by way of increased rents appears the more logical model for payment for improvements. Improving the land was so important on landed estates in this period that Williamson found five Land Improvement Companies - which would provide capital to landowners for improvements - were set up by Parliamentary Act between 1847 and 1860 and evidence of landowners taking out loans and mortgages to invest in their lands.²⁶⁰

Beckett noted that the purpose of investing in the land was both social and economic:

the chief concern was to maximise estate income without undercutting their socio-political role as leaders of the community.

Within this context, it was generally understood that a landlord would provide the fixed capital for improvement whilst the tenant provided the working capital.²⁶¹ R.J. Thompson calculated that investment in the land required a significant proportion of landed incomes and profit was therefore rental income minus costs of both repairs and improvements. He calculated that pipe drainage cost up to £7 per acre whilst fencing cost 17s per acre. In total, he considered maintenance and improvements of the land to constitute around 35% of the set rent. Furthermore, this situation could become problematic for landlords in a recession. Where loans had been taken out repayments remained due and costs of repairs increased as tenants were less willing to undertake the work themselves, meaning that landlords outgoings could not be reduced to the same extent as their incomes had been.²⁶²

However, investment was undertaken with a view to increasing estate profits. John Stuart Mill noted that landlords invested capital which tenants paid back by way of increased rents, a point

²⁵⁸ NRO, Montagu Estate Accounts, No. 407.

²⁵⁹ Cragoe, *Anglican Aristocracy*, pp.36-7.

²⁶⁰ Williamson, *Transformation*, p.144.

²⁶¹ Beckett, 'Landownership', pp.564, 597.

²⁶² Thompson, 'An Inquiry', pp.602-4, 618-9, 623.

to which R.J. Thompson added that this increase would pay back the capital plus interest.²⁶³ Indeed, A.D.M. Phillips, in his study of land drainage, found that it was usual for a landlord to undertake the initial outlay for improving the land but this would then be passed on to the tenant by way of a rent increase. Indeed, he found that landlords funding land drainage in this manner could expect between 4% and 7% return on their investment.²⁶⁴ Elsewhere, the rate of return for landlords on their investments has been examined by Beckett, who discussed the different returns for investments (such as enclosure yielded a higher profit than land drainage) but began entirely on the assumption that landlords would profit from their investment and not just seek repayment of a loan from their tenants. This he views as understood by both parties, with inefficient tenants being replaced by those seeking to maximise their own profits so the estate could maximise its income.²⁶⁵

Landlords also undertook a great interest in how the land was improved and invested in the land in non-financial capacities too. Within Northamptonshire, McDonagh noted that Elizabeth Prowse, in her 40-year management of the Wiken estate in the second half of the eighteenth century, improved the estate considerably, including introducing machinery, new crops and drainage.²⁶⁶ In the second half of the nineteenth century Northamptonshire landlords were still taking an interest in improving agriculture on their estates and Lord Overstone led the way with improvements to his demesne farm. This appears to have been based not on management style but on a landlord's interest in improvements and personal opinion regarding their profitability. Having invested in a Steam Plough for his own farm, for example, Lord Overstone viewed it as a great success but viewed the technology as yet unprofitable for use on small farms.²⁶⁷ It is interesting that Lord Overstone viewed the failure of the steam plough for smaller farmers to be a fault of the technology rather than a reason to increase farm sizes on his estate but primarily this example shows the interest he took in improving farming not only on his own farm but also on the lands of his tenants, including those on small farms..

²⁶³ Thompson, 'an Inquiry', p.605.

²⁶⁴ A.D.M. Phillips, *The Underdraining of Farmland in England During the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1989), pp.139, 186.

²⁶⁵ Beckett, 'Landownership', pp.605-7.

²⁶⁶ B.A.K. McDonagh, 'Women, Enclosure and Estate Improvement in Eighteenth-century Northamptonshire', *Rural History* 20:2 (2009), p.155.

²⁶⁷ University of London, MS804/624.

Thus landlords were vital in improving the land – they often provided the capital to do so (there is evidence of Lord Overstone and the Lords Montagu doing this) and had to provide the security of tenure to encourage their tenants to invest and tenants could not improve or change their farms without landlord permission. Added to this landlords and their stewards were active in spreading ideas of improvements and encouraging interest in improving the land amongst their tenants. Indeed, without landlord support and investment few tenants would have been able to improve their holdings. Several historians have noted the role of landlords in encouraging improvements on their estates, including Bowen, who viewed the desire of landowners and their stewards as the driving force behind improvement and advances at a local level.²⁶⁸ However, Wordie pointed out that one cannot tell the extent to which landlords dictated changes:

Agrarian changes such as the amalgamation and consolidation of tenancies, the enclosure of waste land, and the steady rise of the large farm may have done something to promote tenant prosperity on the estates, but it is also possible that the general level of tenant prosperity itself regulated the pace of these changes.²⁶⁹

In Northamptonshire 1700-1885 evidence shows that landlords were allowing improvements, financing them and introducing them to lead the way but this could not be carried out unless tenants accepted them. Tenant farmers were more limited in their powers to improve or refuse improvements but they did have a significant part to play in the changes in English agriculture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Added to this, there is evidence of stewards in Northamptonshire advising landlords, tenants and other stewards and sharing their knowledge of farming and improvement.²⁷⁰ This was not unique to Northamptonshire though, with Bettey finding that George Boswell (1735-1815) suggested improvements on estates around Puddletown where he was steward and sought advice from John Bailey who by 1789 had made his own threshing machine whilst working as steward for Lord Tankerville.²⁷¹ Thus, as important as the role of the landlord in driving improvement was the advice he was given by his stewards.

²⁶⁸ J.P. Bowen, 'A Landscape of Improvement: The Impact of James Loch, Chief Agent to the Marquis of Stafford, on the Lilleshall Estate, Shropshire', *Midland History* 35:2 (2010), p.214.

²⁶⁹ Wordie, *Estate Management*, p.177.

²⁷⁰ In 1873 Lord Grey wrote to Lord Overstone to ask if Beasley could send him the mix for winter cattle feed which they had previously discussed. *Overstone Correspondence*, p.1230.

²⁷¹ J. Bettey, 'George Boswell of Puddletown (1735-1815): Progressive Farmer and Author', *AgHR* 57 (2009), pp.60, 68.

Farmer's Role

Tenant farmers were themselves avid improvers with a vested interest in increasing their own profits throughout the period. David Stead noted that farmer's took the majority of the financial risks in farming as they agreed to a rent and if they did not make enough profit this was still due from them. Stead looked at the profits to be made by the men farming the land and calculated that in boom years they could earn as much as 11 percent on the capital employed and in a recession may still earn as much as 6-10 percent. He found this comparable with other 'risky industries' such as brewing or coal mining, which also saw varying profits of about 5-14% of the capital employed. However, farmer's profits were dependent upon a number of factors and risk management (and indeed perception) was essential in farming. As well as the fact produce prices for the next year had to be predicted, weather and disease may affect output, costs could vary and war may disrupt trade. However, Stead also viewed farmers managing the risks they faced in a number of ways. Insurance became increasingly available for farming risks in the course of the nineteenth century, although there was proportionately little uptake, particularly amongst smaller farmers. He also found them to be protecting against risks in a number of ways - ways which many would see as improvements – including changing crop choices and employing animal medicines amongst others.²⁷²

John Beckett went further than Stead's study of risk management, and viewed farmers as active improvers, often showing the initiative in improving their farms. Indeed, he found that "large tenant farmers were usually reckoned to be among the most enlightened agriculturalists". Further to this, he found that the advantages of external improvements, transport in particular, required "communication changes" to ensure landlords and tenants utilized them to improve estate output and profits.²⁷³ Phillips went further, not only arguing that tenants of farms of all sizes shared a certain zeal for improvement but stating that

Although desirous of having his agricultural land drained, the landowner in effect was little more than a supplier of capital.²⁷⁴

²⁷² Stead, 'Risk and Risk Management', pp.334-46, 355-8; Hunt, 'Agricultural Rent', p.106 also lists the agreement of rents based on prevailing prices as the greatest risk tenant farmers took. He also noted the risks of changing costs of agricultural labour and the cost of work from tradesmen as risks farmers faced.

²⁷³ Beckett, 'Landownership', pp.570-1, 575.

²⁷⁴ Phillips, *Underdraining*, pp.194, 205.

The nature of this study means that improvements to the soil are traced primarily via rental accounts. However, from these one finds a number of examples in Northamptonshire of tenants having their rents raised as a result of the lands being improved at their request. Prior to the nineteenth century, tenants on the Fitzwilliam estate were seeking to plough up their lands. By the mid-nineteenth century, investment in the soil continued but the improvements being undertaken had changed. In the 1851 and 1861 Montagu accounts, for example, a number of rent increases were noted to be interest on the costs of drainage paid in advance by Lord Montagu.²⁷⁵

In enclosed landscapes in Northamptonshire, McDonagh identified tenants initiating a move to reorganise tenancies as they wanted longer leases and security of tenure.²⁷⁶ The changing of tenancies as lands were improved was certainly nothing new, it was what Lord Fitzwilliam had done in the early-eighteenth century and has been identified by Stead as a method of estate management adopted throughout this period. However, what is important here is that it was the tenants seeking longer leases so that they could benefit fully from the improvements they had instigated. Later, the adoption of 'high farming' required increased investment in livestock and fertilizers at the expense of the tenant but Daunton found that it also required permanent investment to improve drainage and buildings, for which the landlord would often provide the materials and the farmer the labour, thus splitting the cost.²⁷⁷ This is probably the explanation for the high levels of investment in drainage on the Montagu estate in the 1860s where a number of rents on large farms are noted to have increased to pay off the costs outlaid by Lord Montagu to cover the investment in drainage. For example, one William Smith is noted to have had his £262.10.0 rent 'increased £2 per annum for interest of money expended on draining'. The same account also notes that two buildings (not dwellings or cottages as noted elsewhere) had been rebuilt.²⁷⁸

To undertake successful improvements to the land it was also important that the tenant understood farming and the land he worked. Farming literature of the time, such as Hutton's

²⁷⁵ For example, Richard Burton of Marham made such a request in November 1704 D.R. Hainsworth and C. Walker (eds.), *The Correspondence of Lord Fitzwilliam of Milton and Francis Guybon, his Steward, 1697-1709* (Northampton, 1990), p.162; on the Montagu Estate Adam Tirrell provides one example of a tenant who paid such a rent advance in 1851. NRO, Montagu Estate Accounts Nos. 398, 408.

²⁷⁶ McDonagh, 'Women, Enclosure and Estate Improvement', p.149.

²⁷⁷ Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare*, p.37.

²⁷⁸ NRO, Montagu Estate Accounts No. 407.

1797 work on improving agriculture, emphasised the importance of farmers having an understanding of the land so that crops could be chosen beneficially without costly trial and error. He also emphasised the importance of maintaining the fertility of the land, something which those on short-term or insecure leases may have failed to do in order to maximise short-term profits.²⁷⁹ Thus the most obvious difference between how the landlord and how the tenant approached improving the land was that a tenant only sought to increase his own profits whilst the landlord sought to preserve the longer term profitability of his estate. As the examples above of Lord Fitzwilliam's regulation of his tenants' farming practices and the Lords Montagu investing in their tenants' farms show, landowners were concerned about maintaining the land for future tenants whilst tenants wished to take advantage of current prices.

Overall, both tenants and landlords played a part in improving the land. Whilst landlords had to support improvements so did tenants if they were to be successful and while it was usually the landlord who paid the cost of improving upfront it was often the tenant who showed the initiative to improve. However, landlords had to regulate tenurial activity to ensure lands were not exhausted in the short-term to increase tenant profits and thus as well as paying the money to improve in advance landlords would also ensure improvements were carried out correctly and the quality of the soil was maintained. However, it must also be stated that tenants and landlords were aware of the economic situation in which they operated and both sought to increase their profits where possible.

Prices

Prevailing agricultural prices were a central factor in the agricultural economy of nineteenth-century England. Stead noted that English farmers were price takers in the market as the number of producers was extensive and all were selling to the same national market. Whilst farmers were able to some extent to 'self-insure' in periods of low prices by keeping grain from market in times of low prices, he also found that the cost of storage and risk of losses through crops spoiling prevented this being worthwhile.²⁸⁰ Prices were an essential factor in the calculation of rent levels, the payment of rents, the level of investment in the land and the payment of labourers (which in turn had a knock-on effect on the Poor Rate due from landowners and farmers). As seen above, investment in the land was a significant financial commitment and was therefore more likely to be undertaken where prices were high and were expected to be for the foreseeable future. However, low prices were also linked to investment

²⁷⁹ Jones, 'James Hutton's Agricultural Research', pp.575-6.

²⁸⁰ Stead, 'Risk and Risk Management', pp.338, 349-50.

in the land as in order to maintain rents a landlord may well invest in the land to keep the profits of his farms up. Therefore, improvements and investments were dependent on rental income which was, in turn, dependent on prices.

From the tenant-farmer's point-of-view, if prices fell he would struggle to maintain his standard of living and to meet costs such as rent. Adversely, from the landlord's point-of-view, where prices were low the estate would need to be preserved and rents and payments had to be properly managed in order to preserve the long-term profitability of the estate. Where prices were high or rising, however, a landlord who did not increase rents on his estate may well perceive himself to be losing out on a considerable income he considered to be due to him whilst his tenants enjoyed greater profits at his expense.

Turner *et al* described rents as dependant on "the ability of the farmer to pay" which, in turn, depended on his own income.²⁸¹ Whilst one cannot entirely ignore the willingness of a tenant to pay and whether he prioritised his standard of living or other costs above paying his rent, it seems that the majority of tenants on the estates of this study were fairly diligent in paying their rents and generally widespread or abnormally high levels of arrears demonstrate inability over unwillingness, but this will be examined in detail in chapter 5.

In terms of rents due rather than rents paid, one finds that rent levels were set based on prevailing prices and tenants agreed to them based on the levels of profits they felt they could make (although it must be noted this was rarely if ever owing to precise predictions of priced or calculating of income). Matthew Cragoe studied evidence of a number of estate stewards calculating rent levels based on prevailing prices. Sussex land surveyor Robert Clutton, for example, calculated rent due as gross product minus labour, marketing and repair costs, tithe, poor rates, local charges and an allowance for the farmer's profits. J.R. Davy, on the other hand, worked out the value of crops based on a 12-month average and calculated rent as one third of what the tenant was expected to make.²⁸² Even though Clutton's method leaves the amount of farmers' profits open to interpretation and Davy's appears to show a far from profit-maximizing calculation both demonstrate how crucial prices were in setting rent levels. Where prices changed this would therefore be reflected in rent levels although there was usually a time lag where rents were renegotiated or temporary abatements were used.²⁸³

²⁸¹ M. Turner, J.V. Beckett. & B. Afton, *Agricultural Rent in England, 1690-1914* (Cambridge, 1997), p.200.

²⁸² Cragoe, *An Anglican Aristocracy*, pp.50-1.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.200.

As well as being affected by a number of factors in the economy prices were also a factor affecting other aspects of the economy, agrarian life and estate management. J.D. Chambers' 1953 article demonstrates this most clearly. Chambers demonstrated how an increasing population fulfilled the increasing demand for labour from the 1750s when rents and prices rose, arrears fell and interest rates remained low, enabling farmers and industrialists to afford to increase their labour forces.²⁸⁴ Therefore rents, prices, arrears and other debts and labour costs were all inexorably linked. Further to this K.D.M. Snell found that in periods of high enclosure levels price rises led to 'landlords increasing rent to readjust to new price levels' to the extent that the annulment of long leases became a reason to enclose.²⁸⁵ Indeed, it is generally agreed that rent levels were directly linked to prices.

As has been shown, in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries population was increasing dramatically and with that came increased demand for produce.²⁸⁶ Mingay noted that enclosure, in particular where new land was brought into cultivation, helped to feed growing demand for food for a growing population.²⁸⁷ Ricardo, however, had viewed increasing population as causing a divide in the profitability of farms. Overall, he calculated, demand for corn would rise, causing prices to rise. To meet the new demand the land under cultivation would be expanded into inferior wastes with lower yields. High prices would enable those farming inferior marginal lands to make an ordinary level of profit but those on good quality lands would obtain abnormally high profits. However, this difference in farmers' profits (plus the population increase itself) drove up demand for land, particularly superior quality land, and enabled landlords to increase rents. Rent would, as a result, take a larger share of a farmer's income, reducing his income to the bare minimum.²⁸⁸ In practice, however, marginal lands were improved to increase yields and increased productivity stopped prices increasing dramatically. Added to this the negotiation of rent levels meant that farmers would not take on leases unless they thought they could make a profitable living from the land at the agreed rent.

²⁸⁴ Chambers, 'Enclosure and Labour Supply', p.342.

²⁸⁵ K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change & Agrarian England, 1660-1900* (Cambridge, 1985), p.186.

²⁸⁶ Thompson, 'An Inquiry', p.611.

²⁸⁷ Hammonds, *The Village Labourer*, p.xvii.

²⁸⁸ Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare*, p.2.

However, despite an increasing population increasing demand for produce, there was a great deal of variation in agricultural prices across this period, with a number of peaks and troughs resulting from changes in both supply and demand across the period. Indeed, across the period landlords appear to have taken action to aid tenants in times of economic slump, although this did not necessarily prevent tenant poverty, but this is an issue which will be dealt with in chapter 5. What is important here is the fall in productivity which depressed farmers' incomes, although prices were also an issue.

With the advent of the French Wars and barricades preventing imports, coupled with provisions for troops and uniforms, price levels became more directly responsible for farmers' profits. Turner *et al* commented on the steep price rises of the second half of the eighteenth century and the class conflicts this provided as labourers suffered a drop in real income, farmers' profits rose and landlords did not necessarily profit from increased farming incomes as they only had the opportunity to increase rents at the end of tenure and/or with the tenant's agreement.²⁸⁹ In 1786 we have a record of prices from Reverend Howlett who observed that nationally corn prices had risen by almost 90 per cent from 3/6d-4d to 7s-7/6d. He suggested these to be a result of enclosure and said they would fall again when farmers who had converted their lands to pasture returned to arable farming.²⁹⁰ However, after 1793 the main factor one can attribute dramatic price rises to at the end of the eighteenth century was not a fashion of enclosing in order to create pasture but the French Wars. Howell accredited the high prices of the Napoleonic Wars to 'the interaction of an abnormal run of bad harvests, inflationary finance and, to a lesser extent, the difficulties in obtaining imports'.²⁹¹

Yet with the end of the wars prices fell, despite the Corn Laws being introduced in an attempt to prevent agricultural recession.²⁹² Even in 1814 prices began to fall in a recession continuing, as Lord Ernle would have it, until the accession of Queen Victoria in 1837. However, in actuality, both Howell and F.M.L. Thompson pointed out; the post war recession was intermittent. Howell also found that this depression hit wheat farmers on heavy clays the hardest, as did the recession which occurred from 1873. Thompson also identified the crises in farming across this period as affecting cereal farmers worst. He calculated that the price fall from 1814-15 was followed by deflation in 1821-3 and there was a further period of low prices

²⁸⁹ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.10.

²⁹⁰ Howlett, *An Enquiry*, p.8.

²⁹¹ Howell, *Land and People*, p.4.

²⁹² M. Smith, 'Thomas Tooke on the Corn Laws', *History of the Political Economy* 41 (2009), p.346.

from 1833-5.²⁹³ However, Smith also argued that in years of productive harvests the Corn Laws failed farmers and falling corn prices actually led to a fall in agricultural incomes.²⁹⁴ The price falls of this period hit farmers even harder owing to the higher rents which resulted from the war period. During the French Wars, Thompson noted, rents increased both in terms of 'pure' rent and interest on capital invested in the land, especially with regards to the varying quality of land and the improvements necessary to bring increasingly poor quality wastes into cultivation.²⁹⁵ Added to the high rents and falling prices for arable farmers, prices also fell for dairy and animal products meaning mixed farmers, livestock farmers and those who had converted lands to pasture did not escape the recession, although they had also been subject to rising rents during the French Wars.²⁹⁶ But it was the fall in crop prices after the French Wars which was most significant, with wheat prices 'settling down' in the 1820s-30s to around two-thirds of their average 1800-15 levels.²⁹⁷ By 1830, however, prices were beginning to recover.²⁹⁸

It was not only farmers who suffered as a result of the price changes of the first half or the nineteenth century. As a result of falling prices agricultural wages fell. This led to unrest amongst labourers, demonstrating the severity of the impact of lower wages on agricultural labourers. In East Anglia, for example, Graham Seal identified a number of riots occurring in 1816, with rioters demanding fixed wages and stable employment plus 'a reasonable or fixed price of flour' as those on the breadline were especially susceptible to fluctuations in price.²⁹⁹ As noted above there is no evidence of riot in the Northamptonshire sources for this period but there is discussion of some unrest in Cottesbrooke in 1830, which was settled by James Langham lowering rents for his tenants on the condition that they increased their labourers' wages by the same amount.³⁰⁰

²⁹³ Ibid., p.4; Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p.231. Added to this, Hunt, 'Agricultural Rent', p.103 found prices were at their lowest in 1822.

²⁹⁴ Smith, 'Thomas Tooke', p.361.

²⁹⁵ Thompson, 'An Inquiry', p.591; Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p.217.

²⁹⁶ Howell, *Land and People*, p.5.

²⁹⁷ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p.232.

²⁹⁸ Thompson, 'An inquiry', p.592.

²⁹⁹ G. Seal, 'Tradition and Agrarian Protest in Nineteenth-Century England and Wales', *Folklore* 99:2 (1988), p.156.

³⁰⁰ NRO L(C)1184.

John Davies established that the Bute estate in Glamorgan rent trends closely reflected price trends, paralleling national rent levels. He found rents increased rapidly from the beginning of the nineteenth century up to 1815; the early-1820s to early-1830s were characterised by abatements and the 1840s and 1850s were a period of high farming and these trends were commonplace across Britain.³⁰¹ The investment and improvement historians now consider to be farming high was, in 1907, commented on by Robert Thompson, who associated it with “the general advancement of the standard of farming throughout the country”.³⁰² The increasing practice of high farming did increase agricultural income but also increased costs considerably which limited profits and therefore the amount a landlord was able to skim off in terms of increased rents was limited too. However, rent increases which resulted from enclosure and other improvements still took place and increasing population levels both drove up demand for land and kept food prices high, supply being limited and prices kept potentially artificially high by the Corn Laws.

The repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 was met with a great deal of fear that a flood of foreign imports would drive down prices and therefore domestic profits. Lord Overstone, however, was in favour of repeal, writing in 1846 that he was ‘confident of success’ for the repeal because (as he had written six years previously) the increasing population of England would require more crops and further imports were required.³⁰³ However, the crash in the market predicted to follow the repeal of the Corn Laws did not occur. Even though imports increased significantly in the 30 years following repeal, Howell found that aside from 1848-52 being years of depression, Britain was protected from the potential impact repeal could have had. 1850 has also been noted as a year of poor harvests and “great agricultural distress”.³⁰⁴ War and high transport costs limited imports across the period and those that did arrive did nothing more than supply the increase in domestic demand as population increased. Howell found that only wheat was imported in sufficient quantities to depress domestic prices in this period whilst prices for barley and oats actually rose.³⁰⁵ Following the slump up to 1858, Daunton saw prices rising again, to peak in 1865.³⁰⁶

³⁰¹ J. Davies, *Cardiff and the Marquesses of Bute* (Cardiff, 1981), p.184.

³⁰² Thompson, ‘An Inquiry’, p.593.

³⁰³ *Overstone Correspondence*, p.371; University of London MS804/1655.

³⁰⁴ Thompson, ‘An Inquiry’, p.598.

³⁰⁵ Howell, *Land and People*, p.5.

³⁰⁶ Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare*, p.169.

However, prices were not wholly depressed after 1865 and soon began to increase again, producing a 'golden age' and peaking, in the majority of cases, in the early 1870s.³⁰⁷ The effect of repealing the Corn Laws, which had little effect in 1846, appears to have been significant after 1873. Olson and Harris calculated that as a result between 1873 and 1894 British wheat production fell by around 60 per cent.³⁰⁸ Furthermore, Richard Perren pointed out that rents and estate income fell to a greater extent on arable than on livestock estates between 1872-4 and 1890-2.³⁰⁹

From the mid-1870s however an economic slump occurred owing to a number of factors and which caused both prices and domestic supply to fall and, of course, farmers' profits followed. Lord Ernle considered the 1870s to 1890s to be a period of depression.³¹⁰ F.M.L. Thompson, on the other hand, noted in 1991 that

The vocabulary of depression and the despondent flavours of ill-fortune and failure, have never disappeared from accounts of agriculture after the mid-1870s, despite the work of revisionists.³¹¹

Indeed, Thompson further argued that the notion of a depression after the 1870s was entirely inaccurate. He found that agricultural decline was not universal, with different areas and different types of farming being affected differently, to varying degrees and at varying times throughout what has been classified as the depression from the mid-1870s. However, he did find that in a number of counties 'there was agricultural decline, and probably enduring depression among farmers and landowners – but not labourers'. And, amongst the counties he considered subject to such a depression one finds Northamptonshire.³¹²

³⁰⁷ Howell, *Land and People*, p.7.

³⁰⁸ M. Olson Jr and C.C. Harris Jr, 'Free Trade in 'Corn': A Statistical Study of Prices and Production of Wheat in Great Britain from 1873-1914' in Perry, P.J. (ed.), *British Agriculture 1875-1914* (London, 1973), pp.172, 176.

³⁰⁹ R. Perren, 'The Landlord and Agricultural Transformation, 1870-1900' in Perry, *British Agriculture*, p.113.

³¹⁰ Lord Ernle, 'The Great Depression and Recovery, 1874-1914' in Perry, *British Agriculture*, p.1.

³¹¹ F.M.L. Thompson, 'An Anatomy of English Agriculture, 1870-1914' in B.A. Holderness. and M. Turner, *Land, Labour and Agriculture, 1700-1920: Essays for Gordon Mingay* (London, 1991), p.211.

³¹² F.M.L. Thompson, 'Private Property and Public Policy' in Holderness & Turner, *Land, Labour and Agriculture*, p.240; R. Blake and H. Cecil (eds.), *Salisbury: The Man and his Policies* (Basingstoke, 1987), p.253.

Overall there were two main factors which led to a decline of agriculture in England from the 1870s – low domestic yields and increased imports from the Americas and the British colonies. These factors varied greatly between different farming types (in particular arable farming compared to dairying or more specialized farming such as market gardening) and as a result so did the level of recession. The problem of domestic supply affected a number of agricultural products and types of farming. Lord Ernle suggested that the early 1870s were characterised by ‘bleak springs and rainy summers’ which ‘produced short cereal crops of inferior quality, mildew in wheat, mould in hops, blight in other crops, disease in cattle, rot in sheep, throwing heavy lands into foul condition, deteriorating the finer grasses of pastures’.³¹³

It has been theorised that in the 1870s-80s farmers made this bad situation worse by increasing their supply in order to maintain their own total profits but actually only succeeded to saturate the market, driving prices down even further. However, Thompson argued that this was not the case. From the 1870s to 1890s, he found, some farmers increased production of products that remained profitable whilst others cut back production of less profitable goods, presumably partly as a bid to drive up prices by restricting supply and in part to reallocate those lands to more profitable produce.³¹⁴ However, in Northamptonshire landlords were commenting on the bleak weather and problems with produce which Lord Ernle described and did not discuss changes in land use as maintaining profitability. Yet even where farmers did alter production and controlled supply to the market the problem of improved transport and the imports this brought in was still significant. Whilst Britain’s railways and canals had aided domestic markets, improvements to overseas transport, against a market no longer protected by the Corn Laws pushed down prices by increasing supply. The 1870s saw America’s railways extended into the mid-western prairies. This, added to the introduction of steam carriage by sea and land, led to a great increase in American exports to Britain.³¹⁵ The effects of these imports were greatest on corn producers.³¹⁶

Later the effects of increased imports became more widespread. From the mid-1880s refrigeration techniques had also been perfected, enabling the importation of chilled and frozen meat as well as cheese from America and cheese, butter, bacon and eggs from Europe. Yet Howell saw these as impacting negatively on domestic produce prices not because supply

³¹³ Ernle, ‘The Great Depression’, p.3.

³¹⁴ Thompson, ‘Anatomy of English Agriculture’, p.220.

³¹⁵ Williamson, *Transformation*, p.171; Ernle, ‘The Great Depression’, p.3.

³¹⁶ Howell, *Land and People*, p.8.

outstripped demand – demand was rising as population increased – but because the imported goods arrived at a time when domestic productivity was low due to bad harvests.³¹⁷

Such a significant fall in prices reflected in farmers' incomes and therefore their ability to pay rent.³¹⁸ The result of this was that landowners' agricultural incomes (rental and home farm) fell dramatically, Thompson calculated by as much as a half, in the fifteen or twenty years after 1878. As a result many landowners had to sell their lands as expenditure, particularly on wages and luxury goods, could not be reduced to the same extent as it had been necessary to reduce rents by.³¹⁹ Therefore, even by this late in the nineteenth century a significant number of landlords were still reliant on tenurial income and, furthermore, still susceptible to market and price changes. After the mid-1870s prices did not improve significantly until the years following 1897, beyond the end of the period of this study. But even then the level was only that of the mid-1860s, with prices only returning to their 1870s peak levels again in 1914.³²⁰

Thus prices fluctuated dramatically in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, increasing overall but having peaks and troughs where import levels were affected or harvests had been particularly good or poor. As a result tenant profits were affected leaving them with either greater profits which landlords sought their share of or unable to pay their rents. The effect of price changes can be seen in both levels of investment and rent levels as those coming into the land would negotiate different levels of rent or those on it would agree new rents as soon as their tenancy enabled them.

Rent as Dependent on the Type of Farming Undertaken

As profitability varied, rents were also dependent on the type of farming the land was put to. Not only did the topographical merits of the land determine this but prices of various goods would lead farmers or landlords to instigate a change to the type of farming on a holding or estate and changes with the rent accordingly. Until around 1750, Allen found, pasture rents tended to be higher than arable, reflecting falling prices for arable produce. After 1750, Turner *et al* found, the difference between arable and pasture rents was inconsistent but not a great

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.3.

³¹⁸ Thompson, 'An Inquiry', p.601 identified rents beginning to fall after 1877, when prices had been depressed for several years.

³¹⁹ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p.303.

³²⁰ Howell, *Land and People*, p.9.

deal.³²¹ At the other end of the period of this study, English found that when arable prices began to fall in the 1870s many Wolds farmers returned to pasture farming as they were no longer able to profit from corn.³²² However, in terms of rents and their link to the type of farming undertaken, Turner *et al* argued that landlords sought to assume direct control of their estates which they did in part by adding 'tightly drawn clauses' to their leases which determined how the land was to be farmed.³²³ However, on the Northamptonshire estates of this study there is no evidence of landowners dictating the type of farming undertaken so closely, although that is not to say this did not happen - the majority of sets of Montagu accounts did specify the type of farming being undertaken on each holding if not for each field, showing that landlords did pay attention to what use the land was put to, even if they did not dictate its use.

One point of note in the Montagu accounts is that sometimes lands were sublet. This demonstrates that rents were under the maximum which could be charged as tenants would not sublet if they made no money from it. Evidence of subletting in England has also been identified elsewhere. Spring, for example, commented on the persistence of subletting in the late-nineteenth century, when

The holder of the building lease was usually not the occupant. Indeed, repeated subletting often led to a situation so confused that the original lessee could not be easily discerned.³²⁴

Therefore subletting did occur in England, demonstrating that tenants could lease their lands out for higher rents than they themselves were paying.

Therefore the use of the land was a factor considered by both tenants farming it and landlords leasing it. This was usually in the interests of maximising profits on the part of tenants and, as differing rent levels show, this was also a factor considered by landlords. However, as landlords also had a strong interest in maintaining the long-term profitability of land, their interest in the type of farming undertaken also further works to demonstrate an interest in

³²¹ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.55.

³²² B. English, 'On the Eve of the Great Depression: The Economy of the Sledmere Estate 1869-1878', *Business History* 24 (1982), p.27.

³²³ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.15.

³²⁴ D. Spring, 'The English Landed Estate in the Age of Coal and Iron: 1830-1880', *Journal of Economic History* 11:1 (1951), p.9.

ensuring land was not exhausted and was improved in ways beneficial to both tenant and estate.

Conclusion

Thus improvements and investment in agriculture were central to rural society in the nineteenth century and had a significant impact on the rental economy. The improvement which has been of most interest to historians has been enclosure as this had the greatest impact on the landscape and has been argued as the cause of proletarianization of the poor as well as creating larger farms and leading to practices such as high farming. However, what has been shown here is that improvements to the land were not all landlord-driven and that tenants had a personal interest in increasing productivity as it would increase their own profits. As a result a number of improvements were undertaken at tenant demand (with landlord agreement).

Investment in the land was usually undertaken by landlords putting up the financial investment whilst tenants undertook the work and rents were increased accordingly, to pay back what was effectively a loan by the landlord for the work undertaken, as well as transferring a proportion of the increased profit to the landlord. Whilst it has been argued that landlords took a higher proportion of the farm's income following investment tenants had to be willing to improve and, as they often instigated the changes, tenants must have profited too.

Investment in the land was also highly dependent on prevailing prices, increasing when a greater profit could be made. However, prolonged depression also brought about increased investment. As shall be shown in chapter 4 and 5 landlords utilized a number of measures in order to maintain rent levels and keep tenants on the land in times of agricultural depression. Investing in the land was one such measure, intended to increase productivity and farm profits enough to keep rent levels up. Better quality farmland was also more appealing to prospective tenants when demand for land was low.

Chapter 4 – The Setting and Agreement of Rent Levels

Introduction

Changing rent levels were central to the agricultural economy of the nineteenth century. Rents were the principal bond between landlord and tenant and the leasing of land was relied upon by both parties for their livelihoods. Turner *et al* defined rent as ‘the price paid by one group in society, the farmers, to another group, the landlords, for the utility of the soil’ which was fixed ‘under conditions agreeable to both parties’.³²⁵ Thus in order to understand rural society and landlord-tenant relations on landed estates one must understand why rent levels were set as they were. This chapter will examine both changing rent levels and what made them ‘agreeable’ to landlords and tenants as well as how this varied depending on individual tenants or wider economic conditions.

Central factors governing changes in rent levels were the supply of and demand for land. Turner *et al* found a number of reasons for changes in rent levels, not only economic but also social. Indeed, tenurial demand depended significantly upon the perception of the profitability of a farm and predicted, rather than current, price levels.³²⁶ Factors such as the soil type, proximity of a farm to markets, the size of the farm, the type of lease, the type of farming the landlord would lease it out for and the personality of a landlord all went some way towards determining the level of a rent. Thus this chapter will explore both the social and economic factors affecting rent levels both in terms of individual negotiations and estate-wide trends across the nineteenth century, with an in-depth analysis of the recession following the French Wars in the first half of the nineteenth century.

In order to examine changing rent levels in context this chapter begins with a discussion of the trends in rent levels across the period and the social and economic constructs which affected them. Rents on two of the Northamptonshire estates of this study are examined in detail in the context of Turner *et al*'s national rental index, focussing on the rapidly changing economic circumstances following the French Wars (1792-1815). The chapter then moves on to discuss changing farm sizes across the period and their effect on rent levels across the period .

Both rental figures and correspondence regarding rent levels and the setting of rents will be used in order to examine changes in set rents and the agreement of rent levels and the reasons

³²⁵ M.E. Turner, J.V. Beckett and B. Afton, *Agricultural Rent in England, 1690-1914* (Cambridge, 1997), pp.1, 206.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.199.

rents were set at the levels they were in the nineteenth century. The changing spread of rents as the economy changed and lands were improved will also be examined.

It will be shown that landlords and tenants were both primarily interested in their own profits but that landlords were often prepared to negotiate in the short term in order to preserve the long-term profitability of the land. Different methods of managing, negotiating and setting rents and the reasons rent levels were set as they were will also be examined.

The rents discussed in this chapter are however limited to rent levels agreed and permanent changes made to them. The payment of rents, arrears and temporary abatements will be discussed in chapter 5 which will establish how the rural rental economy operated after leases had been agreed, in particular where the economy fell into recession.

Sources

The most extensive collection of rental data available for any of the estates covered by this study are the accounts of the Montagu estate. Rental data for the Montagus' Boughton estate is available for the majority of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Furthermore, the Lords Montagu and their stewards kept a notes column detailing the reasons for changes in rent levels and tenants, providing more information on rents across the period. Rental accounts for the other estates of this study are not as complete, if they have survived at all. However, a run of Overstone accounts is extant for a portion of the early-nineteenth century. As a result, the quantitative data for this study is reliant on these two estates in the first instance.

When it comes to rental data one must first acknowledge a number of limitations to the data available. Even in 1907 Robert Thompson faced the problem that not all account books survived and it was difficult to separate out woods, moors, parks and residential buildings from the agricultural holdings.³²⁷ The issue of surviving evidence (or indeed account books being kept in any clear manner in the first place) is one faced elsewhere, with David Stead noting that Turner *et al*'s rental index inevitably gained bias from this and the estate of this study being chosen to a significant degree by availability of evidence.³²⁸ The Ashley's of Northamptonshire, for example, have good records of the enclosure of their estate - Lord Ashley himself being an avid supporter - but the extant estate accounts consist simply of a collection of receipts for

³²⁷ R.J. Thompson, 'An Inquiry into the Rent of Agricultural Land in England and Wales During the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 70:4 (1907), p.588.

³²⁸ D.R. Stead, 'Risk and Risk Management in English Agriculture, c.1750-1850', *The Economic History Review* 57:2 (2004), p.352.

income and outgoings held together by pins, making the study of rents on the estate nigh on impossible.

Thompson's concern with separating out non-agricultural rents was also stressed by H.G. Hunt, although the records he was using contained some detail on shops and public houses, enabling them to be removed. Hunt also noted that the sole of land through the period may skew figures as a parish may change in size depending on the estate ownership within it.³²⁹ Fortunately, the Montagu accounts do specify the nature of holdings, minimizing this issue. The Overstone accounts are not as clear but do occasionally note the nature of a holding. Where identifiable, all non-agricultural holdings have been removed from analysis.

An initial overview of broad trends is given for the entirety of the period using a sample of the Montagu data. For this, accounts from 1801 and every tenth year following through to 1881 have been used. Added to this, the period 1814 to 1831 has been examined in more detail using detailed figures and analysis of the Montagu accounts have been used covering the period 1815-1831. The Overstone accounts are also available for the lands of Samuel Jones Loyd (later Lord Overstone) from 1827 to 1831.

The rental economy following the French Wars has been chosen as it was a period of significant change in the rental economy, when the inflated prices of the wars fell and English agriculture was thrown into a prolonged recession until the 1830s. The period has been employed in this chapter to examine changes in real rents whilst in chapter 5 the same data has been used to examine the spread of arrears and abatements of rent. Whilst the Montagu accounts provide the most complete picture of the period, the late 1820s were still a period of depressed rents and the Overstone accounts therefore add to the general picture as well as providing a comparison for the changes in Montagu rents. Both of these can then be compared to Turner, Becket and Afton's national rental index in order to see how Northamptonshire rents compared to the country more widely.

However, there are limits to the statistical data available for the Northamptonshire estates – whilst Turner *et al* relied on rent per acre the figures are unavailable for the estates of this study. Instead the changing spread of rents has been used in order to demonstrate the rise and fall of real rents. As shall be shown the changing spread of rent on an estate year on year

³²⁹ H.G. Hunt, 'Agricultural Rent in South-East England, 1788-1825', *AgHR* (1958), p.99.

demonstrates fluctuations in the general level of rents, even though farm size data is unavailable.

Even though the quantitative data does form a significant part of the analysis of this study qualitative data is utilized to reinforce the conclusions drawn from the accounts data. Furthermore, landlords' and stewards' attitudes towards tenants and, to a lesser extent, the views of tenants of the estate and its management can also be gauged using both the memoranda in the accounts (which were utilized more freely in the Montagu accounts than the Overstone and provide not only views on the economy and tenant's ability to pay but on the social and financial situation and even occasionally the character of individual tenants). Added to this, as noted previously, there is an extensive wealth of qualitative evidence available for the other estates of this study.

The Overstone estate in particular has a wealth of correspondence data which provides further information on the thinking behind rent levels and the agricultural economy more widely, including taxation and regulation debated in Parliament, the thinking of great estate owners of the time and discussions between Lord Overstone and his friends regarding the land and value of agriculture. Lord Overstone also managed a significant farm on the Overstone estate, rather than letting out all his land, and regularly discussed farming methods and improvements with his peers. The Langham estate has more limited data but this consists of correspondence between James Langham and his estate manager throughout the 1820s, principally concerned with the profitability of land in the recession following the French Wars. The wealth of correspondence evidence for the period is another reason why this study has focussed on the post-French Wars recession. This evidence is also heavily utilised in chapter 5 as discussion of rent levels in this period inevitably involved discussion of payment of rents, arrears and abatements.

Overview of the Nineteenth-Century Rental Index

Turner *et al* observed that in the first half of the nineteenth century annual leases replaced the former long leases and rents increased dramatically, transferring a larger proportion of tenurial income to landowners than they had previously.³³⁰ David Stead, on the other hand, argued that landlords utilized leases as a management strategy to maximize their own incomes, using year-on-year tenancies where they hoped prices would improve and rents could be increased the next year. Where prices were high, however, he found that tenants were willing to sign longer

³³⁰ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.208.

leases, bearing the entire income risk of farming and still being liable for a high rent where prices later fell.³³¹ Whether or not tenants were tied into leases affected the rent levels on an estate as longer leases would stabilize rent levels even where prices and agricultural incomes changed considerably.

Figure 4:1 shows Turner *et al*'s national rent index for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This shows how rents were linked to prices and fluctuated accordingly but the predominant trend towards increase (until the 1870s) demonstrates the increase in demand for land caused by a dramatically rising population across this period. This overall increase in rents across the period is also notable against the trend towards increasing farm sizes, with the average rent rising despite larger farms usually having lower rents per acre than their smaller counterparts. J.D. Chambers, for example, commented on the loss of tenants through consolidation of holdings throughout the period following enclosure.³³² Thus increases in rent over the period are in part negated by the consolidation of farms in the same space where there were greater numbers previously. But, as shown above, whether as a result of enclosure or otherwise, farm amalgamation and consolidation of holdings was often tenant driven, with landlords simply adhering to their wishes as the loss of large tenants harmed the estate more than letting large, capable tenants increase their holdings.

Furthermore, whilst increases show greater demand for land, falls in rent levels show changes to permanent rents where demand fell. Where demand for land fell tenants would be less willing to pay high rents and there would be fewer tenants at all willing to lease land without being offered concessions. As a result where demand for land fell rent levels would have to be reduced accordingly for those coming into the land. Furthermore, tenants already on the land would often require their rents to be reduced in order to convince them to remain on the land, further reducing overall rent levels on an estate. Yet the overall trends in national rent levels demonstrate the national average rent levels across the period and the socio-economic climate at any one time.

³³¹ Stead, 'Risk and Risk Management', pp.334-5.

³³² J.D. Chambers, 'Enclosure and Labour Supply in the industrial Revolution', *Economic History Review* 5:3 (1953), p.335.

An English agricultural rent index, 1690-1914

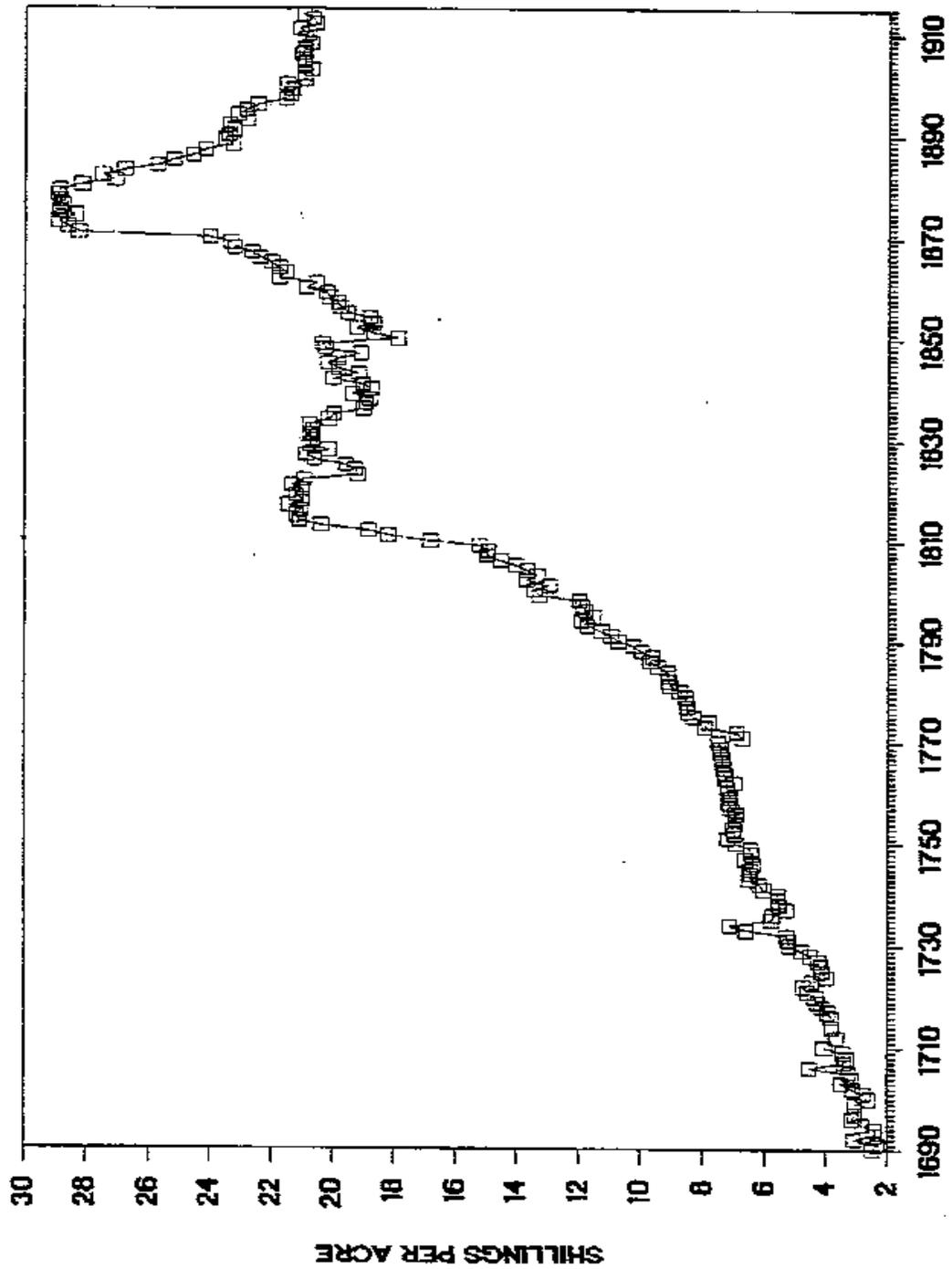


Figure 4:1 Index of agricultural rent assessed in England 1690-1914 (shillings per acre)
SOURCE: Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.149.

It is within this framework that one can examine the spread of rents at any one time. Whilst the national index shows that rents were generally increasing across the period, with fluctuations and depressions identifiable in the 1820s and 1880s, research has also found that farm sizes were increasing. However, the spread of rents on the Northamptonshire estates of this study appears much more stagnant. Changes in agreed rents and increases in farm sizes would both lead one to expect a change in the pattern of rents as well as the rent per acre. However, as shall be shown, as larger farms came into being smaller holdings were also broken down and individual fields moved into different holdings.

Turner *et al*'s national rental index shows abnormally high rents in the early-nineteenth century. After the French Wars ended in 1815, prices, and later rents, began to fall. H.G. Hunt found that rents stagnated as prices fell, before catching up and beginning to fall too.³³³ But even the arrears and abatements with which landlords first approached the problem of falling prices were, to some, too slow a response to falling prices causing tenants to impoverish the soil in an attempt to pay their rents.³³⁴ The time-lag between falls in prices and changes to permanent rents is most evident here in the rental index. Whilst prices began to fall from the end of the war, permanent rents did not fall until the 1820s, reductions in the interim being made by allowing arrears and/or granting abatements. Despite the depth and length of the recession in this period, by 1850 rents had recovered sufficiently and were even increasing. Turner *et al* found that by 1850-1 rent per acre was 35 shillings, 10 shillings more than it had been in the war years in 1810-11.³³⁵

The final peak in rents was in the 1870s. After this, prices began to fall dramatically, imports took away domestic demand and rents (and tenant numbers) fell across England. F.M.L. Thompson found that from 1872/3 to 1892/3 rents fell by 16.8% across England and by 24% in Northamptonshire in particular.³³⁶ Following this, Beckett noted that rents plummeted from 1879 and by 1900, Robert Thompson noted, rents were only 30% of their early-1870s level.³³⁷ Not only does the national rental index provide corroborating evidence for this dramatic slump

³³³ Hunt, 'Agricultural Rent in South-East England', pp.100-1.

³³⁴ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.241.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.46-7.

³³⁶ F.M.L. Thompson, 'Anatomy of English Agriculture, 1870-1914' in Holderness, B.A. & Thompson, F.M.L., *Land, Labour and Agriculture, 1700-1920: Essays for Gordon Mingay* (London, 1991), p.226.

³³⁷ J.V. Beckett, 'Agricultural Landownership and Estate Management' in E.J.T. Collins (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales volume 7, 1850-1914 (Part 1)*, (Cambridge, 2000), p.745; Thompson, 'An Inquiry', p.596.

in rentals but landlord correspondence, particularly that of Lord Overstone, demonstrates the extent of the economic problems this caused for wealthy landowners and the landed estate as an economic entity. In 1880 Overstone even described the falling rents on his estates as having to 'look ruin in the face'.³³⁸ Howell noted that the fall in rental values led to 'financial hardship' for even the wealthiest of landowners and that in difficult years larger estates even invested further in the land to try and attract tenants.³³⁹ Indeed, with mortgages, investment, home farm management and other outgoings, Barbara English found that the Sledmere estate actually made a loss in 1898 with outgoings of £47,951 compared to only £16,716 in 1882.³⁴⁰ One could speculate that a part of this huge leap in outgoings was due to investment in the land. Cannadine found that rents remained depressed for the next seventy years, causing many to have to sell their assets and land was no longer the safest form of investment, soon overtaken by business fortunes.³⁴¹

As noted above, however, there existed a time-lag between price changes and rent changes as rental markets and leases responded to changes in prevailing prices, owing to external factors such as confidence in the market and landlord's ability and willingness to change rent levels. This is most noticeable in the change in the spread of rents in the 1820s, where levels appear to have remained fairly constant despite the deep recession of the decade. However, rents did not remain stagnant in this period in practice, with alternative measures to reduce rents in the short-term being examined for the same accounts in chapter 5.

Overview of the Nineteenth-Century Spread of Rents

Figure 4:2 shows the changing spread of rents in a sample of Montagu accounts across the nineteenth century. A sample of Montagu accounts for every ten years has been used, covering the period 1801 – 1881. In the nineteenth century rents on the Montagu estate were paid annually at Lady Day so there is one set of accounts for each year of the sample. This sample has been used in the same way in chapter 5.

³³⁸ Overstone Correspondence, p.1324.

³³⁹ D.W. Howell, *Land and People in Nineteenth-Century Wales* (London, 1977), pp.56-7.

³⁴⁰ B. English, 'On the Eve of the Great Depression: The Economy of the Sledmere Estate 1869-1878', *Business History* 24 (1982), p.40.

³⁴¹ D. Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London, 1992). P.27.

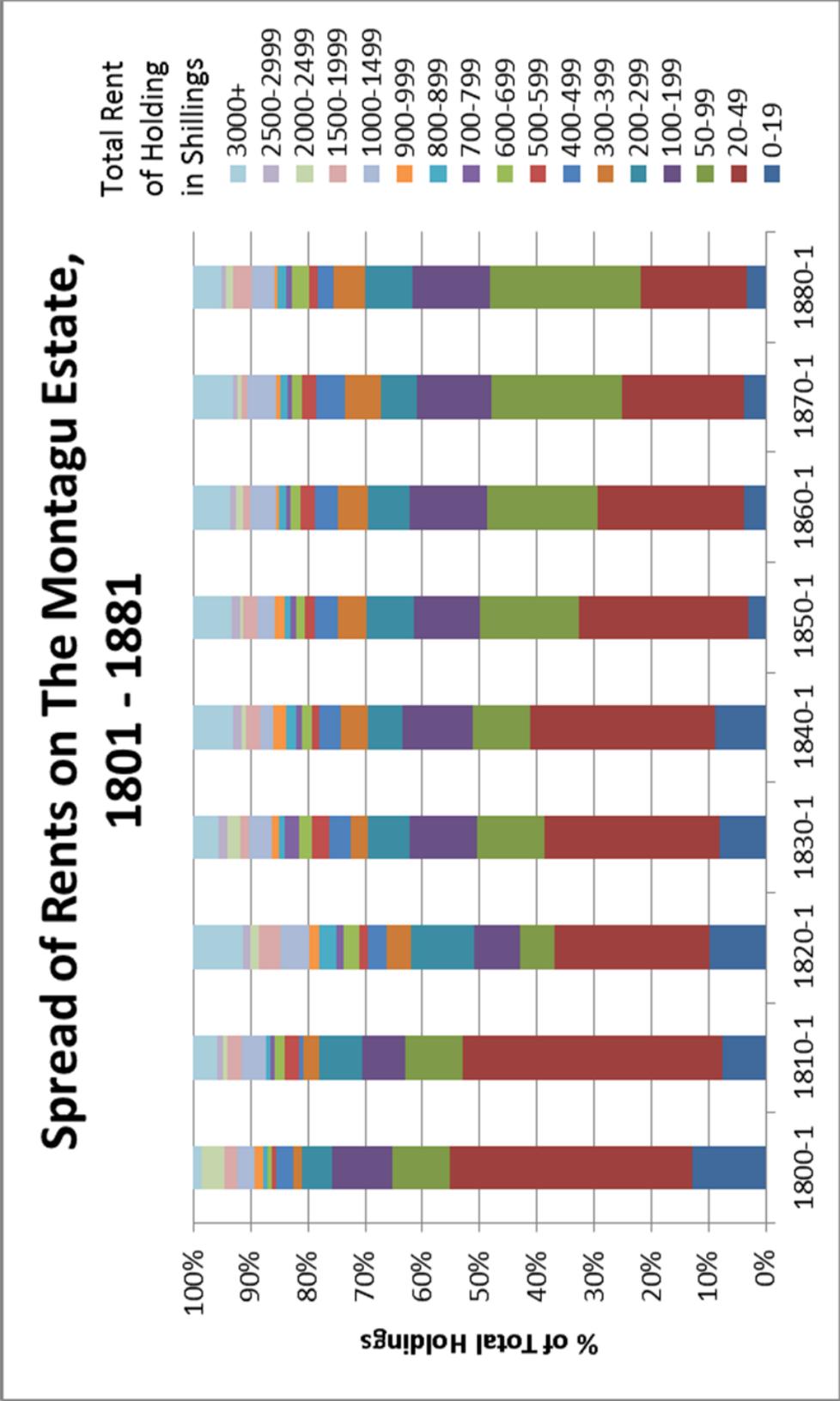


Figure 4:2: Spread of Rents on the Montagu Estate, 1800-1881

Whilst figures show the total rents on the Montagu estate increasing throughout this period the spread of rents remained fairly consistent. Across the nineteenth century one can pinpoint several trends, including a fall in lower rents in the period of high prices early in the century, most notable in the 1820-1821 account and a longer-term trend towards higher rents.

Following the anomalous rent levels shown in the 1820-1 account one also finds changes in rental patterns which can be tracked across the remainder of the century. Whilst set rents are shown as abnormally high in the 1820-1 account from 1830-1 onwards there are noticeably less tenants paying under 50 shillings *per annum* than in the 1810-1 account and a lower percentage of rents at even 1,000 shillings and under. The number of tenants paying between 50 and 700 shillings *per annum* increased and those paying below 50s fell. However, the greatest increase was in the numbers paying 51-100 shillings whilst the proportion paying over 2,000 shillings per annum remained almost constant throughout the whole of the nineteenth century (with the exception of the 1820-1821 account).

All this is coupled with small but sustained growth in the percentage paying over 3,000 shillings per annum, which lasts until 1881 when this group begins to decline. Therefore, this movement is consistent with Turner *et al's* rental index and shows that the spread of rents was moving in favour of higher rents. The accounts for 1831 and after also have a significantly higher number of tenants than the earlier accounts but this number remains fairly consistent for the rest of the century, showing an increase in the numbers of tenants paying higher rents and not just new lands being brought into the estates with new tenants with them.

It is also of note here that although the increase in rents in the 1821 account was not sustained the spread of rents never returned to their pre-1821 levels and rents of under 50 shillings *per annum* were never paid by more than 41% of tenants, despite being over 50% in both the 1800-1 and 1810-1 accounts. This group had also fallen to just 21% of tenants by 1880-1 but was coupled with a significant increase in those paying 51-100 shillings (10% in 1800-1, 11% in 1831 and 27% of tenants by 1881).

However, the nature of sampling means that the above can only provide us with an overview of the period. As a result a detailed analysis has been undertaken for one of the short periods of great change in the nineteenth century agricultural economy – the end of the French Wars (1792-1815) and the post-war recession, which is usually taken to have ended around 1830, although as has been noted in chapter 2 the nature of this recession has been debated by historians. For this case studies have been undertaken for the two estates where accounts for this period are available – the Montagu Estate (1815-1831) and the shorter run of accounts for the Overstone Estate (1828-1831).

Case Study: The Post-French Wars Recession

In terms of the post-French Wars recession, the dramatic changes to the economy in this period have been identified as leading to rapidly falling prices, a loss of confidence in the land and a fall in agreed rent levels. Whilst it is true that prices fell considerably between 1801 and 1821, they had begun to rise again by 1831. Table 4:1 shows changes in the prices of agricultural produce in the early-nineteenth century and the percentage change from the 1801 price of wheat, barley and oats. As can be seen prices had fallen to around half their 1801 levels by 1821 but were beginning to recover in 1831, although they had still not reached the levels they had been at the turn of the century. As one would expect this had a knock-on effect on rent levels.

	1801	1811	1821	1831
Wheat	5.975 (100)	4.765 (79.75)	2.804 (46.93)	3.317 (55.51)
Barley	3.425 (100)	2.211 (64.55)	1.300 (37.95)	1.900 (55.47)
Oats	1.850 (100)	1.379 (74.54)	0.975 (52.70)	1.300 (70.27)

Table 4:1 Prices of agricultural produce in £/Qtr (Prices as a percentage of 1801 price)

SOURCE: Mitchell and Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, pp.488-9

As noted above Turner *et al* found a significant change in rent levels in this period. However, whilst both prices and rent levels were adversely affected by the price falls of this period there is a noticeable time-lag in changes to agreed rents, with temporary measures being used to reduce rents in the short-term. This, again, will be discussed in detail in chapter 5. Even when one accounts for this time-lag in changing rent levels, however, changes in the spread of rents were not as prevalent as one may expect, particularly over the short term. This emphasizes the importance of other rent control measures and, as Cragoe pointed out, the reluctance of tenants to leave the land.³⁴²

Figure 4:3 shows the spread of rents on the Montagus' Boughton estate 1815-1831, corresponding with the post-French Wars recession. Whilst one would expect a time-lag in the fall of rents or, indeed, the change in spread of rents following the wars, there is little obvious trend at all in the Montagu figures. Whilst numbers of tenants and the spread of rents did fluctuate year on year there is no definitive trend across this 16 year period. Some patterns can be identified but the majority of the changes which are apparent on the graph can easily be accounted for in slight changes to tenant numbers and the natural movement of tenants.

³⁴² M. Cragoe, *An Anglican Aristocracy: The Moral Economy of the Landed Estate in Carmarthenshire 1832-1895* (Oxford, 1996), p.34.

Spread of Rents on The Montagu Estate, 1815 - 1831

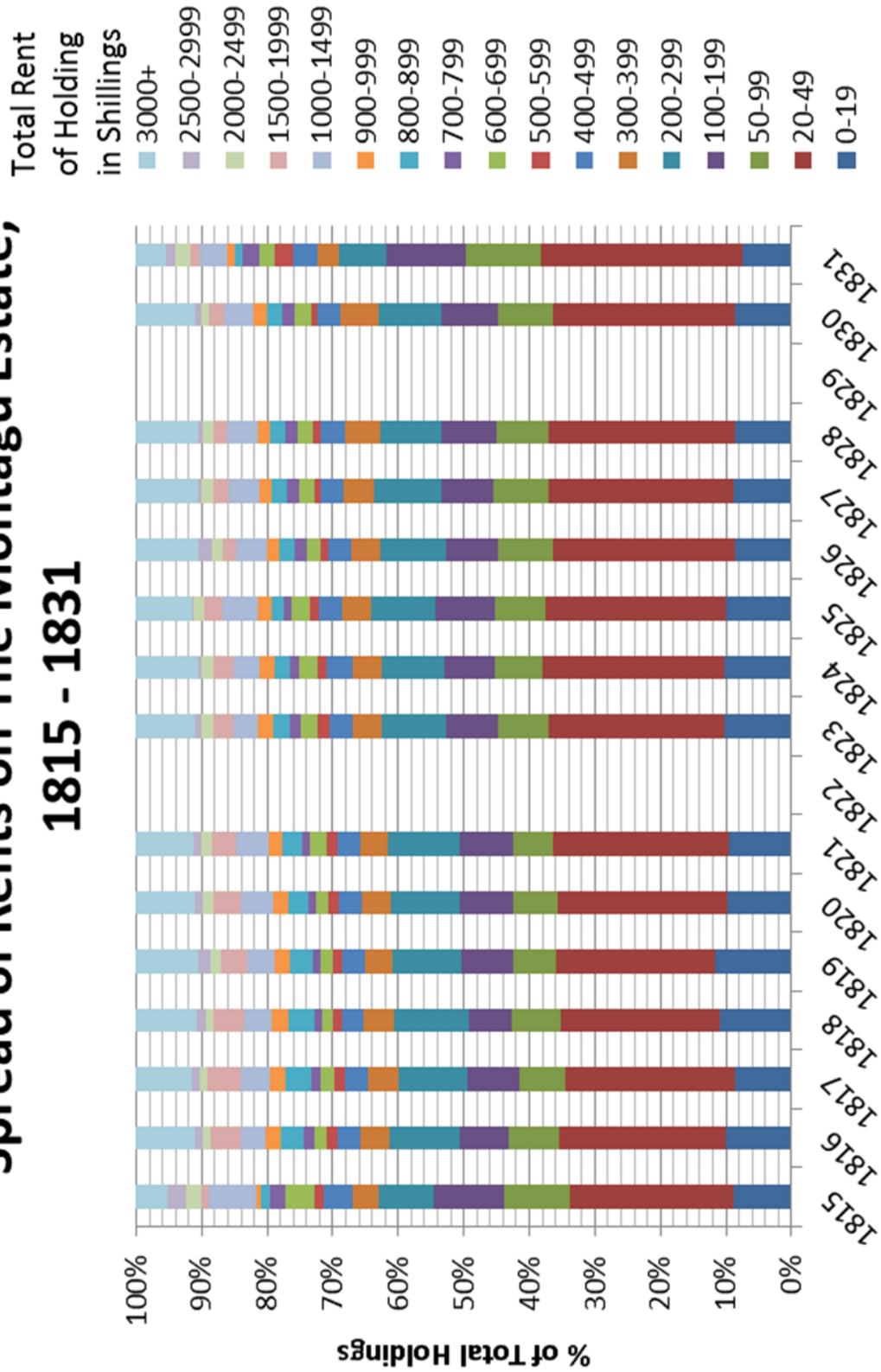


Figure 4:3: Montagu French Wars Figs

At the beginning of the period one can identify a drop in those paying under 100 shillings *per annum* from 1815-17 with rents of 51-100 shillings continuing to account for a smaller proportion of the total until 1821. Outside of this there is little identifiable by way of a trend. The persistence of both those paying under 50 shillings *per annum* and those paying over 3,000 shillings *per annum* suggests that large farmers still existed on the estates but their persistence was not at the cost of small tenants. However, the groups in between also show no definitive fluctuation across the period, demonstrating that the largest and smallest tenants were not surviving at the expense of the middling groups.

Figure 4:4, on the other hand, shows changes in the spread of rents on the Overstone estate. Whilst these figures are only available for 1828-1831 one can identify a trend in the spread of rents. In terms of the small landholders, those paying under 50 shillings *per annum* fall consistently in each account, although only by 1-2% every 6 months. The very smallest tenants, those paying under 20 shillings *per annum* actually rises between the first and second accounts but then decreases across the rest of the period, although at a slower rate than those paying under 50s, indicating a fall in those paying over 20s but under 50s.

At the other end of the spectrum, those paying over 2,000 shillings *per annum* are a growing group, despite the wider economic depression. Increasing most dramatically between the second 1828 and first 1829 account (an increase of 6%). However, within this group the proportion of tenants paying over 3,000 shillings *per annum* remains almost completely static, with a fall from 2% to 1% of the total in the second 1829 account which is rectified in the next account.

However, there is a notable exception to the trends noted above – the first account of the series – Lady Day to Michaelmas 1828 – has noticeably lower numbers of tenants paying under 20s and higher numbers paying over 2,000s than in the subsequent account. This could be accounted for in the time lag between the economy falling and agreed rents falling. However, when coupled with the fluctuations in the middling groups of the Overstone rents across one can build a more direct comparison with the Montagu accounts for this period. The Montagu accounts have no definitive trend across the accounts for 1828-31 (although in practice this only consists of three sets of figures) but this pattern, or lack thereof, is characteristic of the Montagu accounts across the period 1815-1831, as examined in detail above. One reason for this could be the nature of the recession. Thompson argued that the ‘recession’ following the French Wars was not simply one downturn in the market but a series of fluctuations in the agricultural economy which could be classed as a number of short recessions but without any extensive booms between. These, he argued, were identified as lasting until the ascension of Queen Victoria in 1838 to

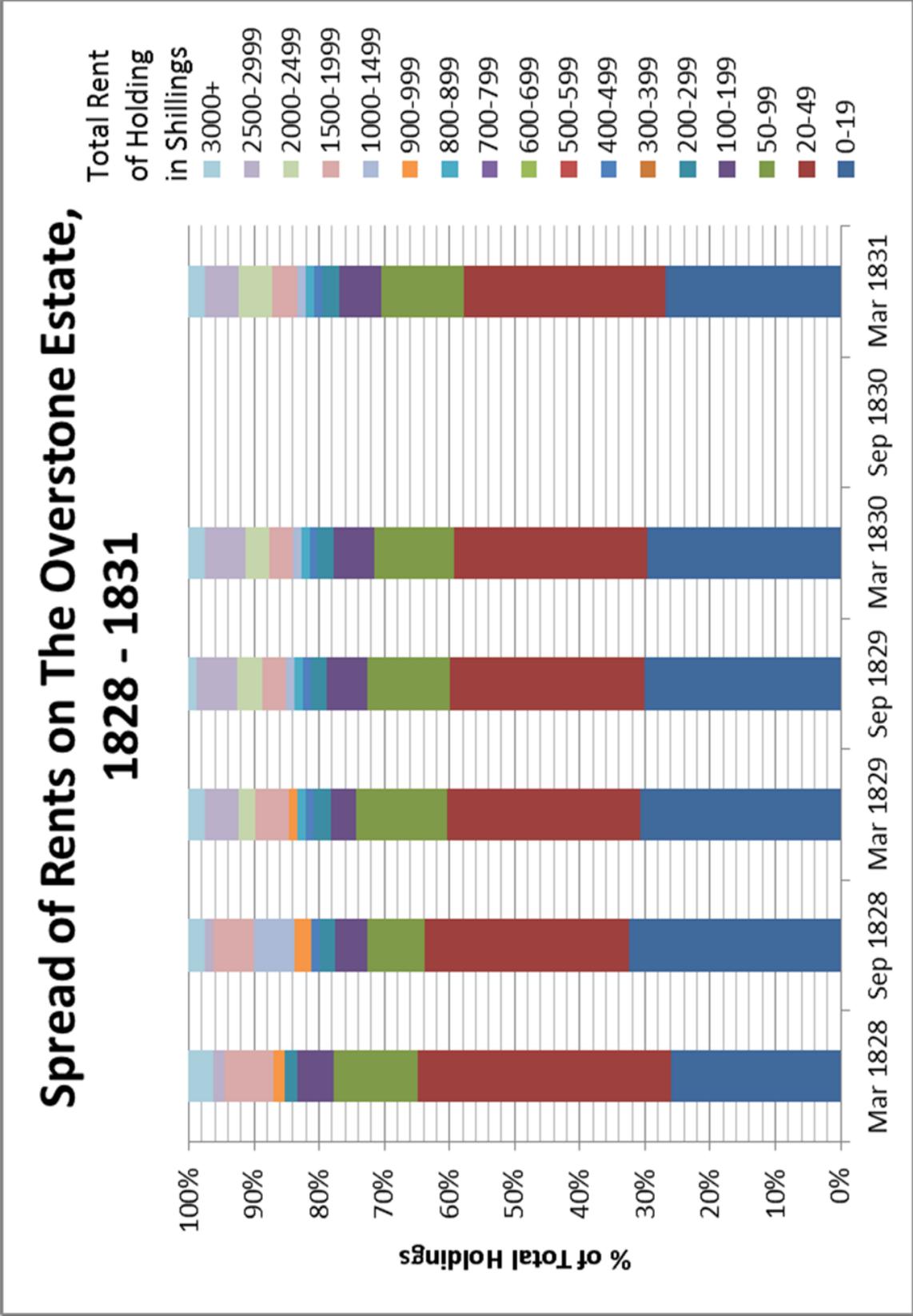


Figure 4:4 Spread of Rents on The Overstone Estate 1828-1831

create the identification of a new economic era with a new monarch.³⁴³ This situation would have created mixed reaction and predictions of the economy, leading to differing demand for and valuations of land and the effect on rents and may well explain the pattern in both the Montagu rents and the middling groups on the Overstone estate.

Ongoing agricultural recession, whether the result of continued recession throughout this period or a number of bad years for farmers and a loss of faith in the income of the land, would also provide a fitting explanation for the fall in those paying the smallest rents, which is identifiable on both estates in this period. The rise in those paying the higher rents on the Overstone estate (over 2,000 shillings *per annum*) and the persistence of the groups paying over 3,000 shillings on the Montagu estate also indicate the largest farmers were most able to survive the recession and retain their holdings. These tenants, it will be shown in chapter 5, were the most likely to receive temporary abatements or have high levels of arrears tolerated by their landlords and therefore the high agreed rents persist although these were not always the rents collected in practice.

Changing Rent Levels

As shown in chapter 3, rent levels depended greatly on prices. But there were also other factors affecting how rents were set, including negotiations with individual tenants, the quality of land, the size of the farm they were taking on and the financial situation and personality of the landowner.

In his study of Agrarian capitalism Andrew Appleby distinguished two types of rent increases, those which resulted from 'investments in new techniques, improvements, and new crops' and those which took place without these.³⁴⁴ The latter was the type of rent increase more directly dependent on the economy and agricultural markets – as prices increased and farmers could not make greater profits without the need to invest in their holdings landlords may well increase rents to retain their share of the income from the land. Whilst Appleby was primarily concerned with England up to 1700, similar trends are prevalent in the early-nineteenth century, when prices were artificially inflated by the French Wars. However, the period was also one of high enclosure rates, high levels of investment in the land and a change from long leases to annual tenancies or tenancies at will. All these factors served to increase the

³⁴³ F.M.L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1963), p.231.

³⁴⁴ A.B. Appleby, 'Agrarian Capitalism or Seigneurial Reaction? The Northwest of England, 1500-1700', *The American History Review* 80:3 (1975), pp.592-3.

profitability of land and brought with them further increases in rents, somewhat blurring Appleby's distinction. However, with tenancies at will making it easier for rent levels to change and prices being a dominant factor in the setting of and agreement to rent levels, the economic slump following the French Wars is one in which changes in real rents, as well as the spread of rents, can be examined.

The link between prices and rent levels is not skewed but further enforced by rent increases resulting from investment in the land – investments and improvements were more common in times of high prices when there was more money to be made from agriculture and increased productivity would be of most benefit, these were also times where there was more money to invest. But it must also be noted that rental figures show a time lag from price drops. Generally where levels appear steady rather than rising it is because prices were falling. Other measures would be used before rents were reduced, in the form of arrears and abatements which will be dealt with in turn in chapter 5.³⁴⁵

Farm Sizes

Farm sizes and the categories of farm associated with them have been widely debated by historians. The amount of land required for subsistence has been argued as have the definitions of small, middling and large farms. In terms of acreage, the most often used definition is that small farms consisted of those of between 25 and 100 acres, middling 100-150 acres and large anything over 150 acres.³⁴⁶ Greater farm sizes would bring with them a shift in rent levels upwards; even where rents themselves were not increased, and therefore they warrant discussion here.

Changing farm sizes have been a central part of the debate regarding the negative impact of enclosure and changing rural society across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Farm sizes did increase in this period. Whilst a number of historians have attributed this increase to a result of enclosure alone, Daunton found it continued throughout the nineteenth century and calculated that some farms became exceptionally large, with farms of under 300 acres falling in number across Britain after 1851 whilst those between 300 and 1,000 acres increased in

³⁴⁵ J.R. Wordie, *Estate Management in Eighteenth-Century England: The Building of the Leveson-Gower Fortune* (London, 1982), p.168.

³⁴⁶ The figures used to define farm sizes in this study are based on those of J.M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge, 1993), pp.248-9 and others. However, farm sizes have been categorized differently by different historians including G.E. Mingay and J.R. Wordie, as shall be seen in the comparisons made in this section.

number.³⁴⁷ As a result of this shift one would expect a distinct upward turn in the rent per holding across this period. However, as has been shown, the spread of rents on both the Montagu and the Overston estates did not change as dramatically as one would expect were farm sizes increasing dramatically. It shall also be shown that farm sizes did increase as tenants added extra parcels of land to their holdings, although it appears that holdings were being fragmented, creating larger and smaller farms at the same time and thus it was possible for a small farmer to gradually increase his holdings and across generations small farming families could become the large capitalist farmers who supposedly drove them off the lands.

In 1911 the Hammonds concluded that increasing farm sizes were detrimental to rural society, immiserated the poor and proletarianized those who would previously have been able to lease their own lands. As a result they identified enclosure and increasing farm sizes as destroying what they termed the 'farming ladder' – tenants were no longer able to take on small farms to move up the social scale from labourer to farmer as these small farms had been eradicated.³⁴⁸ More recently, J.M. Neeson came to a similar conclusion. Neeson identified increasing farm sizes as negatively impacting upon agricultural communities in Northamptonshire by taking away land from would-be small farmers or even dispossessing the less-wealthy tenant, particularly at enclosure when larger farms were created and smaller ones lost. This, she found, compounded the problems created by the loss of commons and common rights to these small tenants and left them reliant on labourers' wages or poor rates or even caused them to migrate to towns and centres of industry.³⁴⁹ But whether a result of enclosure or just changes over time, the general consensus since the Hammonds has been that larger farms harmed the small tenant and agricultural labourer and took away the social mobility they had previously had. Indeed, historians of other parts of Britain also found larger farms forcing out small tenants, although this was a result of a push for profits more generally and not simply a consequence of enclosure. Andrew Mackillop concluded that in the Scottish Highlands the small farmer was not evicted but pushed out by the destruction of the old methods of farming and patterns of grazing and arable production applied by the small farming community.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁷ M. Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare: An Economic and Social History of Britain 1851-1951* (Oxford, 2007), p.37. For those who directly associated change in farm sizes with enclosure only see H.J. Habakkuk, 'English Landownership, 1680-1740', *Economic History Review* 10:1 (1940), p.16 and Neeson, *Commoners*, p.132.

³⁴⁸ J.V. Beckett, 'The Disappearance of the Cottager and the Squatter from the English Countryside: The Hammonds Revisited' in B.A. Holderness and M. Turner, *Land, Labour and Agriculture, 1700-1920: Essays for Gordon Mingay* (London, 1991), pp.65-6.

³⁴⁹ Neeson, *Commoners*, p.231.

³⁵⁰ A. Mackillop, 'Highland Estate Change & Tenant Emigration' in T.M. Devine & J.R. Young (eds.), *Eighteenth Century Scotland: New Perspectives* (East Linton, 1999), p.244.

The idea of enclosure pushing out the small farmer, or indeed the small farmer being immiserated and dispossessed in order for larger, capitalist farmers to take their place has not gone without challenge. Both J.D. Chambers and G.E Mingay viewed increasing farm sizes as a more gradual change and not simply a result of enclosure or any decision to run large capitalist farms. Chambers argued that the increased rural to urban migration of the period which has been identified was not a result of small tenants or owners being pushed out of landholding at all but simply a result of population increase.³⁵¹ Mingay's statistical data also caused him to argue that changing farm sizes were not the cause of tenants leaving the land or a sudden change instigated by enclosure. Mingay's data caused him to arrive at a similar conclusion to that drawn from the Northamptonshire data – in general farms were increasing, but this was not a sudden change at the expense of the small farmer, but a gradual change which did not result in the ruin of the small tenant and loss of the small farm from the rural economy.³⁵²

Few historians have provided significant amounts of data regarding the actual changes in farm sizes in this period. Whilst Mingay looked at the long-term changes in farm sizes, J.R. Wordie undertook a study of the Leveson-Gower estates, which were spread across England and Scotland but owned by one family, between 1712 and 1832. He found that in this period although large farms did increase in number on the estates so did smallholdings, both in numbers and terms of the acreage covered. Wordie attributed this growth in smallholdings to the increase in population but he also found a decline in middling farms of between 20 and 200 acres and evidence of consolidation of farms. More specifically he found that following the Napoleonic Wars tenants and owner-occupiers holding 20-200 acres declined in number as a result of falling price levels, rising costs, high poor-rates and lack of economies of scale. He also found that increasing farm sizes were not a result of enclosure but an ongoing amalgamation of tenancies.³⁵³

However, it appears that whilst sometimes a farm would simply be amalgamated into its neighbour, more often tenants would add extra fields to their farms when they became available and farms would be dismantled, distributing the fields between several farmers who wished to increase their farms. An extreme example can be found on the Montagu estate in

³⁵¹ Chambers, 'Enclosure and Labour Supply', p.339.

³⁵² G.E. Mingay, *Enclosure and the Small Farmer in the Age of the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1968), p.13.

³⁵³ J.R. Wordie, 'Social Change on the Leveson-Gower Estates, 1714-1832', *Economic History Review* 27:4 (1974), p.p.597-604.

1831 when upon the death of a tenant in Little Oakley his cottage was divided between two men – William Barratt (for £1.0.0) and Thomas Joice (£1.5.0). However, in the main it appears to have been the lands attached and not the cottages themselves which were divided. In the 1851 account one can find several examples of smallholdings being split, including those of William Dainty Snr's holding and Mary Austin's. Dainty's lands, for which he had paid £13*pa* were split between John Baines (£3.10.0) and John Smith (£12), an increase of £2.10.0*pa*. Austin's lands were split between three tenants and the increase of £2.0.10 on her £14 rent is noted in the account. George Bell now leased a part of the holding for £6.10.0*pa*, William Chapman did likewise for £5 and Messers Townsend shared the final part for £4.10.0. Of the men taking on these new holdings it must be noted that Baines, Smith and Bell were all middling farmers (with existing rents of £125-£140*pa*), showing that some middling farms were profiting from small farms being broken up and that large farms were being created in this way. However, Chapman was adding to his £5*pa* farm whilst the Townsends were adding to other lands they jointly leased with James Bayes for £17*pa*.³⁵⁴ Thus, overall, as farms were split to increase existing holdings (both small and large) new small farms were created in the process. In this process there was redistribution of significant amounts of farm land but as small farms became middling and middling farms large, new small farms were being created. Neeson found that by the mid-nineteenth century there was a notable absence of farms between 60 and 100 acres in Northamptonshire and the evidence of this study does show a fall in the lower rents across the nineteenth century.³⁵⁵

However, overall the Northamptonshire evidence shows tenants sought to increase their farm sizes and when prices were good those who could afford to do so would often add vacant strips or fields to their holdings. The correspondence data of my study shows small holders increasing in number as a result of larger farms being broken into separate lands on the quitting of a tenant, leaving a farm house and small quantity of land creating a new small farm whilst adding fields to other farms of all sizes and the Montagu accounts indicate the same. Indeed, between an account document from the Ashley estate (centred on Ashby-St-Ledgers) in the late-nineteenth century and the 1877 farm size figures for the estate there are a number of discrepancies, most notably Owen Faulkner's farm which had increased by 69 acres, making it a middling farm instead of a small farm. But in this period another tenant on the estate had lost one acre from his holding, while Faulkner and W.P. Cowley had both increased their holdings. Joseph Southam's holding had decreased by 1 acre in the interim years, from 92 to 91 acres. Faulkner's holding increased from 22 to 91 acres and W.P. Cowley increased his holding from

³⁵⁴ NRO, Montagu Estate Accounts 388, 398.

³⁵⁵ Neeson, *Commoners*, p.325.

310 to 312 acres.³⁵⁶ Thus the largest increase was on a smallholding, which moved into the top of the middling farm category, whilst the middling farm lost land but remained in the same classification and the largest farm gained very little size in the same period. Thus the small farmer was not being pushed out but was increasing his holding. Therefore the above shows and the below will further demonstrate that farm sizes were increasing throughout this period, but not necessarily as a result of enclosure, nor at the expense of the small farmer, but often to his advantage.

The Northamptonshire evidence also shows that middling farmers were also increasing their holdings in this period. The Langham accounts show one Thomas Underwood taking on a farm 'late Dines' in the 1822 accounts. This is most probably that of Samuel Dines in the 1768 account. Dines fell into the category of middling tenant in 1768, with a holding of almost 60 acres, whilst the holding he left in 1822 was 136 acres. Thus some middling farmers were also increasing the size of their farms, moving into the category of large farmers. Therefore increasing farm sizes were not only something for those already farming large holdings, there was definite social mobility for both the middling and the small farmer. However, elsewhere middling holdings were being broken down to increase the size of other farms and, along with the increase in the amount of land in cultivation, also served to increase the number of small farms.

With regards to the social mobility of small farmers, one can also find evidence on the Langham estate. In the accounts for 1822 two families can be traced back to the 1768 accounts, 54 years earlier. As there were no other families of the same name it is a fair assumption that the holders of the land were of the same families in both years. One of these, Robert Knight was listed in the 1768 account as holding just over 13 acres whilst Robert Knight (possibly the same man but more likely a descendent or relative) in 1822 held over 95 acres. Thus the Knight family had increased their holdings and social status from small farmers (holding up to 100 acres) in 1768 to almost middling farmers in 1822.³⁵⁷ Thus, despite the Hammonds arguing that increasing farm sizes prevented small tenants moving up the farming ladder there are examples to the contrary, with small tenants able to become large tenants. It must be acknowledged, however, that the speed with which the Knight farm grew was probably to some degree a result of the higher profits and increased land in cultivation due to the French Wars. Yet it does demonstrate that small farmers were able and inclined to increase their holdings in this period.

³⁵⁶ NRO, ASL387; ASL367.

³⁵⁷ NRO, L(C)1499; L(C)1506.

Thus increasing farm sizes were not to the detriment of the small farmer or the village labourer. The breaking down of farms left increased numbers of small holdings enabling adult children of farmers and even some labourers to take on holdings for the first time and those already on the land to add fields onto their holdings and increase them gradually. A number of examples of this can be found in the Montagu accounts across the nineteenth century. Unfortunately the changing nature of the accounts means that some years the breakdown of farms is only evident where the leaving tenant had outstanding arrears, although others record in detail how a holding was broken down and the new rents to be paid for various parts of it. As a result one is unable to calculate a rate of change or analyse the breakdown of farms in detail but there is enough evidence of the breakdown of farms for the expansion of others and, indeed, cottages with land left behind creating new smallholdings to demonstrate that the practice was common on the estate.

In both 1851 and 1871 one finds more detailed accounts of the breakdown of the land. In 1851 John Smith took on £12 of land described as the 'remainder of William Dainty's holding'. This was in addition to a £140 *per annum* farm he had taken on Lady Day 1839 and a £11 close added in 1844. In 1871 Revd J.L. Sutton's £48 holding was split between 4 men, including Joseph Bollard who added £8 of grassland to his £3 cottage and garden (held from Lady Day 1870) and Jonathan Smith who added £24 of grassland to his £245.5.0 farm (from Lady Day 1851), £7 meadow (1851) and £16.10.0 grassland (added 1865).³⁵⁸ Thus one can see that throughout the period vacant holdings were being broken down to add to both large farms and smallholdings. Joseph Bollard is of particular note as he added £8 of land to a £3 cottage he had taken on only the year before, demonstrating the social mobility of landless labourers and how quickly the farming ladder could be climbed.³⁵⁹ With farm sizes increasing and even small farmers and new tenants adding to their holdings, the increase in smallholding numbers implies that fields and land would be taken from farms, leaving behind the cottage and perhaps land creating more cottagers and smallholdings.

Furthermore, it is evident that small farmers were also able to increase the size of their farms, challenging the Hammonds' idea that enclosure and increasing farm sizes prevented tenant mobility and immiserated the poor. Neeson's argument that farm size increases were primarily a result of enclosure has also been challenged, with other historians finding what has been shown in a small way above – farm sizes changed over a significant period of time and often to

³⁵⁸ NRO, Montagu Estate Accounts Nos. 47, 397b, 421. Examples of holdings being broken down can also be found in other accounts but less detail is provided regarding the lands being taken on. These include Thomas Branson's lands in 1801-2 (account 323).

³⁵⁹ NRO, Montagu Estate Accounts, Nos. 323, 421.

the benefit of the tenant.³⁶⁰ However, Wordie's suggestion that farm size increases were the result of amalgamating tenancies also has its limitations. In Northamptonshire empty holdings would be split as often than they were amalgamated into one farm, creating several larger farms and often a smallholding attached to the farmhouse. This is what resulted in the increased farm sizes and increased number of smallholdings in a society where there was still a 'farming ladder' and tenants at all levels were able to increase their farm size and improve their social status.

Advantages of Large Farms

Like other improvements, larger farms have been viewed as beneficial to both tenants and landlords. Williamson observed that large farms were favoured by enclosers and farmers alike because of beliefs that they were more productive than their smaller counterparts. A large farm was able to use labour more productively and take advantage of methods of improvement to enjoy higher yields per acre. Large farms also had more capital to invest in new technology and improvements.³⁶¹ However, he also found that despite a belief they were more productive

On average, large farms actually produced lower yields than small ones because small farms were generally found in areas of more fertile soil and large ones in less favoured areas.³⁶²

This was probably owing to a number of factors. Large farmers were more likely to farm high, to attempt to maximise their incomes but pushing their costs up in the process. Large farms were also more likely to diversify in case one type of produce failed or prices were particularly low as they had high rents to pay. Diversification would usually involve using some of the land for growing a crop it was not best suited to. Allen argued that large farms did not have higher yields but were advantageous as they had lower costs per acre than their smaller counterparts, although he saw farms of over 200 acres losing some of this advantage.³⁶³ Large farms may also have been extended onto land newly brought into cultivation, which was not as good quality as the lands already being farmed on an estate. As a result smaller farms would have been more

³⁶⁰ Neeson, *Commoners*, p.248.

³⁶¹ T. Williamson, *The Transformation of rural England: Farming and the Landscape 1700-1870* (Exeter, 2002), p.17.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, p.19.

³⁶³ R.C. Allen, 'Enclosure and the Yeoman: The Agricultural Development of the South Midlands 1450-1850' (Oxford, 1992), pp.212-22. He noted the lower costs were brought about primarily by the division of labour lowering the costs of skilled labour.

productive but large farms were still able to generate greater profits as a unit than their smaller counterparts, even if not per acre.

In keeping with this, Mingay argued that large farmers did have lower costs and were more ready to adopt improvements on their farms than their smaller counterparts but that this did not necessarily lead to greater profits per acre. Furthermore, he suggested that large farmers were more ready (and able) to adopt new technologies, techniques and improvements than were smaller men. He found that in general economic forces did favour larger farming units but this varied depending on soil type, local climate and markets. He also found that economies of scale were of limited importance to large farmers before the mid-nineteenth century. Whilst larger farmers were more likely to adopt improvements or changes in farming as they had the capital to invest in them small farmers could also profit from changes and improvements, especially where their lands enabled specialisation in profitable produce.³⁶⁴

What is certain, in Northamptonshire at least is that whilst some farms grew in size the small farm still persisted and survived throughout this period, even beyond the mid-nineteenth century. Mingay suggested that this survival was predominantly due to the specialisation of small farms. He found that before the mid-nineteenth century small farms began to specialise in certain farming types and practices, including dairying and 'speciality' production, such as 'vegetables, fruit, poultry, eggs, milk, hops and hay' were more 'suited to a small acreage'.³⁶⁵ Mingay's view is, however, at odds with contemporary opinion. Ardent improver and estate manager Nathaniel Kent (founder of *Kent, Claridge and Pearce*) went against the majority opinion of his time, which was in favour of large farm units and saw them as having significant advantages over small. Kent suggested that there was an optimum farm size and that small farms were of importance. However, what is important here is the reasoning behind Kent's thinking which was not that small farms had any economic advantage which their larger counterparts lacked, as Mingay suggested with regards to specialisation, but that a small farmer was capable of farming the entirety of his holding and work 'more zealously' than his larger counterpart.³⁶⁶ Unusual an argument as this appears, there is quite possibly some truth in it. As with landowners, tenant farmers were reliant on their income from the land and those holding more extensive lands had a more significant gap between profits and living costs. As shown above, even rents of large farms were usually less per acre than small. Thus those reliant on the

³⁶⁴ Mingay, *Enclosure and the Small Farmer*, pp.12-13.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.12-13.

³⁶⁶ Williamson, *Transformation*, p.17; P. Horn, 'An Eighteenth-Century Land Agent: The Career of Nathaniel Kent (1737-1810)', *AgHR* 30:1 (1982), pp.5-6.

land and making little more profit than that required to feed themselves and their families may well be more diligent workers, eager to maximise their profits from their holdings. Further to this, larger farms employed more external (as in non-family) labourers who would be owed the same wages however high farming production was. However, what is certain is that small farms survived throughout this period, despite the growth of large farms.

Tenant Numbers and Farm Size

As has already been mentioned, there is a belief held by a number of historians that increasing farm sizes, particularly at enclosure, were harmful to and dispossessed the small tenant farmer. This belief has persisted in part owing to the influence of the Hammonds' study but predominantly due to a large number of contemporaries condemning the depopulation which resulted from enclosure and the fact that landholders did form a decreasing proportion of the (increasing) national population across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In 1786 one can find examples of both pro- and anti-enclosure commentators discussing the depopulation of the English countryside which was seen to be a result of enclosure. Both viewed the level of depopulation to be considerable. Reverend J. Howlett commented that in Essex population fell considerably in the 20-30 years following enclosure, leaving farm buildings and houses to go to ruin. He even quoted Addington's figures which stated that in a parish during the 15-20 years following enclosure 'a hundred houses and families have dwindled into eight or ten'.³⁶⁷ Further to this, Neeson quoted an anonymous 'country farmer' who wrote in the same year of the positive features of English farming which were lost at enclosure:

[Before enclosure] small farms were numerous, rents were low, and the land was tilled, not left for pasture. Because profit did not come easily, farmers turned their hands to everything. Their wives did the same.³⁶⁸

Thus even some supporters of enclosure at the end of the eighteenth century viewed it as depopulating the English countryside and leaving buildings to go to ruin and those with a negative view finding that depopulation also had a negative effect on those remaining in rural society.

³⁶⁷ Rev. J. Howlett, *An Enquiry into the Influence which Enclosures have had upon the Population of England* (London, 1786), p.10.

³⁶⁸ Neeson, *Commoners*, p.23.

However, the idea of rural depopulation, at enclosure or otherwise, has been challenged by historians on a number of grounds. J.D. Chambers, for example, argued that the consolidation of farms took place on such a scale as to give the illusion that the rural population was falling.³⁶⁹ However, the general consensus appears to be that rural population was *increasing* and the illusion to the contrary was neither a result of rapid farm consolidation nor enclosure. In fact as population increased a smaller proportion were able to hold land and some of the excess population migrated to towns, creating both the illusion that rural depopulation was occurring and the illusion that farm sizes were increasing more dramatically than they were in practice. Indeed, in 1953 Chambers calculated that there was no significant change in population following enclosure. Of the 119 Nottinghamshire villages of his study he found that population increased in all of them after 1800, regardless of whether they had been enclosed or not. More specifically, on the Isle of Axholme (Lincolnshire) he found that numbers of landowners increased by 60% between 1783 and 1800 and by a further 9% 1800-1829. However, the population of the isle between 1800 and 1829 increased by 33%, meaning that a lower proportion of the population held land even though a greater number did so than had previously.³⁷⁰ Indeed, it is Chambers whose findings support those of this study, in the post-French wars recession there is little difference in tenant numbers year-on year and, more importantly, across the nineteenth century in the Montagu sample (aside from a leap in 1821, where the dowager's lands had the other parishes in the estate added to the Boughton accounts) there is little change in tenant numbers which can easily be attributed to normal fluctuations in tenant numbers as tenants died or quit the land and were replaced.³⁷¹

Joint Tenure

Another way in which the less well-off could take advantage of the increased profitability of large farms was via joint tenure – several tenants taking on a holding between them and pooling their resources.

The practice of sharing holdings – whether to use as pasture in the absence of commons or to make use of technological advances or improvements which could not be beneficially adopted on smaller holdings – was not practiced extensively in Northamptonshire in this period but the practice certainly took place throughout this period, making it significant enough to warrant

³⁶⁹ Chambers, 'Enclosure and Labour Supply', p.340.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.322-3, 339.

³⁷¹ Indeed, Neeson, *Commoners*, pp.230-1 calculated a natural mobility of tenants of around 38%, which would easily account for the differences in total tenant numbers.

discussion here. Its importance, however, stretches beyond the mere fact that it was practised – joint tenure was a way for men of little means to be able to farm significant, high profit holdings, pasture their livestock as they had previously done on the commons or even hold lands rather than be reduced to landless labourers. Thus, in terms of the farming ladder and however small farm numbers changed in a locality one must acknowledge that some tenants were taking on far greater holdings in unison, giving would-be small farmers greater opportunity and profit than individual farms would have done.

The only historian who has noted the practice of joint tenure in post-enclosure society is Moore-Colyer and he gave it little more than a brief mention. Moore-Colyer identified several enclosed pastures within the open fields of Great Oakley (Northamptonshire) even before the first enclosure act in 1784. One of these, he noted, an enclosed pasture in Collier's Field was leased jointly by three men – Wright, Fischer and Gascoigne.³⁷² Even though Moore-Colyer makes no issue of joint tenure, this example demonstrates how tenants would take on joint tenancies to implement improvements (in this case enclosure) in order to improve their own profits.

Examples of shared tenure can be found in both the 1831 and 1851 Montagu accounts and in more significant number in the 1871 accounts, although jointly-leased holdings remained the minority throughout. The examples and comparisons below are drawn from the 1871 accounts but examples of joint tenure can be identified earlier in the period. To ascertain the exact relationships between those sharing tenancies further, more in-depth research would be required. However, the below demonstrate that the practice did take place and had moved beyond simply having lands leased to both husband and wife or parent and child.

In 1871 George and Ann Bell were one couple recorded as jointly leasing lands. The shared surname suggests that perhaps they were married. However, the naming of both parties in the accounts was not a common practice for married couples, suggesting that either there was a particular reason for Ann Bell being named as well as her husband (such as her family supporting the couple financially) or the couple were not married, perhaps being siblings or even in-laws. Other examples suggest perhaps more distant relations or even friendship or business partnerships tying the parties together. In the same account Robert and William Bell jointly leased some grass land. There is a possibility that these men were father and son but the Montagu accounts specified such details so it is more likely they were siblings or more distantly related. But joint tenants were not necessarily related at all and did not always share a surname. Of these, whilst pairs such as Elizabeth Cooper and J. Smith could potentially have

³⁷² R. Moore-Colyer, 'Land and People in Northamptonshire: Great Oakley, c1750-1850', *AgHR* 45:2 (1997), p.154.

been siblings or brother- and sister-in-law, others such as Adam Tirrell and Robert Everitt are less likely are less likely to have been related and were certainly not direct relations.³⁷³

Thus farm sizes increased because tenants wanted them to in order to increase their own profits but at the same time others were prepared to take on small farms and farms were both increased in size and broken down, increasing the size of some farms and creating other small farms.

Supply and Demand for Leasing Land

In their most basic sense, rent levels were directly governed by the supply of and demand for land. Where supply outweighed demand rents would fall in order to attract tenants and / or to convince those on the land to take on larger holdings. Whereas, where demand outweighed supply rents could rise as tenants would be prepared to pay more. Where more lands were brought into cultivation this was usually to take advantage of high demand for land. Essentially, where demand for land rose (such as periods of high prices) landlords would be able to ask for higher rents and it was these periods when further land was brought into cultivation as there was sufficient demand to take on the extra supply. Rents were governed on the most basic level by supply and demand. A landlord would supply land to fulfil tenant demand - the supply of land varied year on year, particularly in periods of high enclosure levels, as lands were brought into cultivation from woodlands or wastes or were taken out for parks, gardens or the plantation of trees.³⁷⁴ However, using the supply of land to actively govern prices was a more difficult practice and one which would overall be detrimental to landlord's profits as limiting their land supply may drive up prices but would also drive up profits for other local landlords who had more land to supply.

That is not to say that the supply of land remained constant throughout the nineteenth century, quite the contrary in fact. When prices were high extra lands would be brought into cultivation, as there was money available for improvements which were more viable (i.e. likely to be profitable) such as drainage or bringing woodland into cultivation. Enclosure and the encroachment of commons, Neeson and others have noted, also enabled landlords to bring more land into cultivation as farmland for rent.³⁷⁵ This extra land is generally considered to

³⁷³ NRO, Montagu Estate Accounts Nos. 420, 371b, 397b.

³⁷⁴ English, 'On the Eve of the Great Depression', p.24.

³⁷⁵ See, for example, Neeson, *Commoners*, pp.109, 12.

coincide with the increase of farm sizes. Not only is enclosure identified as bringing with it great farms at the expense of the small farmer, but, as discussed above, there is a strong argument amongst historians that farm sizes were increasing more consistently across the century and large farms were not merely a product of enclosure. Indeed, H.G. Hunt also found that landlords increased the size of farms in a recession. On the Kent estates of Lord Darnley of Cobham, Hunt found that in the recession following the French Wars farms were all increased slightly in size in order to maintain rents in a period of falling prices.³⁷⁶ Therefore, even though the amount of land under cultivation was increasing and it was becoming increasingly consolidated into fewer large estates there was still demand for land and this was an enabling factor in increasing farm sizes (or the creation of new farms) and one would expect this to both increase the overall rental income of an estate across the period but also to show a notable change in the spread of rents across the period as an increasing proportion of lands were encompassed in larger farms or at least farms increasing in size. As a result, a net fall in the total income of an estate *all else being equal* was more likely indicative of a fall in agreed rents than of a fall in the amount of land in cultivation. An increase in the total rent, on the other hand, may well have been the result of an increase of the amount of land under cultivation or let out to tenants on an estate.

Demand for land, in turn, was governed by confidence in its profitability. If a landlord set rents too high demand would fall and lands would be left in hand whilst if he set the rent too low he would get tenants but be losing out on the profits available to him whilst his tenants would make better profits for themselves. Where produce prices were high and land productivity was good and one could speculate tenant profits would remain high or even increase, confidence in, and therefore demand for, the land would be high. Where harvests had been bad, prices were depressed and there seemed little hope of short-term improvement, demand for land would fall. Outside of confidence in the land demand was also affected by population levels. Where the population was large or increasing there would be greater demand for land simply because there were more people whilst low population may mean there were not enough people to fill holdings. Even though population levels were increasing across this period the growth of industry affected many regions as would-be tenants went to find work in industrial towns and cities. However, Northamptonshire lacked any significant amount of industry, limiting the levels of migration as people would have to travel further to find work. Coupled with the increase in population taking place across the period the result appears to have been that migration did not cause any significant drop in demand for land in the county.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁶ Hunt, 'Agricultural Rent', p.101.

³⁷⁷ Chambers, 'Enclosure and Labour Supply', p.323.

Demand for land is often calculated based on the idea that both landlords and farmers sought to maximise their own incomes. Inevitably a farmer would be unlikely to take a farm if he did not feel he could profit from it, although there was some attraction in the status which landholding afforded. As a result, it is often assumed that both landlords and tenants took land with the intention of maximising their own incomes. Turner *et al*, however, identified two problems with this assumption. Firstly, there has been an assumption that tenants calculated their likely profits before accepting a lease and secondly that if a landlord set the rent at a level too high once costs of capital and labour had been accounted for a tenant would simply move to a holding where the landlord was offering better terms. However, they pointed out that the calculations were not only significant in themselves but relied on unknowns (such as prices and the size of the harvest) and so could not be carried out. This, they argued, ignored the social factors affecting rent levels - the reliability of a tenant or his family as well as his local standing could help to secure him a lower rent than that the market dictated he should pay.³⁷⁸ In terms of the former, even though it is unlikely tenants calculated their predicted income from a holding before taking on a lease it is evident that they did lose confidence in the profitability of land where prices were low and were more willing to agree higher rents where prices were high in the current year. As well as the evidence of the national rental index, Hunt found in his study of leases signed that following the French Wars and the fall in prices which began in 1812, on Lord Darnley's Kent estate "after 1814 it was exceptional for a rent to be increased at the expiry of a lease" whilst in times of high profits tenants had been willing to sign leases on the assumption that profits would remain high.³⁷⁹

However, economically speaking, there is still a great deal to be said for demand for land dictating rent levels and this is evident in the Northamptonshire correspondence. Rising yields and rising population increased demand meaning that rents increased considerably, in spite of any social bargaining factors tenants and potential tenants may have had. In North Buckinghamshire, for example, John Broad found that from the 1770s inflation and population increase were accompanied by not only rent increases but also by a change in farming to what were perceived to be more profitable types of farming.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁸ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.13. J. Bettey, 'George Boswell of Puddletown (1735-1815): Progressive Farmer and Author', *AgHR* 57 (2009), p.60 reached the same conclusion in his local study.

³⁷⁹ Hunt, 'Agricultural Rent', p.103.

³⁸⁰ J. Broad, 'The Fate of the Midland Yeoman: Tenants, Copyholders, and Freeholders as Farmers in North Buckinghamshire, 1620-1800', *Continuity and Change* 14:3 (1999), p.334.

At other times, when demand for land was low, landlords had little choice but to abate rents and even then would not necessarily be able to fill holdings. This type of situation has occurred throughout history at times of low population and severely depressed prices. In the period covered by this study the two most notable instances of low tenant demand for land are the two most notable periods of low prices and economic slump in the agricultural market – the 1820s-30s and the 1870s-80s. In particular, F.M.L. Thompson noted the contrast in demand during and following the French Wars. He found that in Norfolk, Shropshire, Wiltshire and the North Riding of Yorkshire in 1833 witnesses agreed ‘that it was scarcely possible to find a tenant willing to take a farm on lease, while ten to twenty years before they had been pressing to do so’.³⁸¹ There was a similar situation in the 1870s when, Lord Ernle found, stewards across England complained of vacant lands and no eligible tenants to fill them.³⁸² Indeed, Lord Overstone commented on the problems of increased arrears and lands in hand in 1880, problems he claimed the estate had never experienced until recent years.³⁸³

Thus, supply and demand for land were the central factors governing rent levels. Where demand rose rents could also rise but where demand fell rents would often have to fall, even if only temporarily. Supply of land remained constant where demand was low as landlords would be unable to profit from bringing extra lands into cultivation. However, as population increased and towns required greater quantities of agricultural goods further land was brought into cultivation as tenants could profit from it and thus demand was high enough to increase supply without a fall in rent levels. Yet within this there was always room for negotiation and even in times of high demand good tenants would attempt to obtain leases at a lower rent, although they were not always successful.

Leases

As noted above, leases were a good indication of demand for land and depended on assumptions of the future market for produce. Yet despite rents being heavily led by price levels and demand for land there was still a great deal of negotiation of leases. Landowners would prefer reliable, capable tenants and thus would reduce the rent in order to get them but, at the same time, they sought to have tenants take on leases beneficial to maintaining the profitability of the estate. Indeed, as far back as 1907 it was suggested that rent levels needed to

³⁸¹ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p.230.

³⁸² Lord Ernle, ‘The Great Depression and Recovery, 1874-1914’ in P.J. Perry (ed.), *British Agriculture 1875-1914* (London, 1973), p.3.

³⁸³ *Overstone Correspondence*, p.1329.

be examined in terms of the tenure lands were under as this affected their response to prices and other external variables.³⁸⁴

One of the reasons rents in the nineteenth century appear to have been more responsive to prices than those of the eighteenth was a change in the type of leases used on landed estates. A move to shorter leases enabled rents to change more quickly to respond to a changing market whilst longer leases could be used to maintain tenants on the land in times of low prices. Therefore, demand for land was, in turn, affected by both flexibility in land holding and tenants being held into contracts. Turner *et al* identified the Napoleonic Wars in particular instigating a move away from long leases – usually up to 21 years – to tenancies ‘at will’. This was because demand for land was high and tenants were more willing to take on land and would compromise on shorter leases in order to do so. Tenancies at will meant that tenants could give notice to quit the land but also that landlords were more able to change rents in order to maximise their own profits. Under tenancies at will and at enclosure landlords were able to cream off a greater proportion of the farm profits.³⁸⁵ R.C Allen argued that the move to tenancies at will was complete by the end of the eighteenth century. On the Grafton estate in Northamptonshire, for example, he found that the move to tenancies at will “had been accomplished by 1757”.³⁸⁶

Others have identified the change in tenancies as a part of a more complex form of estate management. In his study of rents and leases on Lord Darnley’s Kent estates, Hunt found that there was a notable move from longer leases to tenancies at will between 1795 and 1812 which enabled Darnley to change rent levels more frequently and to “tap more quickly into increases in his tenants’ incomes due to rising prices”. Hunt, however, argued that there was not a complete move to tenancies at will in the early-nineteenth century but that different types of tenancy were used by Darnley in order to best manage his estates. Leases for a number of years were granted even in the early years of the nineteenth century but these were based on an assumption that prices would continue to rise, such as a 12-year tenancy for Green’s Farm signed in 1803. As shall be seen in chapter 5, it was where leases ran for a number of years that abatements of rent were most often required in years of depression. However, it must also be noted that after 1824, when prices began to recover, Hunt found that Darnley’s estate began to revert once more to longer leases, to tie tenants to the land and secure rents for more significant

³⁸⁴ Mr Hooker’s comment in response to Thompson, ‘An Inquiry’, p.620.

³⁸⁵ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, pp.200-1.

³⁸⁶ Allen, *Enclosure and The Yeoman*, pp.97-8.

periods now tenants were willing and able to commit to longer leases again.³⁸⁷ This method of estate management using leases was also commented on by J.V. Beckett in his 1989 article on estate management, where he noted that long leases were employed by landlords to safeguard their lands against damage and to maintain levels of profitability whilst shorter leases gave landlords greater control of rents. Even if Beckett did view there being a move from long leases and security in the eighteenth century to short leases and greater risk (but also greater profit) in the nineteenth, the importance of leases in estate management is still apparent.³⁸⁸

The move to shorter leases (often year-on-year) has been viewed as a negative move for tenants by some. Allen identified the move away from leases for a number of lives enabled landlords to replace tenants with those more desirable (usually those with more money to invest in farming or simply those able and willing to take on larger farms) and saw this as resulting in the loss of the yeoman in English agriculture even in the eighteenth century and regardless of whether or not lands were enclosed or still under open field agriculture.³⁸⁹ Added to this, on the Montagu estate, the accounts for the nineteenth century list all holdings as 'year to year'. However, the estate employed rent abatements rather than reducing rent levels proper throughout the post-French Wars recession and there was a commencement date for each piece of land a tenant took on listed in every account. One explanation for this is that tenants renegotiated rents as required (year-on-year) but were assumed to be long-term occupiers of their farms. Fitting with this assumption, Turner *et al* found that along with tenancies at will tenants had tenant right. This meant that if a tenant invested in the soil but for some reason his tenancy was not renewed when it ran out he would be compensated for 'the unrewarded proportion of their investment'. Thus investment (which would again improve landlords' profits) was still encouraged.³⁹⁰ Added to this, Cragoe found that in Carmarthenshire short leases were the will of the tenants, not simply a measure to increase landlord profits. As well as tenant right, he found that tenants viewed shorter leases as protection from high rents if their own incomes fell but still had a certain security of tenure and protection for any investment they made in the land, although Cragoe pointed out that Carmarthenshire agriculture was, in the main, poor and so little tended to be invested in the land anyway.³⁹¹

³⁸⁷ Hunt, 'Agricultural Rent', pp.102-4.

³⁸⁸ J.V. Beckett, 'Landownership and Estate Management' in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales vol.6, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, 1989), pp.612-3.

³⁸⁹ Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman*, pp.14-15.

³⁹⁰ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, pp.200-1.

³⁹¹ Cragoe, *Anglican Aristocracy*, pp.44, 46.

Social Factors Considered when Leasing Land

E.P. Thompson saw a transition by the early-eighteenth century from the traditional paternal economy - in which landlords took care of their tenants and tenancies were held for lifetimes and inherited through families for generations - to a new market economy model in which lands were leased to the highest bidder as dictated by market levels and the forces of capitalism. Thompson described this new market as based on a belief that

The natural operation of supply and demand in the free market would maximise the satisfaction of all parties and establish the common good. The Market was never better regulated than when it was left to regulate itself.

As such the market should, theoretically, be free of interference from individuals and the state in order to provide balance to the common weal.³⁹² The theory of the free market and rents has often been accredited to the work of Adam Smith. Turner *et al* noted that Smith expected population growth to increase demand which would in turn create rising prices and increased agricultural output (by investment). He predicted that increased profits resulting from this would first be enjoyed by the farmer but would soon be creamed off by the landowner. As a result rent would equal 'the highest which the tenant can afford to pay in the actual circumstances of the land'.³⁹³

However, whether a tenant was considered a good tenant was also a factor in rent negotiation even in the nineteenth century. It was considered usual for tenants to attempt to negotiate lower rents and even where demand was high a good tenant may have been able to negotiate a lower rent than the one asked as they were trusted to pay their rent in full and maintain the land as well as manage a farm. According to J.V. Beckett:

William Marshall maintained that the qualities of a good tenant were capital, skill, industry, and character, and finding tenants with all these attributes, together with a tolerable political outlook was sufficiently difficult to ensure that landowners did not easily turn away qualified men."³⁹⁴

³⁹² E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London, 1991), pp.202-3.

³⁹³ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, pp.9-10.

³⁹⁴ Beckett, 'Landownership', p.616.

Thus the social side of rent negotiations was, on one level, driven by demand for land and the need to keep lands fully tenanted. As a result, known reliable or 'good' tenants would often be able to negotiate lower rent levels even where demand for land was high because a landlord would rather have a reliable tenant who would pay the rent in full, maintain the productivity of the soil and be able to manage the farm successfully. Yet reliability or being a good tenant would not necessarily guarantee the tenant was granted the lease at all. As shall be seen, where demand was high enough a landlord would be able to choose his tenant.

Need for Tenants

In his study of agrarian capitalism and its effects on rural English society, Kerridge argued that landlords needed tenants as much as the tenants needed them and therefore landlords would not price tenants out of their holdings or evict them without good reason.³⁹⁵ This is evident in Northamptonshire, as shown in chapter 2 where approaches to estate management are discussed, but can also be traced with regard to rent levels. H.J. Habakkuk suggested that in Northamptonshire in the late-seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth century a large number of small owner-occupiers sold their lands, making the need for tenants greater as more lands were amalgamated into large estates and leased out. As a result, he argued, a market arose in 'good tenants' and landowners would negotiate rents and improve lands in order to convince good tenants to take up holdings on their estates.³⁹⁶

Johnstone observed that in lowland Scotland and England landlords were tempted to maximise their rents but were aware this would have led to a loss of tenants and 'an outcome in no one's economic interest'.³⁹⁷ However, as Andrew Mackillop pointed out,

Ironically, the landlords' effort to retain tenantry took place against the backdrop of their own determined and extremely successful strategy of rent increase.³⁹⁸

Even though both were discussing Scotland, the strategies described by both Mackillop and Johnstone can be identified in Northamptonshire. Despite differences in management and how rents were set, there was an overarching aim to profit from estates, whether this was by

³⁹⁵ Appleby, 'Agrarian Capitalism', p.575.

³⁹⁶ Habakkuk, 'English Landownership', pp.14-15.

³⁹⁷ M. Johnstone, 'Farm Rents and Improvement: East Lothian and Lanarkshire, 1670-1830', *AgHR* 57 (2009), p.47.

³⁹⁸ Mackillop, 'Highland Estate Change', p.239.

charging high market rents or negotiating levels in order to maintain tenants, to obtain a better guarantee of receiving the monies owed by the tenants, or having the land kept well and farmed successfully.

Indeed, if one begins with the assumption that landlords sought to maximise rental income, which is a safe assumption as one of the primary reasons for owning land was, after all, to profit from it, then the importance of tenants is apparent in that they were the ones supplying the rental income and therefore were needed in order to maximise estate profits. Holdings left empty provided no profit and could even be a loss to the estate but rents set too low would also limit profits. The result was a need to negotiate rents in order to keep lands profitable and prevent them being a cost to the estate but also to ensure there was a fair income coming into the estate from a holding and the tenant would pay the monies owed. Turner *et al* acknowledged this as one of the basic principles of rents. They found that small tenants on beneficial leasing arrangements survived in some areas into the twentieth century and commented on

the extent to which rent was a matter of negotiation, on an individual basis, between tenant and landlord (or agent). Whatever Adam Smith and the classical economists may have argued, bargains were struck according to perceived economic conditions and almost in defiance of any clear notions of accountancy.³⁹⁹

Once again they emphasised the importance of tenants to the landowners and estates and the importance of negotiation in order to both fill holdings and get reliable tenants. The importance of good tenants also comes to the fore, with reliable tenants who would pay their rents being favoured over those unknown to the landlord.

However, there were other ways to profit from landowning and by the late-nineteenth century these had become apparent in some parts of England. English found that in 1861 it was suggested that Yorkshire landlords frequently made more money from timber sales than from leasing the land. Home farms could prove profitable too. English also ascertained that on the Sledmere estate in the late-nineteenth century the home farm existed primarily to provide goods for the estate and its owners but most years it still made a small profit.⁴⁰⁰ In Northamptonshire Lord Overstone wrote on several occasions around the same time regarding both the extensive timber sales and the home farm profits on his Overston estate. However, the

³⁹⁹ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, pp.2-3.

⁴⁰⁰ English, 'On the Eve of the Great Depression', pp.28, 31.

home farm at Overston undertook considerable sales of animal produce in this period and appears to have had more of a profit motive than that English identified at Sledmere.⁴⁰¹ Yet throughout this period in Northamptonshire rental income was still used as the primary way of profiting from the land.

Cost of Replacing Tenants

Even with flexibility in rents provided by flexible leases and changing lease types depending on the economy, landlords wanted secure tenure almost as much as tenants. If a tenant left the land and there was no one to take on the holding immediately it would have to be maintained by the estate and a new tenant would have to be actively sought.⁴⁰² An estate may even have to pay to advertise land to let. All of these factors would be exacerbated where a large number of tenants left the land at once. Both James Langham in the 1820s and Lord Overstone in 1880 voiced concerns about land falling into hand. Indeed, the latter wrote to his friend C. Wood

I have recently opened two new Columns in my Rent Book. Vis:- Arrears of rent –
and Capital Advanced on Farming in Hand

and complained the costs of running his estate were increasing. This was in response to Wood's concern that on his Northumberland estate he had 5 farms in hand, 3 more given notice to quit and a further 5 or 6 had only agreed to stay with heavy rent reductions.⁴⁰³

How Rent Levels Were Calculated

Turner *et al* based their study on the Ricardian school of thought – the economic theory of David Ricardo (1772-1823) and his followers – which was that rents represented (and therefore should equal) what was left over after wages for labour and the farmer's capital costs and profits had been deducted. However, the remaining money (Ricardian surplus) varied depending on the productivity of the farm and many tenants had further outgoings, paying taxes on top of rent, or negotiated rents more favourable than they should have had to enable the operation of the model. Thus the Ricardian model provides an important insight into how rents were negotiated and worked in theory whilst also demonstrating the social factors in their negotiation - farmers' profits and labourers' wages were both open to negotiation. As a result,

⁴⁰¹ *Overstone Correspondence*, pp.1093-4.

⁴⁰² Johnstone, 'Farm Rents and Improvement', p.47.

⁴⁰³ NRO, L(C)1105; *Overstone Correspondence*, pp.1328-9.

although his model is not noted in the Northamptonshire evidence, one can see its operation in not only rent levels but also negotiations, a point which was also noted by Turner *et al* in their national sample.⁴⁰⁴

Furthermore, Donald Ginter, amongst others, found that land values changed 'quite dramatically and in highly varying degrees' across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁴⁰⁵ Thus charging the full difference between costs and profits on a farm would not only require knowledge of the productivity and costs of each individual farm year-on-year but also the price of produce. In other words, charging rent equivalent to the full Ricardian surplus would require annual valuations of the land to keep up with changing land values which would have been costly and impractical and would have negated the value of social factors affecting rents and in practice lands were not valued regularly.⁴⁰⁶ Indeed, F.M.L. Thompson noted that rent levels were 'not sensitive to year-to-year fluctuations in the prosperity or adversity of farmers'.⁴⁰⁷ But the overall trends in rent levels provide a great deal of information on landed estate management and tenurial relations.

In practice, rent levels were calculated based on demand for land and prices for produce as well as the farmer's cost and profits, as shown above, but were also based on land values and land valuations were rare. Cragoe noted that in order to calculate rents accurately an accurate land valuation (productivity, farming type and demand for land) could provide an accurate market value for the land and the rent a landlord should expect to get for it. However, land valuations were costly, time-consuming and as a result rarely carried out. Where rents were adjusted to the value of land they were usually reasonably consistent but estates were revalued infrequently, meaning the valuation and associated rent levels may well have remained the same for over a generation. For example, the Tyllwyd estate near Newcastle Emlyn was revalued in 1874, leading to rent increases of 2-5 per cent on those based on the 1818 evaluation and, Cragoe found, a great deal of money had been ploughed into buildings and other improvements on the estate.⁴⁰⁸ Mingay also noted that Sir Jacob Bouverie, on his Kent estate,

⁴⁰⁴ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, pp.10-11.

⁴⁰⁵ D.E. Ginter, 'Measuring the Decline of the Small Landowner' in B.A. Holderness & M. Turner, *Land, Labour and Agriculture, 1700-1920; Essays for Gordon Mingay* (London, 1991), p.31.

⁴⁰⁶ Cragoe, *Anglican Aristocracy*, p.53.

⁴⁰⁷ Thompson, 'An Anatomy of English Agriculture', p.227.

⁴⁰⁸ Cragoe, *Anglican Aristocracy*, p.53.

sought to raise rents in the early-eighteenth century because land values had increased.⁴⁰⁹ In Kent in the early-nineteenth century too, stewards were seeking to ensure rents kept up with the market, with Lord Darnely's steward increasing rents on the expiration of leases to ensure rents were maintained at an economic level.⁴¹⁰ Furthermore, J.R Wordie calculated that an average rent doubled at enclosure but he rejected the idea that this was because the value and output of the land had also doubled. Here, he argued, land values had not increased and higher rents simply represented 'a simple transfer of income from pocket of the tenant to the pocket of the landlord'.⁴¹¹

Cragoe also argued that in Wales there is no evidence of land 'being let to the highest bidder'.⁴¹² In Northamptonshire there is some evidence of landlords trying to maximise their rental income but at the same time tenants were expected to negotiate rents and therefore levels for reliable tenants, known to the landlord were often lower than the maximum market rent. In March 1705, however, Lord Fitzwilliam chose his tenant on the basis of good reputation rather than on the basis of the rent they were prepared to pay. Despite competition for a holding he, eventually, offered an abated rent to his preferred tenant – Widow Thompson – commenting that she 'is so good a tenant I will reduce the rent 40s a year for her, but for nobody else'.⁴¹³ The differences in rent increases for new tenants coming into the land in the nineteenth century accounts indicate that this practice was also undertaken on the Montagu and Overston estates. For example, Joseph Keep's land at hanging Houghton on the Montagu estate had the rent reduced from £280 to £200 in 1814, despite rents elsewhere being increased Charles Lucas being described as insolvent and John Stevens being helped to pay his rent by "two respectable persons" who had agreed to be sureties for his rent.⁴¹⁴ Therefore even though some landlords were willing to let lands to the highest bidder, there were significant non-monetary factors affecting to whom land was let which could result in agreements of a rent below the maximum available level.

⁴⁰⁹ G.E. Mingay, 'Estate Management in Eighteenth-Century Kent', *AgHR* 4:2 (1956), p.110.

⁴¹⁰ Hunt, 'Agricultural Rent', p.102.

⁴¹¹ J.R. Wordie, 'The Chronology of English Enclosure, 1500-1914', *The Economic History Review* 36:4 (1983), p.505.

⁴¹² Cragoe, *Anglican Aristocracy*, p.51.

⁴¹³ D.R. Hainsworth and C. Walker (eds.), *The Correspondence of Lord Fitzwilliam of Milton and Francis Guybon, His Steward 1697-1709* (Northampton, 1990), pp.194, 200-201.

⁴¹⁴ NRO, Montagu Estate Accounts 365, 1814-5.

Landlords required tenants not only for a rental income but also to maintain the land. Were a holding left empty the estate would have to maintain it in a fit condition for a new tenant to farm, would be losing the rental income and may even be reduced to farming the land themselves, making them susceptible to changes in the market and liable for labour costs. Were a landlord of significant wealth he may well be able to leave a small number of holdings empty until a tenant was found willing to pay the rent he asked but in the main landlords wanted to keep lands tenanted in order for them to bring in profit to the estate rather than form a costly burden. Tenants, on the other hand, could gain clear advantages in terms of profits, financial security and social status but were not wholly reliant on the land. That is to say were a tenant being asked for a higher rent than he felt he could comfortably profit from he could refuse the lease or quit the land whilst a landlord usually relied on his tenants for his income. Quittals were not common but tenants may well leave the land or give notice to quit unless rents were reduced in times of prolonged recession. Landlords were also usually men of great wealth and even though they required tenants for their income would be prepared to make concessions in order to get a good tenant or refuse the 'highest bidder' as it were if they feared their reliability. As a result the rent agreed for a holding would often be lower than what the landlord had initially asked and if the economic climate changed whilst the tenant was on the land rents may even be reduced further.

The final factor in how rent levels would be calculated was who would pay the taxes. Paying taxes on top of rents would eat into a tenant's profits and could lead to real problems in times of low prices. Landlords on the other hand would begrudge paying taxes which were rightfully their tenants' to pay and would eat into estate profits which, if applied across the entire estate, would be a significant amount of money. Within the Northamptonshire evidence it is quite clear that rents involved negotiation of taxes and both parties begrudging being liable for them. Landlords seemingly begrudged the burden of tax falling into their hands though, despite tenants negotiating away their liability. In 1799 James Langham had found himself liable for the majority of his tenants' tax burden and wrote 'in my opinion no great hardship would arise by their being made to discharge it'.⁴¹⁵

Therefore overall rents were calculated based on land values and the potential profits of tenants which established the market value based on supply and demand. Added to this there were social factors such as the reliability of the tenant to pay the rent, his ability to successfully farm the land and the social situation and status of the tenant. Furthermore, tenants would not only

⁴¹⁵ NRO, L(C)1075.

try to negotiate lower rents but may well seek to shift their tax burden to their landlord in order to decrease their outgoings.

Who Set Rent Levels

As already shown rent levels were set based on estate valuation of the land and presumption of its productivity but were agreed by negotiation with the prospective tenant until a level was agreed. But setting the levels and changing them for a particular tenant was a role of the estate, being in part a duty of the steward who had the most in-depth knowledge of the estate and a part that of the landlord, whose profit levels would be directly affected by the level agreed, as well as the influence of the tenants themselves.

Role of Stewards

Stewards were the ones who actually collected rents and compiled the accounts. As a result it was they who knew the reliability of a tenant or family to pay their rents on time. Their presence on the estate also meant they were more aware than landowners (who were often absent) of the ability of a tenant to farm and manage a holding successfully as well as the quality and value of the land. However, what is apparent in the Northamptonshire evidence, and supported by other localities, is that when it came to rents stewards could advise and enforce levels but it was the landlord who set rents. Outside of Northamptonshire, L.J. Bellot observed that Earl Temple was often absent from his estates in Somerset and Dorset but gave his steward a great deal of instruction on various matter of the estate. What is most noteworthy here is that Earl Temple, Bellot noted, 'was especially critical of the steward's failure to rent lands at the rate he expected', demonstrating how Earl Temple set the rents but his stewards were expected to find tenants willing to pay them.⁴¹⁶

Within Northamptonshire stewards also had a limited role in the setting of rents but were expected to find tenants willing to pay the rent the landlord was asking. However, landlords (especially absentee landlords) did not just set rent levels blindly. If a landlord had not seen the land of late he would generally ask the opinion and get the guidance of the steward as to its rental value.

⁴¹⁶ L.J. Bellot, "'Wild Hares and red Herrings": A Case Study of Estate Management in the Eighteenth-Century English Countryside', *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 56:1 (1993), p.19.

Role of Landlords

Whilst stewards had the role of advising on rent levels, landlords decided and set the levels of rent for their lands. Landlords were interested in profiting from their lands and ensuring they were not losing out dramatically on its value. C.G.A. Clay commented that

the extent to which owners showed sympathy for tenants under pressure, their willingness to evict, and the degree of help they were prepared (or indeed able) to provide naturally varied from estate to estate. So did their attitude towards the raising of rents, at times and in places where economic circumstances made this a feasible proposition, and the extent of their willingness to push through schemes of enclosure or farm reorganization whose implementation adversely affected the well-being of some of their tenants. To a degree the varying attitudes of landlords reflected differences in their socio-economic status and the nature of their estates.⁴¹⁷

Clay noted that landowners would usually have a large enough margin between 'unavoidable outgoings' and rental income to enable them to weather a recession, although during a prolonged recession this may well not have been the case.⁴¹⁸ However, this emphasizes the importance of the ability of landlords in setting rents. Where a landlord was struggling with a depressed income, debts and unavoidable outgoings he would be less likely to reduce a rent in order to get a better quality tenant but might be more likely to reduce the rent in order to get a tenant sooner and not have lands in hand. In Northamptonshire Spring found that the Fitzwilliam family was amongst those heavily indebted in the mid-nineteenth century, whilst the Ishams relied on their rental income to form the majority of their income.⁴¹⁹ The Loyd family on the other hand were bankers by trade and so until late in Lord Overstone's career had a significant income from business as well as the estates. An income based primarily on rents would mean that a landlord would lose more if rents fell whilst an external income could, if necessary, be used to prop up the landed one.

Furthermore, the size of an estate would also affect a landlord's decisions in setting rent levels. A small estate would be less affected by falling rents in terms of actual income but would also

⁴¹⁷ C.G.A. Clay, 'Landlords and Estate Management in England' in Thirsk, J. (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales vol.5, part 2, 1640-1750* (Cambridge, 1985), p.241.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.170.

⁴¹⁹ D. Spring, 'The English Landed Estate in the Age of Coal and Iron: 1830-1880', *Journal of Economic History* 11:1 (1951), pp.14, 22.

be bringing in a lower total income than its larger counterpart even without the fall. Thus a large estate would often in itself be able to weather a recession without external money than a small one but a wealthy landlord may have more significant fixed outgoings than his more modest counterpart, somewhat complicating the issue. Both Habakkuk and Howell commented on the difference in rents on the estates of large and smaller landlords. Howell argued that landlords did not charge overly competitive rents and that large estates in particular did not exploit high demand for land in the nineteenth century. What they tended to do was to pass farms on to relatives of the previous tenants.⁴²⁰ Habakkuk, on the other hand, found that the opposite was true when it came to smaller gentry landlords. He claimed that in Northamptonshire during the Napoleonic Wars smaller landlords increased their rents as much as possible but this only resulted in their tenants moving onto the estates of larger landlords.⁴²¹

Therefore a landlord's decision in setting rent levels was not based purely on the land market but also on his personal situation and the reliability of individual tenants plus the personality and management type of the landlord.

Role of Tenants

Despite belief and suggestion that landlords raised rents to the maximum they possibly could, driving out the smaller and poorer tenantry in favour of wealthier, more capitalistic tenants, there is a great deal of evidence that rents were negotiated and tenants seldom paid the full asking price for a holding across England and Wales and indeed the Northamptonshire evidence supports this. Cragoe observed that in Wales in the 1860s many landowners 'were keen to point out' that the rents they charged were far below the levels they could have been.⁴²² And negotiations of rent levels were a common if not normal feature of English rural life too.

Turner *et al* found that eighteenth and nineteenth-century agricultural experts condemned the granting of rents below the market level. They argued that low rents meant farmers could profit comfortably with less exertion and would therefore do less work. Those paying over the economic level of rent on the other hand were equally bad for the economy, tending to over crop the land in order to meet their rents and living costs and abandoning the farm with exhausted soil.⁴²³ Criticisms of this system of leasing land for below the market rent were in

⁴²⁰ Howell, *Land and People*, p.81.

⁴²¹ Habakkuk, 'English Landownership', p.12.

⁴²² Cragoe, *Anglican Aristocracy*, p.52.

⁴²³ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.17.

some cases justified. Cragoe discussed how in the late-nineteenth century Broderick was critical of landlords in Wales for their accepting lower rents from tenants who could not afford the full market rent. He argued that landlords were willing to do so as these tenants would let them hunt across their lands and if they went bankrupt the landlord had the security of 'first claim on the residual estate'. However, Cragoe pointed out that this criticism assumed that tenants of greater means were available to take holdings which, in Carmarthenshire, was not the case as the majority of tenants sought land for social not economic reasons and emphasis lay on self-sufficiency. Welsh agriculture compared unfavourably to English as it was comparatively unproductive and undercapitalized.⁴²⁴ However, in practice few rents appear to have been set at the market level, the majority falling below it although some tenants paid more than the going rate for their holdings.

Indeed landlords actually expected tenants to negotiate before taking on leases and even set rents accordingly. In March 1823, for example, William Pearce wrote to James Langham that he had been offered 40s per acre for a vacant holding but had asked 45s and was holding out for 42s an acre.⁴²⁵ In practice, Turner *et al* found that few landlords charged rents equivalent to the full ability of their tenants to pay because they either wanted or needed to maintain good relations with their tenants.⁴²⁶ This, of course, went hand in hand with desiring good, reliable tenants who would pay the rent due and on time, for whom rents were often reduced below the levels asked of those unknown to the estate. Furthermore, where tenants acted *en masse* - such as in 1830 when 17 of James Langham's tenants signed a letter requesting better payments to the poor or help in providing employment to them as they feared an uprising,⁴²⁷ - landlords were often unable to deny them their requests as losing good relations with their tenants could result in mass-quittals and the loss of a great deal of income to the estate. Therefore it was in a landlord's interests not only to keep tenants on side as individuals in order to keep his lands tenanted but also to adhere to reasonable requests they made as a collective in order to retain as many as possible on his lands, even if this was for a slightly lower income per tenant than he could have had.

⁴²⁴ Cragoe, *Anglican Aristocracy*, pp.43, 58.

⁴²⁵ NRO, L(C)1118.

⁴²⁶ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.15.

⁴²⁷ NRO, L(C)1181.

Labourers too were important. Hunt noted that wages of labourers were closely linked to the “fortunes of farming” and therefore responded to changes in a similar manner to rent levels.⁴²⁸ For example, even in 1911 the Hammonds had observed that when labourers demanded higher wages tenant farmers would tell them they could not afford to pay more unless their rents were reduced, as was reported in *The Times* in 1830, which turned labourers’ attentions to objecting against rent and tithe levels, particularly tithes.⁴²⁹ Indeed in Northamptonshire in 1830 James Langham reduced rents for his tenants on the condition that they increased their labourers’ wages ‘according to some determined scale’. In fact rents would only be reduced as long as wages had been increased and by a corresponding amount.⁴³⁰

Even though rents were negotiated on an individual basis there is also evidence of tenants working as a group in order to achieve a particular result. The Montagu accounts, for example, appear to show a number of tenants exchanging lands between themselves and joint tenancies. In 1811, for example, John Brett of Brigstock held lands worth £100 a year but in the 1821 account he held lands worth only £65 whilst Thomas Brett (who was absent from the previous account) held lands worth £22 per year.⁴³¹

Yet how far this negotiation was based upon calculations of profitability on the part of the farmers is questionable. As already noted, Turner *et al* commented that few tenants had sufficient wealth and education to undertake accountancy calculations to ascertain the profitability of the land. However, they also argued that tenants often ‘had their own ideas’ how rents should be calculated and the levels at which they should be set.⁴³² What tenants were aware of, and used to their advantage, was that landlords favoured those reputed to be reliable and would lease them lands at a lower rent and that they could negotiate before agreeing to a lease. Furthermore, once a tenant was on the land the cost of replacing him may well be more than granting him an abatement on his rent and many tenants already on the land appear to have exploited this too. Of course when tenants were coming into the land landlords would want to ensure they had good, reliable tenantry but this came at a cost. Even after the initial bargaining of rents below the market level good tenants would still expect favourable treatment. Roebuck found that Sir Marmaduke Constable of Everingham, in the early

⁴²⁸ Hunt, ‘Agricultural Rent’, p.107.

⁴²⁹ Hammonds, *The Village Labourer*, p.182.

⁴³⁰ NRO, L(C)1184.

⁴³¹ NRO, Montagu Estate Accounts Nos. 333, 371b.

⁴³² Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, pp.18, 20.

eighteenth century, was reassured that the good tenants holding land on his estate would be offered lands when they became vacant before they were offered to others.⁴³³ Indeed Mingay noted the qualities landlords and estate managers sought in good tenants, the primary one of which was reliability. A reliable tenant was considered one who was reliable in paying his rent (and on time), of good character and had sufficient ability in husbandry.⁴³⁴

In the main tenants were more able to negotiate lower rents in times of low prices but often one must assume they usually required lower rents as they were themselves making less money and still had their living costs to cover. Habakkuk pointed out that following the French Wars tenants were in a stronger position than they had been before and were able to prevent landlords increasing rents or making them liable for the land tax, many were even able to negotiate the renewal of their tenancies so they were no longer liable for tithes.⁴³⁵

However, English's study of the Sledmere Estate in East Yorkshire showed the limits of tenurial power of negotiation. In July 1876, when prices were falling and agriculture was sinking into deep depression, Sir Tatton Sykes II actually increased rents on his estates, much to the dismay of his struggling tenants. Even Sir Tatton's brother condemned his actions in the local newspaper, writing that they would destroy confidence between landlord and tenants. However, tenants had annual tenancies and, following an unsuccessful petition, many accepted the new, higher rents hoping, as English suggested, that prices would rise or Tatton would change his mind before the rises came into effect. In this case even with petitions and outside condemnation tenants remained subject to the landlord's rent increases despite falling prices and even with the option of quitting the land many chose to stay. However, in 1879 thirty-nine tenants quit the land and many were not re-let for a significant time, despite offers of lower rents (reduced by up to 25%).⁴³⁶

Therefore power in negotiating rents worked both ways. When a tenant was considered reliable he could often negotiate a lower rate than that at which the land was offered but when rents were increased across an estate many tenants objected but it took 3 years before there were significant quittals. Furthermore, landlords could use rent levels in order to select tenants,

⁴³³ P. Roebuck, 'Absentee Landownership in the Late Seventeenth and early Eighteenth Centuries: A Neglected Factor in English Agrarian History', *AgHR* 21:1 (1973), p.6.

⁴³⁴ Mingay, 'Estate Management', p.110.

⁴³⁵ Habakkuk, 'English Landownership', p.13.

⁴³⁶ English, 'On the Eve of the Great Depression', pp.26-27.

lowering the rent for a particular tenant only or raising the rent on renewal of tenancy to encourage a tenant to leave the land. Outside the period of this study, in 1706, Lord Fitzwilliam provided a good example of this when he refused to lower the rent of Benjamin Burton as he and his two sons were reputed to be drinkers and he hoped they would leave the land as a result of the rent being kept high.⁴³⁷

Thus rents were a construct of landlords' expectations, stewards' knowledge of the value of land and ability of a farmer and the tenants' ability to negotiate the rent. However, these factors were not in isolation, all being subject to produce prices and changing supply of and demand for land and, as shown above, both tenants and landlords were primarily interested in their own profits.

Rent Collection

The most important factor in the rental economy was probably rent collection. Whatever level the rent had been agreed at it made no difference if it wasn't paid. Chapter 5 will show that rents were not always paid in full and arrears and abatements were integral parts of the rural economy but here the primary focus is on how rents were collected and the role of stewards and landlords in their collection as well as the duties of a tenant in paying them.

English summarised the role of stewards with regard to rents thus:

It was the agent's duty to collect the rents and to advise his landowner about rent rises or rebates, about delay in payment or selling up a tenant. It was customary for most of the nineteenth century for tenant farmers to pay the rents personally, at the great house or estate office, at twice-yearly rent days, related to (but not exactly at) Lady Day and Michaelmas.⁴³⁸

Evidence of rent collection for the estates of this study is limited, with only two estates providing any evidence at all and these falling around a hundred years apart. On the Langham estate William Pearce would arrange a convenient day for collection with both the tenants and James Langham himself which fell around the appointed rent day (Lady Day or Michaelmas). Any monies not paid on collection day would then be collected from tenants and chased throughout the year. This is also evident to some extent in the Montagu accounts, where

⁴³⁷ *Fitzwilliam Correspondence*, pp.101, 176.

⁴³⁸ B. English, 'Patterns of Estate Management in East Yorkshire c1809-c1880', *AgHR* 32 (1984), p.40.

arrears outstanding in one account book may have been paid off by the compilation of the next. For example, Thomas Pack of Geddington was £86.0.0 in arrears at the making up of the account in April 1823 but had just £16.0.0 outstanding by the April 1824 account.⁴³⁹

Landlords also played a part in collecting rents. James Langham appears to have ensured they were present at rent collection whilst the Lords Montagu did not but still showed great interest in the income of their estates, Walter Montagu analysed his own accounts (as did his predecessor Elizabeth) and those still extant often contain notations questioning the actions of his agent Philip Pain and comparing these accounts to the last.

Of the estates of this study only Lord Overstone appears to have been as remote from his estate as it is often suggested that landlords in general were and this was not from ignorance or lack of knowledge as he had run the estate for his father and been much more involved in the day to day running of things. When Overstone came into his inheritance he was 60 years old and had made his money from banking, as well as having been granted a peerage in 1850 and thus he was interested in the estate but not in managing it himself, preferring to leave that to others. Having said that, one can assume that Overstone would still have looked over the accounts and he showed enthusiasm and an informed interest in how the estate was run, although he left the majority of the actual work to Beasley, his steward. Therefore collections were undertaken by the steward on set days, theoretically Michaelmas and Lady Day but in practice days which suited both steward and tenants (and often landlord too). Twice yearly rents may well have been collected annually with the agreement of all parties involved too. Landlords, whether they were present at rent collection or not, would check the annual accounts to check not only that rents were being paid but that arrears were being paid off and stewards were not defrauding the estate. Where rents were unpaid or only partially paid and arrears were accruing landlords would take the appropriate action, whether this be to chase or evict the tenant or to look at abating rents. This will be dealt with in chapter 5.

Thus both landlords and stewards were usually involved in rent collection and tenants were given a set date to pay the monies owed. If a tenant did not pay his rent action may be taken against him but, as chapter 5 will show, there were exceptions to this. It is also evident that the majority if not all tenants turned up on rent collection day even if only to pay a token sum or explain why they could not pay their rent.

⁴³⁹ NRO, Montagu Estate Accounts, 372a, 372b.

Conclusion

Therefore rent levels depended upon a number of factors, not in the least prevailing prices for agricultural produce, population levels and demand for land, all of which are factors discussed by the landlords themselves in their correspondence. The personality of landlords and individual tenants also affected rent levels and as a result rents varied considerably from holding to holding, whether it be for the holding overall or per acre. What was theoretically an economic sum calculated based on land values and the prevailing market price was, in practice, a social calculation based upon the reliability of tenants, personality of individual landlords and individual negotiating skills within the prevailing market.

The predominant trend for rents across the period was an increase, as demand for agricultural produce increased. Even where rents fell temporarily the levels at the end of the period were considerably higher than those at the beginning. The most notable changes in rent levels were the peaks of the early-nineteenth century and the 1870s and the troughs which followed. But unlike the recession of the 1820s where rents fell but recovered and several short recessions followed, the recession of the 1870s was prolonged and the severity led to landlords and landed estates struggling financially.

In terms of the spread of rents, this study has found that changes in the spread of rents were not hugely significant as the economy changed. Even though landlords may have increased farm sizes as prices fell to enable tenants to remain on the land, or rents may have remained stable as arrears and abatements were employed, the general spread of rents for both the Montagu and Overstone estates appear to have remained reasonably consistent, particularly following the French Wars, a time when one would have expected more significant changes in rent levels. As has been shown, rent per acre did change significantly in this period in particular and therefore one must look to other explanations for the consistent spread of rent such as temporary abatements or tenants falling into arrears. These will be examined in detail in chapter 5. Where these measures were not an explanation of the consistency in the spread of rents it is perhaps indicative of other forces at work, such as rents initially being set below the market level or tenants having savings or other forms of income with which to pay monies due.

Chapter 5: The Payment of Rents and the Role of Temporary Abatements

Introduction

Arrears and abatements provided an integral function in rural landed society and estate management which is often overlooked by historians. In times of fixed rents and a fluctuating economy the ability to temporarily lower rents or not to pay the full rent provided the landed estate with some flexibility, flexibility necessary for solvency in difficult times. Even though changes could be made to the levels of rents due, abatements provided a temporary measure and were usually dependent on the price of produce directly. Arrears, on the other hand, were often the tenant's way of indicating he could no longer afford his rent if he were to feed his family. High levels of arrears across an estate were usually taken as an indicator by landlords that rents were too high in the short-term and as a result abatements could be granted to ease some of the financial strain on the tenantry. This chapter will demonstrate the varying use of both in Northamptonshire 1800-1881.

However, one must exercise some caution in using arrears and abatements to signify the ability of tenants to pay rent at any one time. A landlord may well have abated rents for individual tenants in order to fill holdings or ensure they did not fall empty; he may even have abated the rent for an elderly or infirm tenant to allow them to retain their home. On the other hand, rather than abate rents a landlord may have allowed tenants to build up huge rent arrears and may even have written those arrears off. Thus the levels of arrears and abatements were linked not only to the economy and one another but also to the management decisions and personality of the individual landlord. Overall levels are, however, indicative of the estate response to changes in the economy.

Arrears levels are further complicated by individual tenants. Whilst wide-spread arrears indicate a problem with the farmers' finances, individual arrears may indicate a lack of will or effort to pay. Yet this in itself shows an aspect of estate management – how landlords dealt with struggling or lazy tenants. It also shows that farmers often had greater priorities than paying their rents. Indeed, Turner *et al* commented on the difference between expected and received rents thus:

Setting the rent was one thing, paying it – from the farmer's point of view – or extracting it – from the landlord's – quite another.

Therefore arrears demonstrate the will of the tenant in paying his rent as well as his ability. But primarily where the economy fell into depression rents agreed would be higher than rents paid and therefore provide another dimension to the rental analysis.⁴⁴⁰

Arrears are most simply defined as monies outstanding after the collection of rents. Abatements, on the other hand, are simply the amount of money a rent was reduced by on a temporary basis when the economic situation was poor, intended to last only until prices improved. A number of terms have been employed by historians to discuss abatements, including remissions of rent and rebates,⁴⁴¹ but the generally accepted term in landlord correspondence was abatements. Abatements could also be granted to tenants coming into the land or taking new holdings, intended to convince a tenant to take a lease in times of poor prices, but were still not permanent rent decreases. Here we are concerned primarily with abatements granted to tenants already on the land, in often significant numbers, to help them to weather a recession and thus to help the estate survive and remain profitable beyond the recession. Abatements were closely linked to rising arrears levels, but arrears could exist without abatements being granted. Thus the two are interlinked but the concepts very separate.

Importance of Arrears and Abatements to Historians

Compared to rent levels and farm sizes little work has been done on arrears and even less on abatements. Historians have concerned themselves with evictions of tenants, but generally as a part of a political study or as an effect of enclosure and not in regard to defaulting on rent payments.⁴⁴² Perhaps this is because levels of arrears and abatements have been viewed as less a result of landlord control or enclosure and more an inevitable response to changes in the agricultural economy, although, as shall be seen, landlords did have a certain amount of control over arrears and set levels of abatements.

The major scholarship on the subject of arrears and abatements is again Turner *et al*'s work on rents, although even their work on abatements is negligible.⁴⁴³ Further to this, H.G. Hunt in his

⁴⁴⁰ M.E. Turner, J.V. Beckett and B. Afton, *Agricultural Rent in England, 1690-1914* (Cambridge, 1997), pp.32, 179.

⁴⁴¹ For example, B. English, 'Patterns of Estate Management in East Yorkshire c1840-c1880', *AgHR* (1984), p.40; J. Davies, *Cardiff and the Marquesses of Bute* (Cardiff, 1981), p.184.

⁴⁴² See for example, M. Cragoe, 'The Anatomy of an Eviction Campaign: The General Election of 1868 in Wales and its Aftermath', *Rural History* 9:2 (1998) on political evictions of tenants and Dr Hasbach as quoted in J.D. Chambers, 'Enclosure and Labour Supply in the Industrial Revolution', *The Economic History Review* 5:3 (1953), p.327 on the loss of holdings for tenants as a result of enclosure.

⁴⁴³ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*.

work on leases and David Stead in his work on risk management looked at abatements as a way of managing estates and estate income.⁴⁴⁴ Studies of Northamptonshire, in particular that of J.M. Neeson, focus primarily on the social history of the county and whilst great analysis has been undertaken of enclosure and common rights, virtually no attention has been paid to arrears or abatements.⁴⁴⁵ Yet both arrears and abatements were integral economic responses which helped to form social and economic structures and relations on the landed estate.

Turner *et al* employed a number of statistical calculations in order to analyse rents, arrears and other factors affecting monies paid by tenants to their landlords and created a national arrears index for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This provides an index to compare my Northamptonshire evidence to and a stable methodology which to apply to my data. Outside of this there has been little interest in arrears or abatements from historians in more than a peripheral sense. The general trends in the economy to which arrears will be shown to be related - the power of landlords, living standards of tenants and the role of stewards on landed estates have all been examined in a manner linked to arrears or relevant to a study of arrears but arrears have not been studied in their own right.

Prior to Turner *et al*'s work in 1997 reference to arrears and abatements was quite rare. English listed setting rent and abatement levels amongst the duties of the steward whilst both Chambers and John Davies acknowledged arrears and abatements as a part of wider economic change.⁴⁴⁶ Chambers included arrears figures in his analysis of the prosperity of the farmer. For example, he observed that in the 1750s prices and rents rose at the same time as arrears and vacant farm numbers fell. Thus arrears were one of the four factors which depict the prosperity of the farmer and levels were inversely proportionate to prices but Chambers provided no further analysis.⁴⁴⁷ Davies again acknowledged the relationship between arrears, abatements and rents operating in the wider economy. In his study of the nineteenth century Davies summarised the major economic trends of the period:

⁴⁴⁴ H.G. Hunt, 'Agricultural rent in South-East England, 1788-1825', *AgHR* (1958), p.104; D.R. Stead, 'Risk and Risk Management in English Agriculture, c.1750-1850', *The economic History Review* 57:2 (2004), pp.350-1.

⁴⁴⁵ J.M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge, 1993).

⁴⁴⁶ English, 'Patterns of Estate Management', p.40.

⁴⁴⁷ Chambers, 'Enclosure and Labour Supply', pp.342-3.

The rapid increase in rent and arrears before 1815, the remissions of the early-1820s and the early-1830s, the development of the covenant, and the drive towards high farming in the 1840s and 1850s are the commonplaces of the history of nineteenth century agriculture.⁴⁴⁸

Yet none of these provided any actual arrears or abatements figures.

The importance of the relationship Chambers discussed between prices and arrears and the importance of arrears themselves was acknowledged by Turner *et al* in their arrears index:

A trend of rent arrears may act like a thermometer to gauge the general health of agriculture, the 'Feast and Famine' within the agricultural sector. In plotting the fluctuations in agricultural prosperity in this way, particularly the very short-run movements, an index of rent arrears provides vital information. Indeed, it may even be more useful than an assessed rent series, because it points to the ability of tenants to pay. Assessed rents point to the market value of rent in optimum agricultural conditions, but in a depression the tenants responded by failing to pay part of all of their rents.⁴⁴⁹

But within this one must also acknowledge the context of arrears and build a more complete picture acknowledging abatement and rent levels too. J.R. Wordie even commented that stable rent levels in themselves suggested not rising or stable prices but *falling* price levels. If prices rose landlords would increase rents but when prices fell they were reluctant to reduce them. Therefore rents proper would remain stable as prices fell.⁴⁵⁰ While Chambers implied that rents rose *as* arrears fell, Wordie explained that rents were able to rise *because arrears had fallen*. This also fits in with Turner *et al*'s conclusions. Rents would rise as a result of higher prices and higher tenant profits, which were indicated in part by falling arrears. If tenants had previously been unable to pay their rents in full the ability to do this (and to pay off arrears) would be necessary before rents could be increased.

However, it must also be stated here that these are, of course, generalizations. But it is as this that they work. Both Chambers and Wordie based their models on the period c1700 – c1750 but,

⁴⁴⁸ Davies, *Marquesses of Bute*, p.184.

⁴⁴⁹ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.179.

⁴⁵⁰ J.R. Wordie, *Estate Management in Eighteenth-Century England: The Building of the Leveson-Gower Fortune* (London, 1982), p.168.

as Turner *et al*'s arrears index has shown, the economy reacted in this manner to economic peaks and troughs throughout the entire period 1690-1914. However, Turner *et al* also pointed out the limits of what can be learnt about the English agricultural economy based on arrears levels. How a landlord reacted to rent arrears 'depended on various considerations, among them the number of tenants involved, and the general trend of agricultural conditions'. This is reinforced by their assertion that 'individual tenants must occasionally have experienced a bad year or two, but then made up ground with an extra payment'.⁴⁵¹ Where an individual 'experiencing a bad year' was a large tenant with substantial rent his non-payment could form a greater percentage of rent due being owed in arrears than if a significant number of smallholders were struggling. Therefore, as useful as an arrears index is, the number (or percentage) of tenants in arrears is also important in informing us of tenant ability to pay the rent relative to the prevailing conditions of the agricultural economy.

The relationship between tenant and landlord is also of great importance when one discusses the payment of rents. As Turner *et al* noted, landlords were flexible where tenants had a bad year or two and did tolerate some arrears. Indeed, John Beckett noted the importance of landlord-tenant relations and the complexity of the ties between the two groups, without which improvements and investment in the soil would not have taken place but, at the same time, a relationship underpinned by the rental system. In particular, he identified this relationship in times of depression when, although the differences in their situations became more apparent, landlords and tenants attempted to "reach amicable working arrangements".⁴⁵² These arrangements included the arrears and abatements which are the subject of this chapter but also other factors such as, Stead found, landlords covering the costs of insuring their tenant's stock "to help guarantee their rent".⁴⁵³

This relationship and the place of abatements in particular is further complicated by the types of lease a tenant was tied into. Hunt found that on Lord Darnley's estates in Kent leases played a big part in whether a rent was reduced in times of depressed prices. He found that tenants-at-will had their rents reduced in 1823, when the end of the French wars was followed by several years of low prices. However, those who were tied into longer leases received abatements instead.⁴⁵⁴ Stead, on the other hand, noted landlords may well have to abate rents even where

⁴⁵¹ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.184.

⁴⁵² J.V. Beckett, 'Agricultural Landownership & Estate Management' in E.J.T. Collins (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales volume 7, 1850-1914 (part 1)* (Cambridge, 2000), pp.741, 734.

⁴⁵³ Stead, 'Risk and Risk Management', p.344.

⁴⁵⁴ Hunt, 'Agricultural Rent', p.104.

rents were fixed.⁴⁵⁵ The findings of this study are more akin to Stead's argument. On the Montagu estate in particular, all leases were noted as 'year on year' yet abatements still preceded any reduction in real rents and sometimes remained for several years, listed in each account as an allowance and thus on the understanding that rent would increase to its previous level. James Langham, too, granted his tenants rent reductions on the understanding that their rents would revert to the agreed levels when the price of produce improved.

Arrears were also used as a short-term method of coping with low prices, with Lord Overstone, for example, complaining about tolerating rents going unpaid and the Dowager Montagu writing off arrears to enable tenants to remain on the estate. In terms of the link between the two, both were used as methods to cope with agricultural recession. However, arrears were often tolerated in a hope that tenants would eventually pay off what was owed (with landlord eventually writing them off if this were unlikely to be the case) whilst abatements were the equivalent of writing off a proportion of the rent before it even became due. Even though neither were intended as permanent reductions in rent, abatements represented a greater definite loss than did arrears but, as Beckett pointed out in a prolonged recession such as the final decades of the nineteenth century "rising rent arrears were followed by rent remissions and finally by falling rent levels".⁴⁵⁶

Therefore, despite its importance in both social and economic relations, the subject of payment of rent (arrears and abatements) in this period has been somewhat overlooked by historians. Arrears tolerated and abatements implemented demonstrate not just changes in the economy but also the management style and approach of particular landlords. The evidence of this study shows that arrears and abatements were primarily economic, not social, responses but were also occasionally used (or omitted) in order to drive problem tenants off the land.

However, landlord response to tenant difficulty and mounting arrears is an important part of the rural economy and although no great indices can be produced the localized nature of the current study does allow a comparison of abatements in terms of when a landlord granted them, the proportion of rent abated and to whom. A similar study can be done of the forgiving of arrears, although this appears to have been a less frequent method of dealing with agricultural recession in Northamptonshire.

⁴⁵⁵ Stead, 'Risk and Risk Management', p.350.

⁴⁵⁶ Beckett, 'Agricultural Landownership', p.746.

Method

The first problem one faces in deciding how to calculate arrears is how one defines them – all those debts recorded in the accounts after collection day or just those outstanding in the next account or even whether one discards monies owing which were not judged unfavourably by the estate. Within this study arrears are all monies outstanding at the making up of the account and thus anything the estate considered to be an arrear. This does not vary across the period. Final accounts were not completed until a time after rent collection, allowing for a degree of lateness. Anything paid after this, even if it was paid before the making up of the next account, shall be considered to constitute arrears as it was both money which the estate did not receive at an acceptable time and money the estate staff would be required to put extra effort into chasing and collecting.

Yet one also has to acknowledge what were consistent and acceptable short-term arrears. This is not to say that ongoing arrears were acceptable when sustained at a low level or that landlords would ignore arrears were their overall estate income satisfactory. However, seemingly it was acceptable on a number of estates for tenants to pay rents annually even though they were due twice a year, meaning a tenant might be in arrears for 6 months before paying off his debt with the next rent payment due, reducing this arrear to zero. Barbara English found that it was normal for rents on the Sledmere estate in Yorkshire to be paid around four months in arrears in the 1870s, whilst elsewhere tenants would pay 6 months in arrears.⁴⁵⁷ This was also the case in on the Montagu estate across the eighteenth century, although by the nineteenth accounts had become annual.⁴⁵⁸

Aside from the work of Turner *et al* the only other study which included arrears calculations was that of Chambers in 1953. Chambers did not specify whether he used accrued or putative rent arrears calculations but the trend of his figures fits with the trend of Turner *et al*'s rent index and, to a lesser extent, my own figures for accrued arrears for the period 1720 to 1775 but not putative arrears for the period. Figure 5:1 shows Chambers' graph, although the limited labelling, detail and lack of figures makes it difficult to compare with other figures in more than a peripheral manner.⁴⁵⁹ This shows that Chambers considered the paying off of accrued arrears

⁴⁵⁷ B. English, 'On the Eve of the Great Depression: The Economy of the Sledmere Estate 1869-1878', *Business History* 24 (1982), p.25.

⁴⁵⁸ For example, NRO, Montagu Estate Accounts No. 333, 1811-12.

⁴⁵⁹ Chambers, 'Enclosure and Labour Supply', p.343.

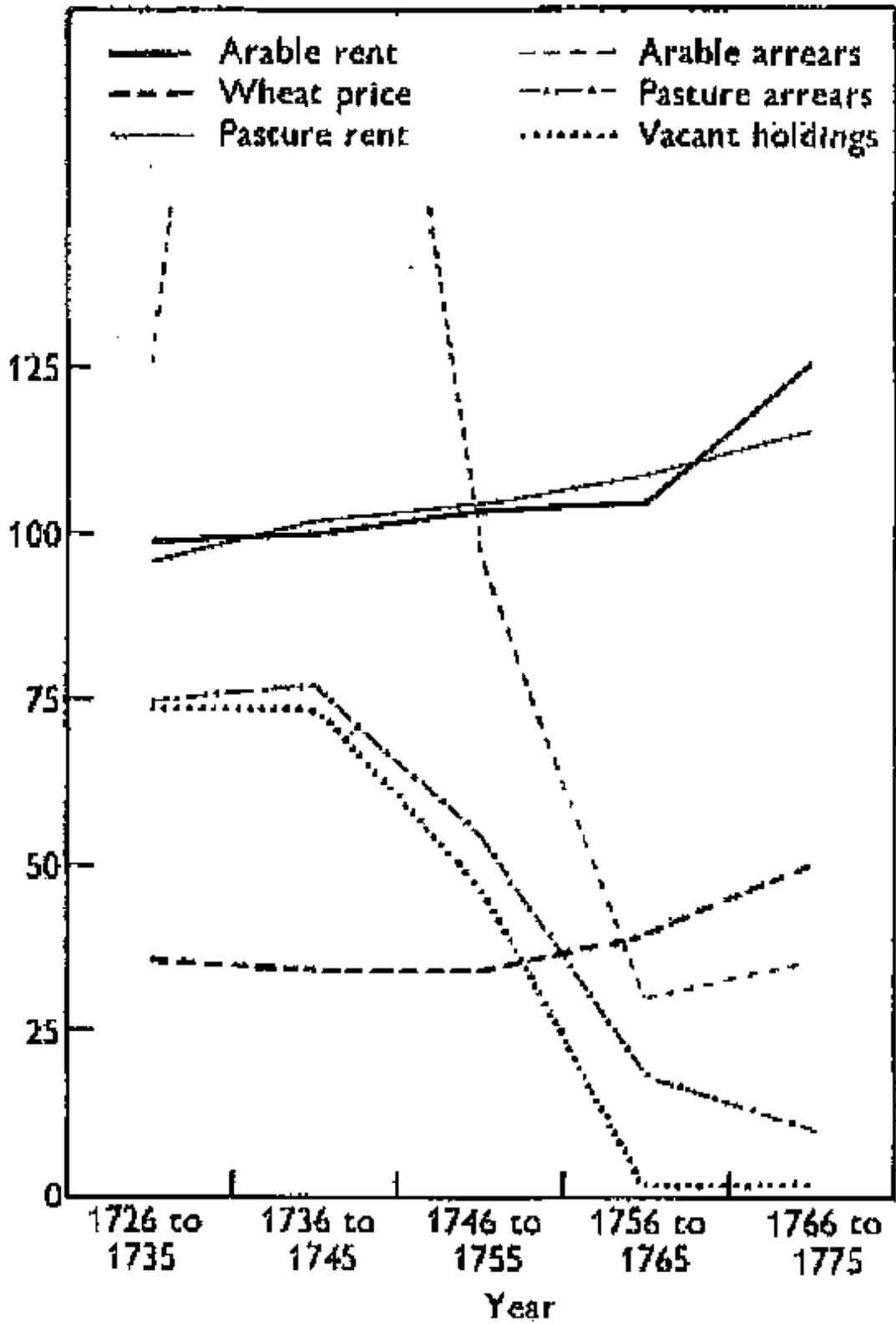


Figure 5:1 Arrears compared to rents and prevailing produce prices

SOURCE: Chambers, 'Enclosure and Labour Supply', p.343.

as important in establishing the ability of tenants to pay labour, presumably as they were more able to pay labourers when they were financially able to pay off their arrears. This further makes the point for accrued arrears in demonstrating the wealth of the tenantry.

Turner *et al* argued there were two methods of calculating arrears, the arrears owed and accumulated over the years (here Accrued Arrears) and the amount of rent left unpaid in an individual account (Putative Arrears).⁴⁶⁰ Turner *et al* preferred the putative arrears calculation in their study on the basis that this showed how much of their rent tenants could afford to pay in any given year. They considered accrued arrears calculations to be a method of 'feast and famine' which 'measures the difference between the agreed rent and the received rent', whilst the putative arrears calculation, they suggested 'is derived from a calculation involving the recorded rents but not the recorded arrears. It is the difference between agreed and received rents, but only for the estates where both measures coincide'.⁴⁶¹ Putative arrears they claimed showed the difficulty faced by tenants each year without the picture being blurred by long-term irrecoverable debts or debts being written off and were less variable by estate than accrued.⁴⁶² Thus, in their opinion, putative arrears were a more accurate calculation of tenants' year-on-year finances.

However, accrued arrears are not, as Turner *et al* suggested, less important than putative arrears, they simply show different aspects of the social and economic climate of the landed estate. Whilst putative arrears show the willingness and ability of tenants to pay their rents in any given year, accrued arrears show whether arrears were constant or increasing over time, plus the proportion of rent a tenant could owe before a landlord took action. Accrued arrears also show the levels of arrears generally accepted by estates and how long tenants took to pay off their arrears. The work of the landlord in chasing arrears and what levels were considered a problem by the estate also becomes apparent from the levels of accrued arrears built up and the point at which a landlord questioned these levels in a way that the putative arrears do not make clear. Furthermore, it was the accrued arrears which were used by the estate to assess whether rent levels were too high and should be abated. The estate made none of its calculations based on putative arrears. Therefore, here both accrued and putative arrears have been studied.

⁴⁶⁰ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.179, 181. Accrued Arrears = Total Arrears Owed - Amount Paid. Putative Arrears Owed = Rent Due - Amount Paid.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.180.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, p.183.

Abatements are more straightforward to calculate. The amount abated has been examined in terms of the proportion of rent which was abated and which tenants received abatements, when and whether abatements were granted at the same time on different estates.

Both arrears and abatements have been looked at across the nineteenth century using a sample of every ten years on the Montagu estate with a case study of the post-French Wars recession being utilized to examine both the Overstone and Montagu accounts in detail, supported by correspondence and data from the Langham estate.

Sources

The most complete accounts of arrears and abatements (both accrued and putative) are those of the Montagu estate and for this estate an index of arrears has been drawn up. The putative index has been compared to Turner *et al's* national index whilst the accrued index is used to add a further dimension to the study and provide a clearer study of the estate's view of and response to arrears. Added to this, a case study of arrears and abatements in the post-French wars recession has been undertaken utilizing not only Montagu data but also Overstone accounts figures and correspondence data plus data from the Langham estate on abatements.

Arrears

Putative Arrears

Figure 5:2 shows Turner *et al's* putative arrears index. Where tenants paid their rents in full here the arrears are shown as zero and where tenants were able to pay off some of their accrued arrears this is a percentage below the zero line, and therefore where rents were not paid in full in a given account and arrears were accrued this would be shown as a positive percentage. Therefore the ability of tenants to pay their rents in full and whether they could pay off any outstanding arrears can be used to provide evidence of the profits of tenants and the position of the rural economy in any given year.⁴⁶³

Compared to the national index, figure 5:3 shows the putative arrears figures for the Montagu estate for the period 1801-1871. Turner *et al* calculated that putative arrears

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.184.

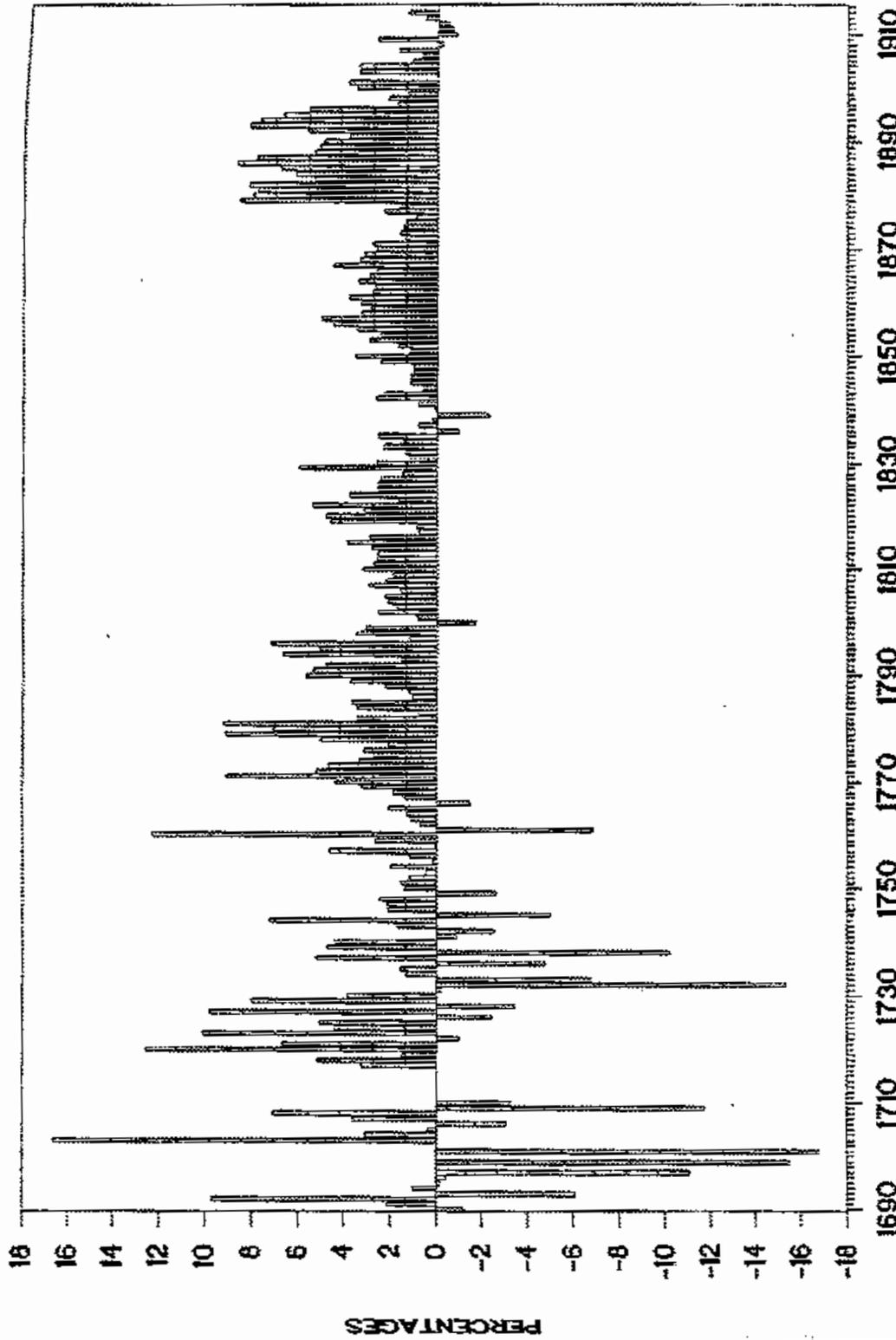


Fig. 9.4 Putative rent arrears, as percentage of rent agreed

Figure 5:2 Putative Arrears as a percentage of rent agreed, 1690-1914

SOURCE: Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.181.

Putative Rent Arrears, as a % of Rent Agreed, on The Montagu Estate, 1801 - 1881

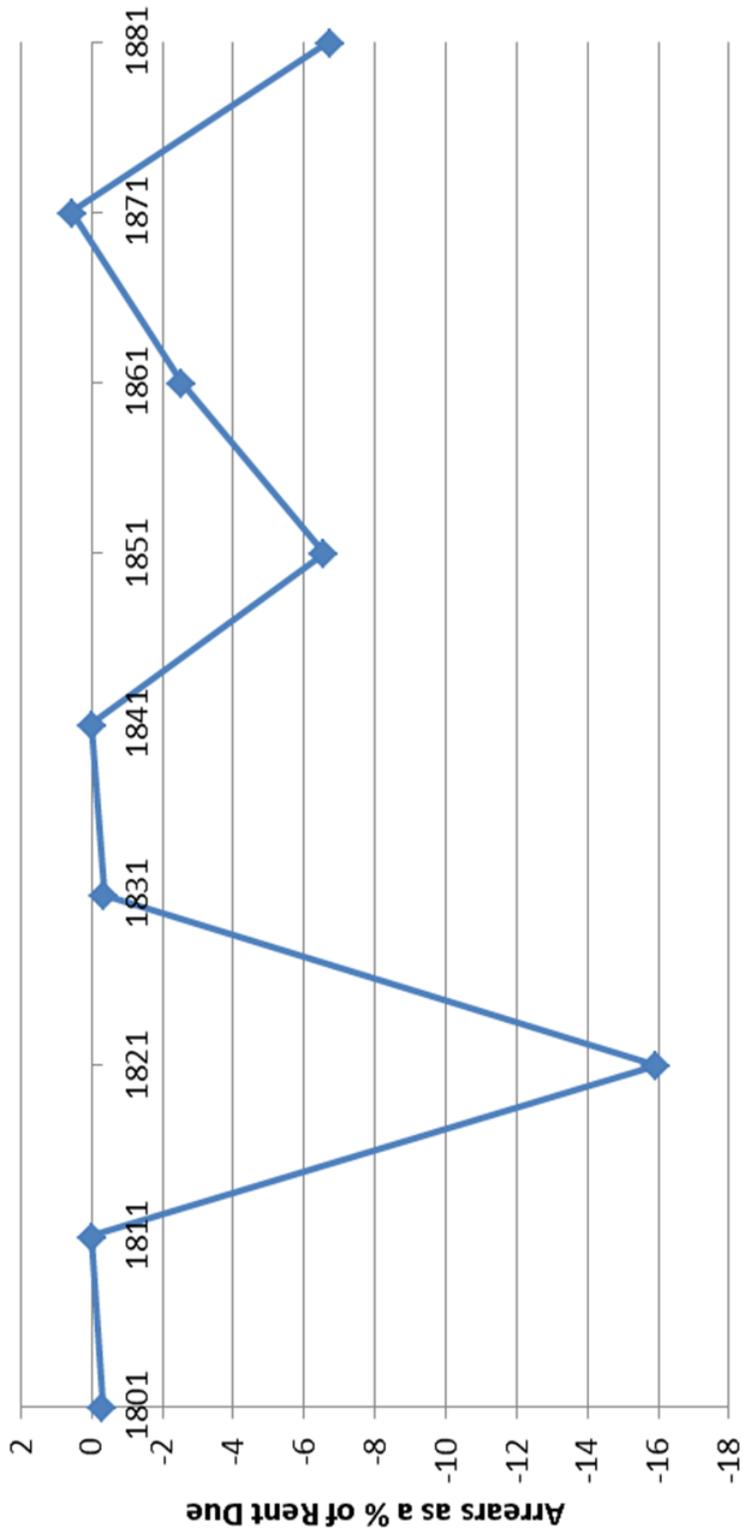


Figure 5:3

SOURCE: NRO, Montagu Estate Accounts, 1701-1885.

were generally under 5%, rising above 10% on only three occasions. Compared to these, putative arrears on the Montagu estate were more erratic, usually lower than the national index but rising in the late-nineteenth century to almost 100% of the rent due. But despite the differences in the actual figures the trends are the same and correspond to wider changes in the economy.

Thus the trends in putative arrears on the Montagu estate roughly correspond with Turner *et al*'s national index. However, the importance of putative arrears extends only to year-on-year changes in the tenants' ability to pay their rents. Long-term arrears can be assessed using accrued arrears figures, which are covered in the next section which also discusses the relative merits of both calculations as a method of studying tenant prosperity.

Accrued Arrears

Turner *et al* argued that 'feast or famine' or accrued arrears provided an inaccurate figure of outstanding arrears on an estate because they included money which was irrecoverable due to

a combination of inefficient collection, the unwillingness of landlords to accept that arrears could not be recovered, and problems with tenants which were resolved by allowing arrears to build up.⁴⁶⁴

This, they argued, rendered accrued arrears an inaccurate indicator of tenurial finances and therefore less valid for analysis than putative arrears. However, this argument doesn't stand up because inefficient collection would be as apparent year on year as it would in the longer term.

Turner *et al* presented a number of examples to demonstrate the utility of putative over accrued arrears calculations but this only shows their significance to studies of current arrears. Turner *et al*'s argument in favour of putative arrears calculations goes as follows:

Until 1750 the recorded arrears on the Manvers estate at Adwick in South Yorkshire were negligible, both in nominal terms and as a proportion of the agreed rents – the standard method we have employed in 'Feast and Famine' [i.e. accrued rent arrears] – but on other Manvers' estates the recorded arrears as proportions of agreed rents varied from an annual average of 2 per cent at Holme Pierrepont to 7 and 8 per cent at Beighton and Thoresby, and to nearly 21 per cent on the Crowle estate in

⁴⁶⁴ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.183.

Lincolnshire. Such a persistently high level of arrears points to a measurement problem. Nor is this a lone example. At face value the average recorded rent arrears on the Castle Howard estate for the decade 1701-10 were 31 per cent of the level of agreed rents, and over the period 1724-50 the equivalent annual average recorded arrears on the badminton estate stood at an astonishing 130 per cent of the agreed rent. In the first year when the data are available for Badminton the accumulated arrears were £1,850 while the assessed rent was £865.

What these examples point to is the difference between accumulated arrears, and freshly acquired arrears.⁴⁶⁵

Yet this differential is precisely why accrued arrears *are* important. Where a tenant could not pay one year or only paid a proportion of his agreed rent, putative arrears will show his difficulty but where he defaulted for several years, maintaining or increasing the monies owed, this will be apparent in accrued arrears. Thus accrued arrears are important in showing how much a landlord would tolerate and how his tenants behaved in terms of paying off their arrears.

Figure 5:4 shows the accrued arrears on the Montagu estate and figure 5:5 provides Turner *et al's* national index for comparison. Whereas the putative arrears fall into negative figures where tenants were paying off some of their arrears (i.e. paying off more than 100% of the year's rent) the accrued arrears graph shows that even though tenants in general were wealthy enough to pay off some of their arrears in good years, arrears often remained outstanding.

In 1821, for example, the putative arrears figure of -15.94% shows that on average tenants were paying more than their agreed rent. However, for the same year the accrued arrears stand at 5.76 percent, showing that tenants were able to pay off a proportion of their arrears but some remained outstanding. Putative arrears figures show what percentage of the annual rent a tenant paid but do not give any information on what sort of debt level the tenant was paying off. Whereas a tenant may seem prosperous in paying double the rent whether he owed a single year's arrears or was several years in debt tells us a lot more about his financial situation.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.181-2.

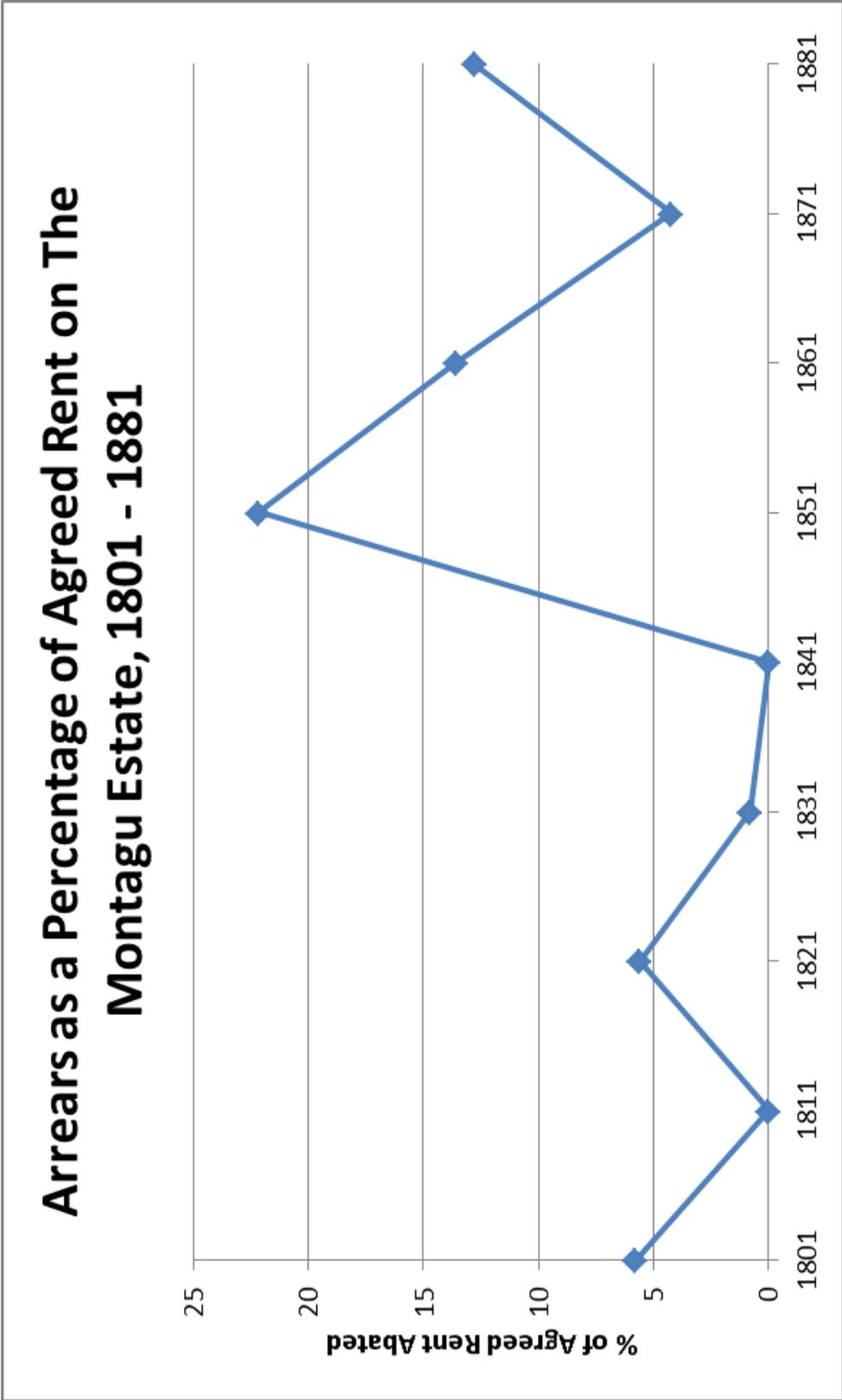


Figure 5:4
 SOURCE: NRO, Montagu Estate Accounts, 1701-1885.

Furthermore, putative arrears as an indicator of tenant prosperity also fall down where the putative arrears index figure is zero. Whilst a positive figure shows on average tenants were paying less than their agreed rent and a negative figure shows they were paying more, a zero figure shows tenants were paying the rent due, no more, no less. Therefore one cannot tell if they were prosperous and paying all they owed having previously paid off their arrears in another account or if they had high levels of arrears but had generally managed to scrape together their current rent. The former situation is more likely but it is also entirely possible that tenants had paid the rent due because they hoped, thought or knew the landlord would not threaten to evict based on their arrears so long as those arrears were not increasing. Indeed this was common on the Montagu estate where increasing arrears were a far greater cause for concern and action than those remaining stable, with tenants able to build up several years' arrears and maintain that level without landlord action. Thus where putative arrears are zero the state of tenant prosperity is somewhat ambiguous. In this situation the point can easily be clarified using the accrued arrears index. Accrued arrears also enable one to identify whether estate attempts to reduce arrears were implemented or successful based on how many years' rent a tenant was in arrears and reinforced by other data recording estate opinion and plans to reduce arrears levels.

It was also accrued arrears, not putative, which landlords acted against. Therefore the two types of arrears answer different historical questions and vary in importance depending on the historian's focus. A tenant unable to pay his rent in a single year or a single account would usually manage to pay at least a token amount from his rent (unless otherwise agreed) and unless landlords were exceptionally strict about arrears a tenant would not be threatened with eviction or noted by the landlord as having exceptionally high arrears. Outside of stewards chasing and attempting to collect putative arrears they would have little effect in isolation. Estates and landlords were more prone to take action against accruing arrears, not just tenants unable to pay in full in a single account. Therefore landlord and estate action on arrears and the levels tolerated can only be examined using the accrued arrears index, not the putative. For example, in a rare instance of compassion, tenant arrears were written off on the Montagu estate in 1821.⁴⁶⁶ This was not a result of (or a writing-off of) putative arrears but of tenants struggling from price falls following the end of the French Wars in 1815 and therefore obvious in the accrued arrears index by the rise in accrued arrears between 1811 and 1821 but figure 5:3 shows tenants still attempting to clear their outstanding arrears.

⁴⁶⁶ NRO Montagu Estate Accounts, No. 119.

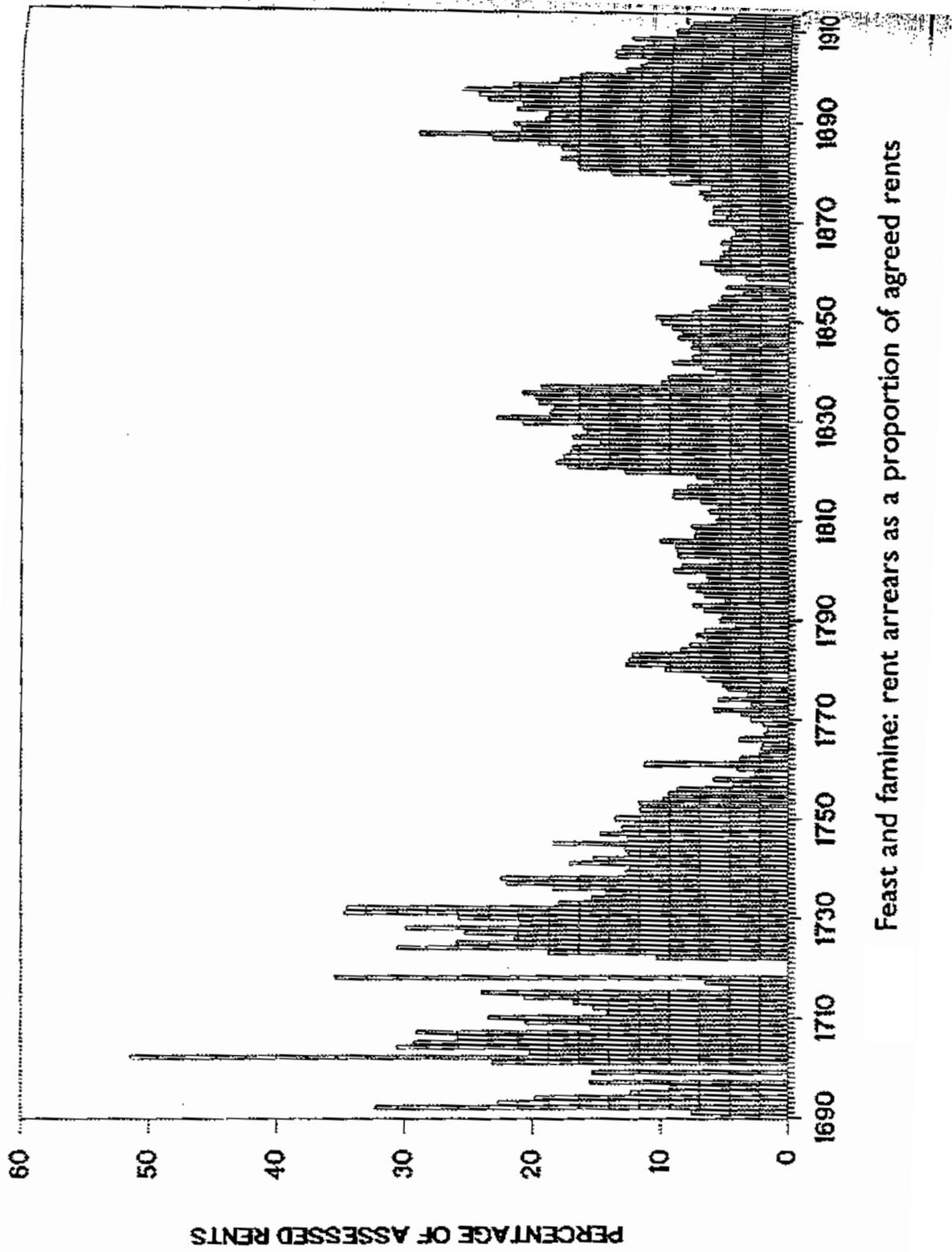


Figure 5:5

SOURCE: Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.180.

Compared to other estates, the Montagus were extremely reluctant to abate rents or write-off arrears but accrued arrears do demonstrate that there was still some compassion. In the 1851-2 account, for example, one John Russell was in effect acquitted his arrears. Russell had built up 3 years' arrears but when Montagu wrote a memorandum questioning this increase his steward, Phillip Pain noted the following:

The occupier of this cottage is an old wood labourer who has been employed on the Estate nearly the whole of his days, he is now supported by the Parish and cannot I think live long, he begs hard not to be sent to the Union as his time cannot be long.

Therefore the tenant was allowed to remain in his cottage despite the knowledge that neither his arrears nor his rent would be paid.⁴⁶⁷ However, few arrears were written off and the years where this was done were generally years of trouble for farmers or there were extenuating circumstances in the case of individuals. It must also be noted here that those exonerated were often labourers and where a tenant could not farm the land they held estates would usually look at moving them to a smaller holding or landless cottage rather than allowing them to remain.⁴⁶⁸ Throughout the Montagu accounts arrears were also written off where a tenant became a pauper, absconded or died. But the build-up of arrears, not the reasons and incidents of the landlord writing them off, is what is of interest here. The rarity of instances of writing off arrears simply makes the figures for the accrued arrears generally more accurate, usually disappearing when they were paid off and not written off.

One significant difference between the Montagu figures and Turner *et al's* rent index is the 'background arrears level' which they identified in their accrued arrears calculations. The Montagu estate did not correspond to this national trend, with tenants seemingly determined to pay off as much of the money they owed as possible and certainly for the nineteenth century there was no background level of arrears since arrears levels fell to zero whenever the economy looked promising. Where what Turner *et al* would describe as background arrears do occur it is because few tenants were significantly in arrears, pushing up the average even where most tenants owed nothing. In fact, with the exception of the 1860s the Montagu arrears were always lower than Turner *et al's* national index identified across the country. In terms of general trend, however, Turner *et al's* index arrears remained stable at around 5 percent (the background level) in 1800 and 1810 whilst in the Montagu accounts there were no arrears in 1791 but arrears

⁴⁶⁷ NRO Montagu Estate Accounts No. 398.

⁴⁶⁸ In 1822, for example, Pearce suggested Mrs Hales be allowed to keep her cottage but her son take over her farm, as per her son's suggestion and owing to her age and infirmity. NRO L(C)1107.

rose to 5.7 percent in 1801-2, falling back to 0 in 1811. The two zero figures can be explained by an absence of background levels of arrears, probably resulting from the lower numbers of tenants used in my study. The 1801 arrears, however, show an increase in arrears during the French Wars, which is not easily explained in general terms. The 1800-1 account shows very few tenants in arrears but those who were had accrued great amounts – 2 at 100 percent, 1 at almost 200 percent and one at 310 percent of 1 year's agreed rent.

The Montagu arrears rose in the 1850s and remained high in the 1860s, whilst in the national index they fell. This is where Montagu's arrears were higher than the national figures. The 1850s and 1860s figures again are a result of anomalies which would be balanced out in a national sample but which stand strongly in the accounts of a single estate. In 1861 there were several tenants in arrears, two of whom owed more than 250 percent of their annual agreed rent; one owing over 400 percent and one almost 500 percent. In 1851-2 only two tenants were in arrears at all but one of these owed over nine-and-a-half years' rent and the other over ten-and-a-half years' rent. This is the problem Turner *et al* complained of with accrued arrears figures but the extremities of this year emphasise the importance of accrued arrears – from the 1840s to the 1850s these tenants had been allowed to build up arrears virtually unchecked despite there being no problem in the economy. The rental index shown in chapter 4 (see page 98) shows that rents were steadily increasing for this decade and the absence of high numbers of tenants in arrears adds to this evidence to indicate that those who did fall into arrears were struggling personally or neglecting to pay and not a part of a wider struggle facing agricultural tenants on even just the Montagu estate, let alone at a national level. The building up of over 10 year's arrears shows that Montagu and his steward had not taken action to evict this tenant or to agree a deal to get his arrears paid off but the tenant in question, one Henry Draper, does have notes of concern beside his arrear in the 1851-2 account, including a note from steward Phillip Pain stating

I fear the affairs of this tenant are in a bad state and that there is but little chance of getting his arrears reduced without destraining his effects.

But there is no indication whether this arrear had been chased previously or why action had not been taken sooner.

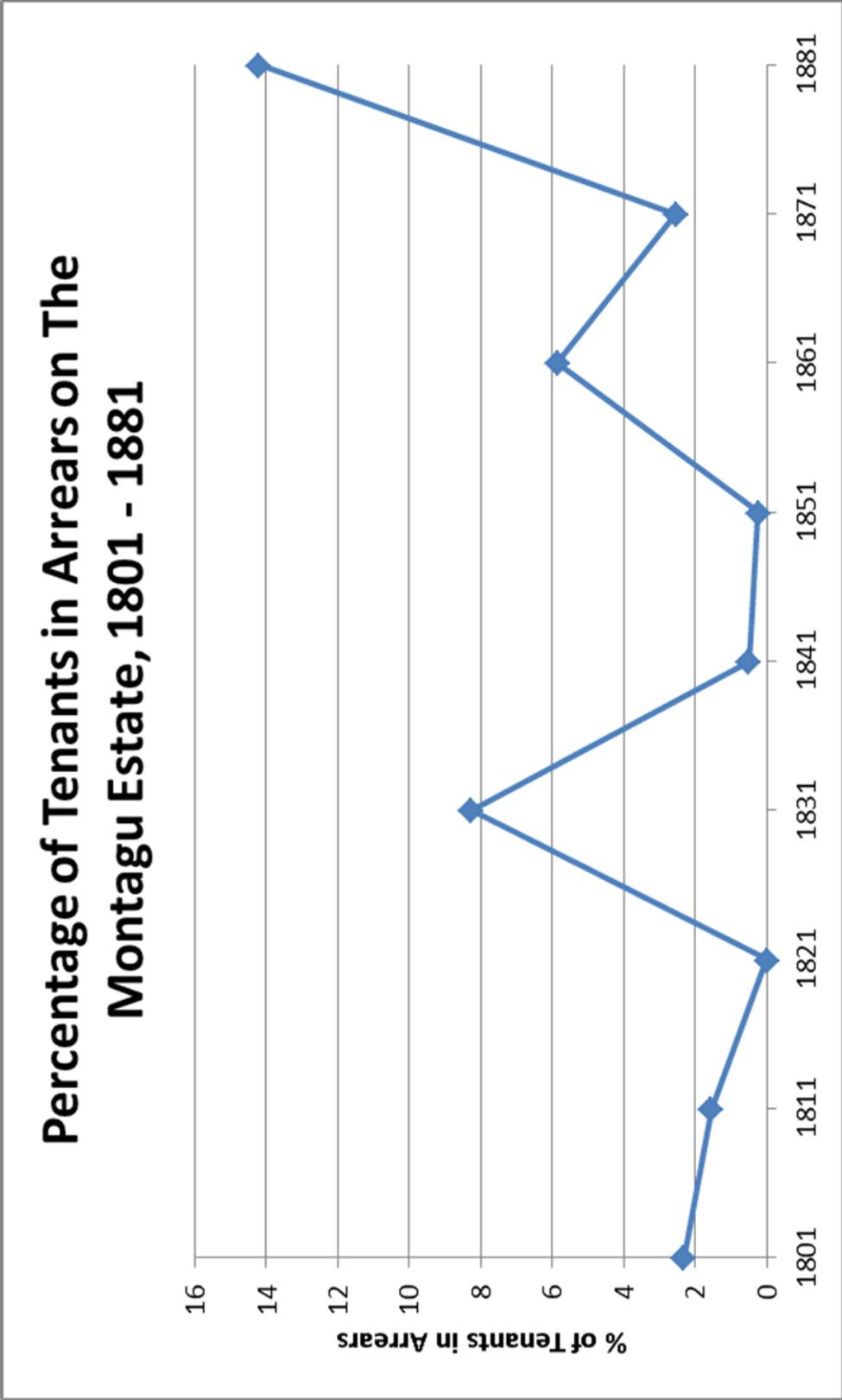


Figure 5:6
 SOURCE: NRO, Montagu Estate Accounts, 1701-1885.

Figure 5:6 shows the numbers of tenants in arrears on the Montagu estate at any one time as a percentage of the tenants on the estate. Tenant numbers fluctuated over the period for a number of reasons such as tenants coming on to or quitting the land, landlords buying and selling land, land being taken out of cultivation for other purposes (e.g. parks) or brought into cultivation from other uses and changing farm sizes. Therefore, the number of tenants on the land at any one time was not consistent so one is unable to produce a productive study of tenant numbers across the period. However, as can be seen from figure 5:6, the percentage of tenants in arrears can be used to ascertain, to a degree, the relative wealth of the tenants on the Montagu estate at any one time.

The numbers of tenants in arrears enables one to draw a more complete picture of tenant finances and, indeed, of the economy of the landed estate. For example, 1810-11, at the height of the French Wars when prices were rising rapidly due to French barricades. The Montagu rents do not appear to have been raised dramatically in the wars, despite the year-on-year leases, and thus at this point putative arrears were zero with rents being paid in full.

Therefore, in spite of Turner *et al's* conclusion that one can learn most from putative arrears calculations and that these provide the greatest accuracy, one actually requires accrued arrears figures and proportions of tenants in arrears in order to build up a complete picture of tenurial finances and their place in estate management. Putative arrears do provide the most accurate catalogue of the tenants' ability to pay at any particular time but do not give an accurate indication of ongoing trends across the period, even in the national index which loses the limitations created by my sample size but also smoothes out the patterns at the risk of losing the social dynamics. Accrued arrears face problems if one wishes to use them to look at short-term financial ability but, particularly when used with putative arrears, can be used to look at the current and ongoing prosperity of tenants and also provide information of the levels of debts both subjected to and tolerated by the estate. Yet even when used in conjunction with one another putative and accrued arrears figures can be skewed by tenant numbers, with few tenants with high debts producing similar figures to many tenants with low debts even though it is probable only the latter situation is evidence of wider economic problems troubling the estate. Few tenants with high debt levels are also indicative of the levels of debt landlords were prepared to tolerate. Therefore the trend in both tenant finances and estate management across the entire period 1700-1885 requires all three sets of figures in order to be studied with any accuracy and to build up a complete picture.

Estate Management of Arrears

Of course, landlords relied on tenants for a significant quantity, if not all, of their estate income. Rather than farm the land themselves with paid labour, landlords leased it out to tenants. This was because, in the words of C.G.A. Clay, tenants

provided them with a buffer against a fall proportionate to the fall in agricultural profits in times of depression, for the tenants had to maintain rent payments as far as they could, even at the expense of their own savings, consumption, and reinvestment in their farms.⁴⁶⁹

However, this buffer could only work provided the tenants paid the rent, it also relies on the assumption that the tenants not only had savings and money to re-invest but that they could and would reduce their consumption in order to pay their rent. In other words we return to the difference between agreeing and paying the rent. Some tenants managed to fall into arrears even when agricultural profits in general were high, others became bankrupt or absconded in arrears during even short recessions. It is doubtful these tenants had any money to rely on in times of economic downturn, making them useless as a buffer. Turner *et al* also appear to blame estate management for arrears remaining on the accounts, suggesting a mixture of inefficient collection and refusal to admit arrears were irrecoverable as reasons for high levels of arrears on estates.⁴⁷⁰ But however far one accepts tenants had an obligation to pay their rents even at the expense of their own livelihood, Turner *et al*'s reasoning suggests that the reasons for arrears (especially in times of stable or increasing prices) lay with the estate not chasing them effectively rather than with the tenants who failed to pay. This does correlate to the Northamptonshire evidence where stewards appear to have chased rents although action was seldom taken against them.

The Montagu arrears figures and Turner *et al*'s arrears index, along with the correspondence evidence of other estates, show that the majority of tenants made a great effort to pay their rents in full. Even though arrears rose in a recession they would be paid off when times were better, sometimes even falling to zero on the Montagu estate. Elsewhere there are many comments of rents being 'well paid'. How far this was due to tenant conscience and how far to stewards' work in ensuring rents were paid cannot be established with a great degree of certainty.

⁴⁶⁹ C.G.A. Clay, 'Landlords & Estate Management in England' in Thirsk, J. (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England & Wales* vol.5:2, 1640-1750 (Cambridge, 1985), p.170.

⁴⁷⁰ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.183.

However willing tenants were to pay their rents, or however obliged they felt to do so, there is a large body of evidence both within and outside of Northamptonshire of both stewards chasing up tenants for monies owed and landlords chasing up stewards to collect in the arrears due. The success of the steward in collecting rents was dependent again on the willingness and ability of tenants to actually pay the monies owed. Leveson-Gower steward Plaxton best explained the problem in 1704:

Ralph Wood saith he visits them often but can get no money. Now your lordship is under an odd dilemma. If you sue them or distreyn, you bring a great clamour on a good landlord: if you for bear them too long, you bring loss and damage to yourself. I wish they would act with more vigour, and yet you must be forced to make an example of some for a terror to the rest... I know times are bad, but here are many very rich men behind and in arrear with their Mic. Rents.

As evident above stewards were responsible for the collection of arrears and at least some performed this duty with vigour if not success. Wordie suggested that Plaxton was obsessed with what he perceived to be the arrears 'problem' of the estate. Wordie noted that arrears were a serious problem on the estate in 1691 and pointed out that Plaxton viewed rent collection as extremely inefficient complaining in 1704 of the inefficient rent collection and the levels of arrears remaining from the previous year. Despite Plaxton's campaign against arrears however, they were at exactly the same levels in 1705 as they had been in 1702, although Mingay pointed out this was as a result of outstanding arrears not being paid off, but that tenants were paying off their current rents.⁴⁷¹

Where rents were not paid, the job of chasing arrears and ensuring tenants paid their rents fell to the estate steward, especially where a landlord was often absent from the estate. Yet this did not mean they had sole charge of the accounts. The Lords Montagu, for example, would check the accounts and write marginal comments although these were seldom more detailed than 'Arrear must not be allowed to remain'.⁴⁷² Landlords almost exclusively focussed on the failures of their stewards in collecting rents but this was presumably because it was their duty to collect all monies due. Nathaniel Kent was very much of the opinion that where rents collected were less than rents due the steward was at fault:

⁴⁷¹ Wordie, *Estate Management*, pp.33-4.

⁴⁷² This example, NRO Montagu Estate Account No. 398.

I know that the Rents should be returned, and would be returned if the Responsibility could be so impressed upon the Minds of all the different Superintendants, so that they might act with the same zeal as a Farmer does for his own immediate interest.⁴⁷³

Indeed, the Montagu accounts have comments throughout whereby the estate owner questions the actions of his steward and why arrears have been allowed to build up, often even saying that the arrear must be reduced or “cannot be allowed to continue”. Stewards can also be seen regularly justifying their actions in their accounts, for example, in April 1816 steward Robert Edmunds noted Charles Lucas of Geddington Chase’s arrear:

See Note in the Last Account, and for the reason there stated this Arrear will in future be discontinued in my account

having previously stated the arrear would be written off if it could not be recovered.⁴⁷⁴ In their correspondence both Lord Overstone and James Langham appear content with their stewards’ actions, making no complaints, although this does not mean there were not problems, particularly as one of Langham’s stewards was removed from his post for dubious bookkeeping.⁴⁷⁵ However, whether this carried over into their actions one could not say. Outside of Northamptonshire landlords appear to have taken a similar approach. Mingay commented in his study of the Bouverie estate in eighteenth-century Kent that ‘the unfortunate steward was constantly instructed to... keep down his rent arrears’ and commented that Bouverie frequently complained about his steward’s failing in this task.⁴⁷⁶

Mingay found that Sir Jacob Bouverie had to instruct his steward when to take action against arrears but in Northamptonshire stewards appear to have been much more organised and usually having reasons for allowing arrears or a plan to deal with them.⁴⁷⁷ Philip Pain, a Montagu steward of the nineteenth century, was clearly productive in the chasing and

⁴⁷³ Quoted in P. Horn, ‘An Eighteenth-Century Land Agent: The Career of Nathaniel Kent (1737-1810)’, *AgHR* 30 (1982), p.14.

⁴⁷⁴ NRO, Montagu Estate Accounts, 366. But this is only one of many examples.

⁴⁷⁵ NRO L(C)1091, L(C)1174 included details of the complaints of tenants and findings of Pearce when looking into the matter of William Fellows’ bookkeeping.

⁴⁷⁶ G.E. Mingay, ‘Estate Management in Eighteenth-Century Kent’, *AgHR* 4:2 (1956), p.109.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.109.

collecting of arrears. Where a tenant could not pay an arrear he would often negotiate with them and agree they were to pay a proportion of the arrear and the rest would be written off. Pain would also justify tenant arrears for reasons such as tenant poverty or ill health, sometimes suggesting the tenant would recover and pay off the arrear, or that the tenant had been a loyal, hard-working employee of the estate and would probably die soon so should be allowed to live out his days outside the poor house or was too poor to stay but he did not want to send them to the poor house. In the 1851-2 account, for example, Lord Richard Francis Montagu questioned an increasing arrear and Pain replied that

The occupiers of this cottage sleep on the floor, they have no bed nor any other furniture, therefore there is nothing to distrain, they belong to Warkton but no one will have them as Lodgers & they refuse to go to the union.

But tenants who *were* deemed capable of paying the full rent due were unlikely to receive compassion. In the same account Montagu commented that Richard Bagshaw had not paid enough of his outstanding arrear (he had reduced it from £467 by just £29 to £438) and Pain's response was to detail his efforts in collecting the arrear:

I have pressed this tenant hard to reduce his arrear which he promises to do before my next account is made up, but I cannot depend on his word.⁴⁷⁸

Thus stewards were aware of who was able or should have been able to pay their arrears and did work hard to collect monies owed. It was they who understood best how to act on tenant arrears. Yet landlords who wanted full receipt of rents may have been right to suggest their stewards were being lenient towards some tenants in arrears but in many cases they acted as they did with good reason.

Elsewhere struggling tenants could be treated with compassion, even if this involved moving them from their farms to smaller agricultural holdings or landless cottages. In July 1831 for example, William Dean of the Langham estate wrote

On the morrow I expect to have possession of the Cottage &c of the late Joseph Pursers. You will please to take into consideration who is to be the future tenant and give me your instructions accordingly, as some final arrangement must be made respecting the Widow Wiggins who is still residing in the house and land her

⁴⁷⁸ NRO Montagu Estate Account No. 398.

late husband occupied I am sorry to say without any means of being able to pay up the arrears of rent. I think I did mention to Mr Pearce some little time back in one of my letters to him respecting her being allowed to occupy a Cottage which might enable her to keep a Cow or two and with the assistance of her late husband's Brothers she would be able to live comfortable with her two youngest children, one a little Girl and the other Boy a cripple, the two other Boys are now at service.⁴⁷⁹

Other stewards gave reasons other than illness or poverty to justify the arrears of some tenants. Catlin commented that tenants 'take very little care' to pay their rents including one Benjamin Wright who could not pay as he had to pay a bill for looking after sheep and a Mrs Vaughan who could not pay as she 'must buy some beasts to eat her hay stacks first'.⁴⁸⁰ But these were not reports of justified arrears but of those reprehensible that he had failed, despite best efforts, to collect. Indeed elsewhere he complained to Fitzwilliam that

Mr Smith of Deepingate is in arrears for meadow and other land, which I have asked for (he is to pay some of it for Dr Wigmore), but he makes no haste about it although three or four years behind, and many others are also.⁴⁸¹

Stewards on other estates used different approaches to justify arrears to their landlords. A letter from the Finch Hatton estate in the early eighteenth century commented that since Michaelmas and the date of the letter (26th December) 'Old Mr Wilson has gathered you some money amongst your Tenants'.⁴⁸² On the Langham estate, manager William Pearce often wrote informing his landlord that money was coming in too. In 1817 he wrote that he had left £100 with Fellows (sub-steward) but was unable to leave anything more as 'Parkwood and Clarke will both pay something in the course of a Month towards their Rent... they promise to do it'.⁴⁸³ In a previous letter Clarke and Parkinson were both noted as tenants 'always tardy' with their payments.⁴⁸⁴ This is not evidence of more competent or thorough collection but simply of the

⁴⁷⁹ NRO L(C)1196.

⁴⁸⁰ *Fitzwilliam Correspondence*, p.187.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.197.

⁴⁸² NRO, FH1457.

⁴⁸³ NRO L(C)1091.

⁴⁸⁴ NRO L(C)1089.

steward pointing out he was in control of the situation before the landlord could complain of monies outstanding, as is the case of Old Mr Wilson on the Finch Hatton estate.

Stewards also appear to have been forward-thinking in terms of rent collection, maybe allowing a short-term arrear as they believed this would be the most profitable course in the longer term. In 1822, following large abatements on the Langham estate, Rippon paid only £32 on his £208 rent which had already been abated by £70. Pearce advised Langham not to evict the tenant but to write-off the arrear so that the tenant would remain on the land:

I understand that there are nearly 20 farms to let in the Neighbourhood of Oundle, and that though many of them have been advertised, they still remain unlet from Michaelmas next!! The only course to pursue in my opinion in these most trying Times, is, to keep the Land if possible in Cultivation – and to prefer Old Tenants to new ones, for to either – great allowances must be made ‘till the Produce bears a better price.’⁴⁸⁵

L.J. Bellot’s study of steward Leer on Earl Temple’s Dorset estate included evidence of similar management. In 1771 Leer took no action against a widow in excessive arrears because ‘her prospects improved daily with the growth to manhood of her son’.⁴⁸⁶ Thus the retaining of tenants who could pay their arrears off eventually was often preferred over having to write-off the money due and lay out further money in order to secure a new tenant.

Stewards would also advise lords how to respond to arrears. The dowager, Lady Montagu, forgave a number of arrears in the 1820-1 account on the advice of steward Robert Edmunds and for the year 1821-2 a number of notes are made regarding tenants unable to pay. William Copley, a tenant less than one year in arrears but whose rent had been abated and whose arrear was increasing, is noted as ‘Reduced to £35 a year from 5th April 1821. I fear this tenant cannot be allowed to continue’ when he managed to pay only £30 of his £35 rent and increased his arrears to £30. But Edmund’s luck appears to have been more limited than Pearce’s optimism. Another tenant, one Elizabeth Bird, was noted as insolvent owing £3 in arrears which had to be written off. The arrear is not particularly high as the tenant taking on her holding paid £22 per annum for it but the loss of her as a tenant without monies secured indicates less success than

⁴⁸⁵ NRO L(C)1110.

⁴⁸⁶ L.J. Bellot, “‘Wild Hares and Red Herrings’: A Case Study of Estate Management in the Eighteenth-Century English Countryside”, *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 56:1 (1993), p.25.

Pearce enjoyed.⁴⁸⁷ It must be stated however that whilst Pearce was writing at the beginning of the recession the Montagu account was several years later and the recession had deepened but the fact that Edmund advised on mounting arrears even after abatements had been granted and Pearce advised on action to be taken if a payment was not made shows Pearce thinking further forward and implies he was more in control of the estate. The bankruptcy of Elizabeth Bird with an arrear to the value of such a small part of her rent further implies limited control of rents whilst Pearce was entirely in control knowing the men to be serial defaulters and managing to extract full rent and only having to chase outstanding arrears. In 1823 Pearce was again having a level of success with his rent collection, writing to Langham that 'those tenants that were behind have paid off a considerable Portion of their arrears'. This was again when the estate was in the midst of a recession and a year after Edmund's account in 1821-2.

On the Langham estate (although not evident elsewhere in the county) Pearce would also go further than advising his landlord when not to take action but would actually take action against tenants as required and inform Langham he was doing so. In September 1818 Pearce wrote to Langham informing him that he had sent 'a sharp letter' to Thomas and Robert Houghton in an attempt to extract payment but if the arrears were not paid in the next 3 months he would take action against them.⁴⁸⁸

Turner *et al* had suggested one of the reasons for arrears was inefficient rent collection but from the evidence of steward actions (as opposed to landlord views) in Northamptonshire collection was well managed, with arrears being expected at certain times, stewards calling upon those owing money regularly and arrangements being made with those who were unable to pay, as well as arrangements being made with some for reasons of compassion.⁴⁸⁹ Yet the landlord's view on arrears rarely seems to have accepted or acknowledged the difficulties faced by stewards in gathering in arrears. On the Montagu estate the Lords Montagu would often question why an arrear was outstanding, James Langham questioned arrears levels and Lord Overstone discussed tenants unable to pay their rents with Beasley to determine whether arrears were justified.

Roebuck also found that arrears increased when landlords were absent from their estates. Before 1725 on the Everingham estate in East Yorkshire, Roebuck calculated that arrears levels were very low but increased thereafter when the landlord was long-term absent from the estate,

⁴⁸⁷ NRO Montagu Estate Account No. 371b.

⁴⁸⁸ NRO L(C)1097.

⁴⁸⁹ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.183.

resulting in a 'significant reduction in the size of his annual income'.⁴⁹⁰ Both Mingay and Roebuck's findings imply that landlords were greater supervisors of rent collection and indeed put successful extra pressure on stewards to keep arrears down when they were present on the estate, not able to check accounts or check up on the steward's work as regularly when long-term absent.

Therefore stewards and landlords did indeed work hard in an effort to collect (or indeed avoid) rent arrears. However, the problem was that the tenants were not always willing to pay nor were they always able. Here stewards tended to be compassionate towards those elderly and infirm or those who would soon be able to pay off their arrears, sometimes to the dislike of their landlords. Sometimes it was even more economically viable to write-off an arrear in order to retain a tenant long-term. These details were often discussed between stewards and landlords but it was the stewards who were blamed for arrears, even if they were doing all in their power to collect them. If an arrear remained outstanding year-on-year however action would eventually have to be taken.

Abatements

Arrears on landed estates were tolerated for a number of reasons, primarily based on an assumption that they would be paid off or because landlords would rather tolerate arrears and have tenants pay what rent they could than reduce rents, even on a temporary basis. Whilst David Stead argued that arrears levels in general fell over time owing to better management of the farming risk by tenants, where they did accrue the estate had to acknowledge them and decide whether to take any action.⁴⁹¹

Abatements were temporary rent reductions in periods of low prices which lasted only until prices rose again. Turner *et al* described them as 'practical short-term remedies' to low prices; a way of aiding struggling tenants without permanently reducing rents.⁴⁹² However, Hunt found that whilst landlords had been more than eager to increase rents during the French Wars they were reluctant to lower them again in the recession which followed.⁴⁹³ In times of depression,

⁴⁹⁰ P. Roebuck, 'Absentee Landownership in the late Seventeenth and early Eighteenth Centuries: A Neglected Factor in English Agrarian History', *AgHR* 21 (1973), p.9.

⁴⁹¹ Stead, 'Risk and Risk Management', p.352.

⁴⁹² Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.241.

⁴⁹³ Hunt, 'Agricultural Rent', p.108.

where a tenant was signed into a lease, a landlord may well tolerate arrears or even offer temporary abatements of rents to his tenants. Indeed, were the recession prolonged, Hunt noted that landlords would often abate rents to prevent tenants becoming bankrupt and being forced to quit their holdings.⁴⁹⁴ Added to this, however, Stead noted that abatements were not generally granted unless tenants complained.⁴⁹⁵ However, in the Montagu accounts at least, abatements do not appear to have been limited to those tied in leases for a number of years, but were applied to those already on the land on a year-on-year basis, depending on the agricultural economy, with no reduction in the agreed rent. Robert Thompson found that abatements usually lasted for several years before becoming permanent reductions in rent but, if prices improved before this, rents would return to their agreed levels.⁴⁹⁶

Indeed, in Northamptonshire the short-term, temporary nature of abatements was of great importance to those granting them, as was the necessity of granting them. In 1822 Pearce advised Langham that 'great allowances must be made 'till produce bears a better price'.⁴⁹⁷ However, the temporality of abatements had already been set for the Cottesbrooke estate in 1816 when it was decided that abatements would be halved when the price of wheat was over 70s per quarter and rents would return to their 1811 levels once the price was over 80s per quarter.⁴⁹⁸ Unfortunately prices continued to fall. Therefore abatements were rent reductions intended to be temporary but which could remain in place for a significant period of time or could become permanent rent reductions. However, as shall be shown, the intention and purpose of rent abatements was to provide a temporary reprieve for tenants in times of low prices, even if this extended throughout a prolonged recession.

Along with arrears, abatements were an important factor in managing a landed estate. However, unlike arrears, abatements were granted and their levels set by the estate. Their application was linked closely to the economy as well as the need of individual estates to retain tenants on the land at a particular time and their levels depended on prices, demand for land and the importance of maintaining individual tenants (most easily gauged by the level of rent or size of holding of the tenant).

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., pp.102-3.

⁴⁹⁵ Stead, 'Risk and Risk Management', p.351.

⁴⁹⁶ R.J. Thompson, 'An Inquiry into the Rent of Agricultural land in England and Wales during the nineteenth century', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 70:4 (1907), p.601.

⁴⁹⁷ NRO L(C)1110.

⁴⁹⁸ NRO L(C)1086.

Historians have done little work on abatements, even within studies of rents, but their importance in estate management and the rural economy necessitates their inclusion here. Turner *et al* noted their importance as the response of estates to rising arrears levels but did not study them statistically and analyse levels as they did for rents and arrears.⁴⁹⁹ Muir Johnstone, however, did note the importance of abatements in East Lothian and Lanarkshire, although not all the reasons identified for abatements in the lowlands are apparent in the Northamptonshire evidence.⁵⁰⁰ In fact, abatements were an alternative to both high arrears and permanent rent reductions, making them the most profitable option for an estate without the risk of tenant bankruptcies arrears or high rents could bring. Their existence was common and their purpose important, if not necessary, for the survival of landed estates but, probably as a result of little work concentrating on tenants and rents, little work has been done on the subject of abatements.

Who Granted Abatements

Unlike arrears, which were the tenants' to accrue, abatements were controlled by the landlords. Therefore landlord personality and personal finances played a significant part in determining whether abatements were granted at all. However, stewards and tenants also affected this decision.

Stewards would advise on both the need for abatements and the extent to which rents ought to be abated based upon their knowledge of individual holdings and the tenants renting them. Indeed, English considered rebates and delaying payment as part of the role of the steward.⁵⁰¹ Within Northamptonshire this was certainly the case on the Langham estate where Pearce advised on abatements, even going so far as to provide calculations of the sums to be abated, although the final decision rested with Langham himself. It was Pearce who, in 1816, 'inspected every cottage and fixed what I think a fair rent upon each'.⁵⁰² But in 1821, despite Pearce's advice to accept the tenants' requests for abatements, Langham instead proposed 'taking up each individual Case distinctly', taking into account whether poor rates or other local costs were particularly high, but until this was done he would 'take no notice of their application for a Reduction at present – but desire Dean to press for the Arrears in the usual way hitherto

⁴⁹⁹ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.179.

⁵⁰⁰ M. Johnstone, 'Farm Rents and Improvement: East Lothian and Lanarkshire, 1670-1830', *AgHR* 57 (2009), p.37.

⁵⁰¹ English, 'Patterns of Estate Management', p.40.

⁵⁰² NRO L(C)1089.

done'.⁵⁰³ The reference to the tenants requesting abatements is also an interesting one, for tenurial requests were also an important factor in a landlord's decision to abate rents. Whilst Langham refused to abate rents in 1821 he did look into individual cases to see if some holdings were being overcharged. In 1859 W. Lewis also wrote about the role of tenants in the decision to grant abatements. In a letter to Lord Overstone Lewis commented that prices were low but 'the farmer has not yet begun to complain and rents have been well paid'.⁵⁰⁴ Thus tenants would let landlords know if they were struggling and felt rents should be abated, seemingly by method of complaint as well as by accruing arrears.

Why Rents Were Abated

Abatements would work to maintain tenants by helping them to avoid bankruptcy and heavy arrears in times of recession, enabling them to remain on the land. Turner *et al* suggested that despite their being introduced as a method of self-preservation by the estate abatements

could be dressed up as temporary expedients to help out tenants during times of distress and would also convey the correct image of a landed hierarchy acting with local responsibility.⁵⁰⁵

Yet despite their being portrayed as an aid to the tenantry in hard times, abatements were intended for the preservation of the estate by keeping the lands as fully tenanted as possible. This meant that when rents rose again there would be a greater estate income than if some tenants had left the land and also minimized lands in hand which the estate would have to maintain. Johnstone noted that in the lowlands abatements were also sometimes granted to encourage improvements but there is no evidence of this in the Northamptonshire records covered by this study.⁵⁰⁶ Outside of Northamptonshire abatements also appear to have been used as a method of retaining tenants. In the 1870s C. Wood wrote that on his East Riding estate 5 tenants had left the land, 3 more had given notice to quit and a further 5 or 6 had been convinced to remain by the estate granting heavy abatements.⁵⁰⁷ Thus abatements had an

⁵⁰³ NRO L(C)1105.

⁵⁰⁴ University of London MS804/1180.

⁵⁰⁵ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.241.

⁵⁰⁶ Johnstone, 'Farm Rents and Improvement', p.37.

⁵⁰⁷ *Overstone Correspondence*, p.1328.

important function in keeping the land tenanted and thus under cultivation rather than maintained at the expense of the estate.

Abatements were occasionally granted for reasons outside of maintenance of tenants in times of recession. In 1830, for example, following unrest amongst labourers on the estate, Langham advised Dean to offer abatements to tenants who increased the wages of their employees, the abatement to be equal to the increase in wages paid out by the tenant.⁵⁰⁸ The Hammonds had also picked up on this point and in 1911 they had suggested this to be not necessarily a common practice but certainly a common complaint of tenants to their landlords was that they could not pay labour more unless their rents were reduced.⁵⁰⁹ This form of abatement adds a further dimension to the economic workings of the estate, with labourers' grievances also coming through in the accounts and adds to the complex picture of landlord actions taking an interest in the financial well-being of their tenants whether out of interest for their own long-term profits or out of a feeling of paternal duty towards those residing on their estates.

Thus abatements acted as a way of retaining tenants on landed estates in times of poor demand for land. However, they were also used in a paternalist manner, to aid struggling tenants simply because they were struggling, whether it be due to economic problems, illness or infirmity or even so they could, in turn, increase the wages of their labourers. When abatements were granted will be discussed below.

When Landlords Granted Abatements

Rent abatements were granted based on a number of considerations, listed by Turner *et al* as including 'the number of tenants involved, and the general trend of agricultural conditions' and were only made after 'an extended period of difficulty'.⁵¹⁰ This is evident in estate accounts (and indeed correspondence) where abatements were not granted until arrears levels were high and prolonged. But even when arrears were high tenants usually had to complain, request abatements or even threaten to quit the land.

The evidence of the Cottesbrooke estate in 1821-2 best demonstrates the purpose and application of abatements as well as their relationship to arrears. Ongoing, increasing arrears

⁵⁰⁸ NRO L(C)1184.

⁵⁰⁹ G.E. Mingay (ed.), J.L. Hammond and B. Hammond, *The Village Labourer* (London, 1978), p.182.

⁵¹⁰ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.183.

led to the granting of abatements in order to prevent arrears further increasing. In September 1821 Pearce wrote to Langham

Viz a long Account of Arrears, and a record of the discontent expressed by the Tenantry – two things unusual on your fine Property. But the same state of discontent pervades I believe every part of the Island amongst others of your Tenantry – Jones and Davis (who are both you will know – respectable Men and whose assertions I think we may believe) told me that they had lost so much during the last Two Years they should be constrained much against their Wishes to give Notice to quit before Michaelmas unless their Rents were reduced.⁵¹¹

By January 1822 Pearce wrote again, stating his hope that arrears would not increase following the abatements which had been granted but he worried this may not be enough were prices to remain low for a considerable period.⁵¹² Low prices did continue however and in August 1822 Pearce only managed to collect a third of the money he expected, in spite of the abatements granted.⁵¹³ Thus abatements were both granted as a result of and intended to prevent increasing arrears. But ongoing low prices could, as in this case, result in tenants unable to pay even the abated rents.

Yet abatements were still not the first choice of an estate where tenants were struggling to pay their rents. In 1822, for example, rather than abate rents Pearce simply moved the winter audit from 16/17 December to 7/8 January 1823 to enable tenants to take produce to the Christmas market in London and other fairs.⁵¹⁴ This was intended to enable tenants to pay their rents in full. However, the fact that rents were further abated after this account shows it was ineffectual in the longer term.

Where a recession was prolonged an estate could also end up making a series of abatements and, Turner *et al* commented, may even be faced with no option but to make permanent rent reductions.⁵¹⁵ Reducing rents permanently was not an option landlords took unless it was deemed absolutely necessary though. In the prolonged recession at the end of the period of this

⁵¹¹ NRO L(C)1104.

⁵¹² NRO L(C)1106.

⁵¹³ NRO L(C)1111.

⁵¹⁴ NRO L(C)1113.

⁵¹⁵ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.41.

study permanent reductions were required on a number of estates, as prices did not rise again as they had been expected to. In 1887 C.L. Norman wrote to Lord Overstone suggesting that permanent rent reductions would have to be granted for his lands to remain profitable.⁵¹⁶

Despite their being deemed necessary to maintain an estate through a recession there were limits to when abatements would be granted. If a tenant requested further abatements on a threat of quitting the land he may well be allowed to leave. This was based on whether the estate would benefit more from keeping the present occupant or if a new tenant could be found who would pay a higher rent than he was asking for. In 1822, for example, when prices had fallen steeply and large-scale abatements were granted on the Cottesbrooke estate, Pearce feared Bennet Sharpe would request a greater abatement than the £45 which he had been offered. Pearce commented to Langham that any further abatement would be unreasonable and that if Sharpe could not cope with the holding at the offered rent he should leave the land.⁵¹⁷ Further to this, those deemed incapable of managing a holding at the reduced rent would not be viewed favourably by the estate. In 1816 William Earl suggested that tenants unable to afford to continue on the land should be given notice to quit to avoid their becoming bankrupt.⁵¹⁸ Thus abatements were limited to tenants acceptable to the estate and who the landlord and steward deemed capable of maintaining the holding as profitably as possible through the recession and were still only granted when it was deemed necessary for the economic survival of tenants and estate. Were a tenant deemed likely to go bankrupt (at an even greater loss to the estate both financially and socially) he would be denied rent abatements and possibly even evicted to prevent his bankruptcy. Tenants were also evicted entirely for social reasons. In 1706, for example, Lord Fitzwilliam refused one of his tenants an abatement as he and his sons were reputed to be drinkers.⁵¹⁹

Abatements granted also depended to an extent on the importance of the tenant to his landlord. As seen above and in previous chapters the importance of a tenant to a landlord was based primarily on the income the tenant would bring in, i.e. how reliable he was in paying his rent in full and on time and how much rent was due from him. The latter was obviously dependent to

⁵¹⁶ University of London MS804/1575.

⁵¹⁷ NRO L(C)1109.

⁵¹⁸ NRO L(C)1086.

⁵¹⁹ *Fitzwilliam Correspondence*, p.194.

a large extent on the size of the tenant's holding. Generally the larger the holding the higher the rent and the higher the rent and the more land would fall in hand were the tenant to quit.

Thus the primary reason for abatements was when tenants complained *en masse* that they could no longer afford their rents. Abatements were not the first choice of estates and often second only to excessive arrears but they did occur where the economy was poor. Furthermore, the social standing of a tenant and his ability to manage his farm were also taken into account when deciding to abate rents and rents would seldom, if ever, be reduced below the level the steward thought he could find others willing to pay.

Case Study: Post-French Wars Recession

Where abatements were considered necessary they usually varied across a single estate and were certainly not applied by landlords on different estates at the same time or to the same extent. However in a prolonged recession estates would usually use abatements of rent as a method of retaining tenants, helping them financially to keep lands under cultivation and ensure able farmers stayed on the land so they could profit in years to come.

Within the sources available, the greatest wealth of evidence on abatements covers the years following the French wars (1815-1831). Therefore, rather than examine the short times in the century where abatements were made, this study will focus on these years and compare estate levels of and approaches to both arrears and abatements. This will work to show arrears levels and estate reaction to them in context as well as the workings of abatements as an estate management tool. F.M.L. Thompson observed that demand for land fell in 1815 and continued to do so until 1833, resulting in landlords struggling to find tenants for holdings across a number of English counties.⁵²⁰ Therefore the maintenance of tenants, large and small, was of paramount importance to landlords reliant on their landed income throughout this period with even owners of extensive lands like the Montagus making some rent abatements and their smaller counterparts (here represented by the Langhams) made several lots of abatements in order to maintain what they considered a liveable income in the medium to long term.

Whilst the Montagu accounts provide comprehensive data on arrears levels the Lords Montagu seldom granted abatements and when they did so they granted them only to a minority of tenants whom they did not wish to leave the land. Essentially the Montagus did not often abate rents because they did not need to; the estate could afford to lose some tenants without its own

⁵²⁰ F.M.L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1963), p.231.

finances suffering too greatly in a recession. Elsewhere, there are figures for the Overstone estate can provide a direct comparison for a short period (1828-31) but, as shall be seen, whilst the estate had higher levels of arrears, abatement levels were lower and they were granted to a smaller proportion of tenants, despite Lord Overstone's insistence in his correspondence and other writings that he prioritized the wellbeing of his tenants over his own profits. The Langham correspondence also provides some evidence of rent abatements. Whilst these figures are less comparable to those of the other two estates the correspondence surrounding them provides evidence of the reasons for abating rents and why the estate was being managed in this way.

Figure 5:7 demonstrates the accrued arrears on both the Montagu estate and the Overstone estate in this period. Accrued arrears figures have been used here as these demonstrate the amount of rent that was still outstanding across the period and the ability of tenants to pay off monies owed. They are also the figures which estates based their assessments on in deciding to abate rents, evict tenants or lower rent levels. The rent figure used is the rent due rather than the rent agreed, taking into account any abatements being applied and showing what was still outstanding. As can be seen, the figures for the Montagu estate show fluctuations and a particularly bad year in 1817, although a great deal of these arrears were cleared off by the 1818 account. Arrears tail off by 1831, when the economy was picking up again. In contrast the Overstone arrears were increasing from the first available figures (1828) and were still rising upto 1831. This may be because the estate was employing lower abatements or simply because Lord Overstone was more tolerant of arrears when his tenants were struggling.

Figure 5:8 shows abatements granted as a percentage of total rent due and figure 5:9 shows the percentage of tenants on each estate receiving abatements. Whilst the Montagu abatements fluctuate across the period, peaking at 23 percent of rents due in 1823, they fell to zero in 1831. In the same period the number of tenants receiving abatements fluctuated considerably with the first abatements granted in 1817, no abatement in 1819 and almost 50% of tenants having a proportion of their rent abated from 1823 to 1830, again falling to nothing in 1831. The Overstone accounts, on the other hand, show only one set of abatements, with only 15% of tenants receiving abatements of only around 2% of the agreed rent. This may well be as the economy was showing signs of recovery and tenants were more able to pay their rents. However, the figures are notably lower than those for the Montagu estate and with the Overstone estate also having tenants in greater levels of arrears, one is inclined to view these differences as different approaches to estate management, with Lord Overstone aiding his tenants by allowing arrears whilst the Lords Montagu granted abatements and even wrote off a number of arrears in 1820, explaining the zero figure.

Accrued Arrears Levels, 1815 - 1831

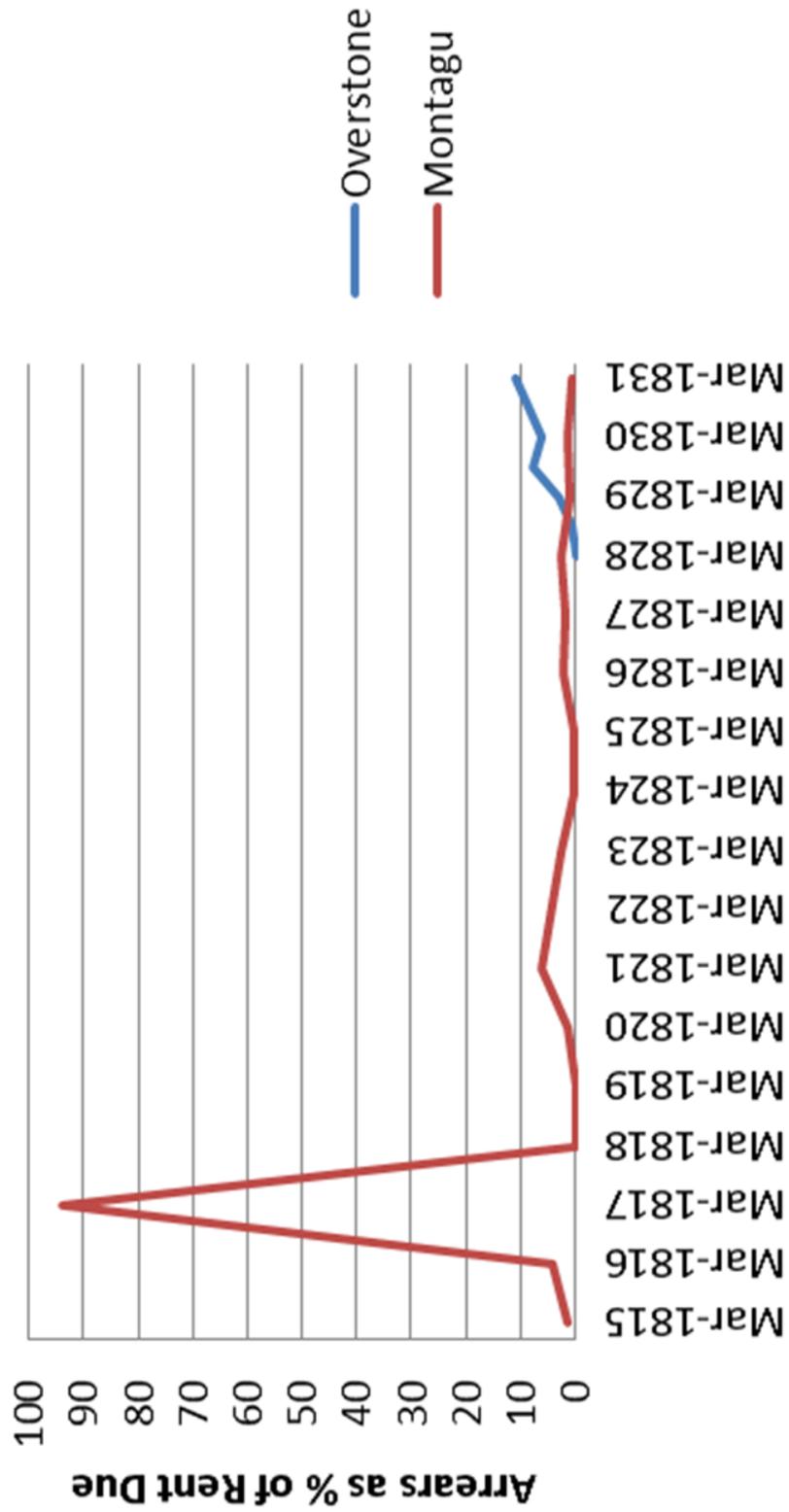


Figure 5:7

Percentage of Agreed Rent Abated, 1815 - 1831

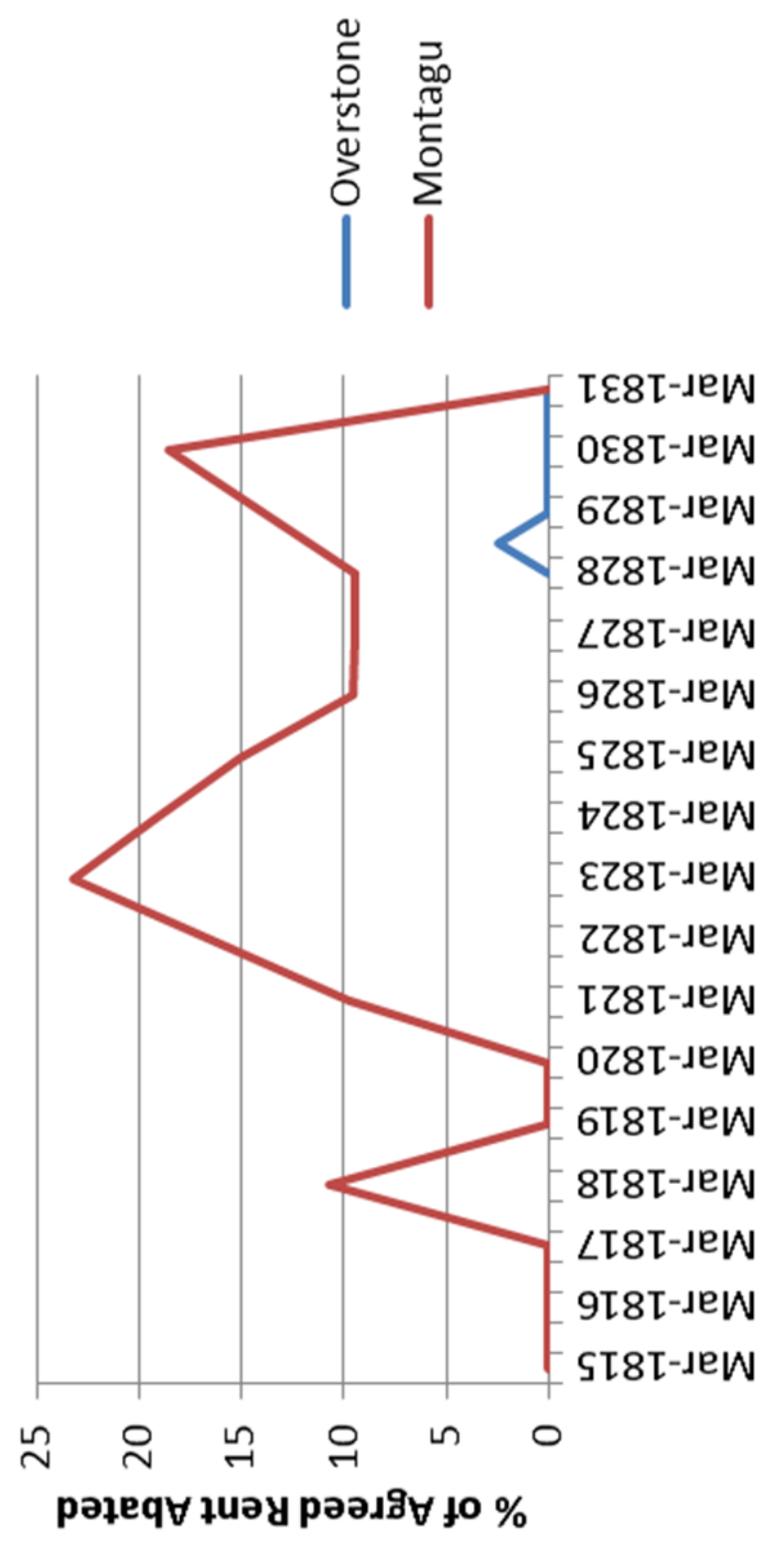


Figure 5:8

Percentage of Tenants Receiving Abatements, 1815 - 1831

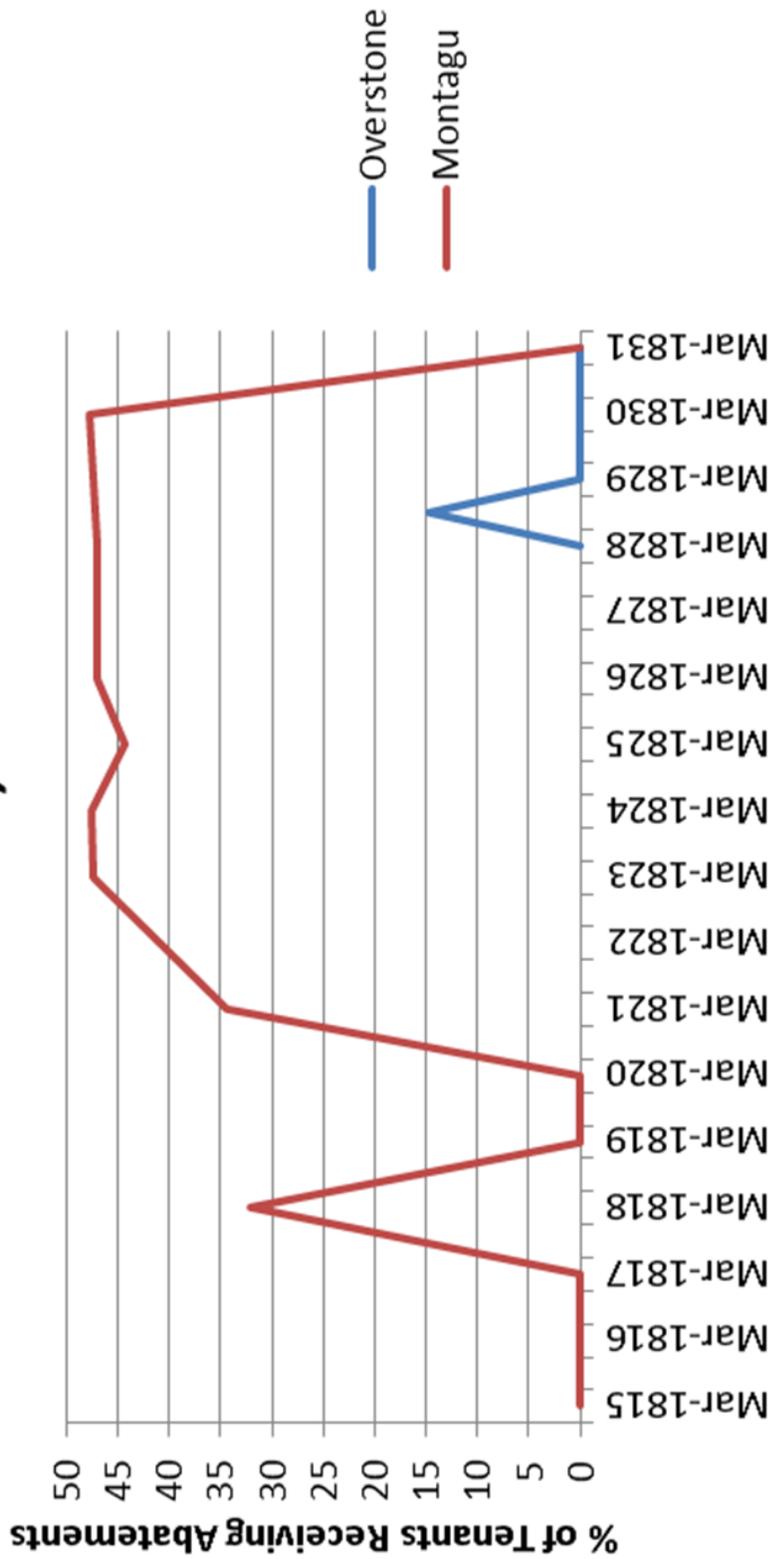


Figure 5:9

Added to the above, there are four sets of rental data available for the Langham estate in this period – one rent increase in 1811 and 3 sets of post-war abatement figures (1815, 1822 and 1827).⁵²¹ Owing to its proximity towards the end of the wars this was most likely not the first rent increase of the wars. However, the general increase was greater for larger farmers, with the average rent increase being as high as 40%.⁵²² The three sets of rent reductions coincide with the end of the wars, when the Montagu estate was reluctant to reduce rents, and two of the years in which the Montagu estate had the highest level of abatements. The first rent reductions took place in 1815, just after the end of the wars. Johnstone pointed out that in the lowlands rents were also abated after the end of the French Wars due to falling prices and ‘despite much-improved practice’.⁵²³ Added to the abatements of 1815, rents were further abated by 16-40% in 1822,⁵²⁴ and by a further 10-12% in 1827.⁵²⁵ Further to this, with a lack of records between these dates and demand for land continuing to fall beyond 1827 it is probable Langham abated rents between these years and abated them even further after 1827, although unfortunately no further figures are available. However, the notable difference in these reductions is that whilst the Langham estate had lower average abatements the later ones were further reductions on the abated rent not, like the Montagu estate, reductions on the same agreed rent level. As a result, the Langhams’ expected rents fell from their 1822 levels in 1827, whilst the proportion of agreed rents expected on the Montagu estate remained level.

The reasoning behind the Langham rent abatements are further explained in estate correspondence. In 1816 Pearce wrote to James Langham that a number of tenants had left the land and in order to replace them he would have to abate rents by 30 to 40 percent. Of these leavers 3 had quit the land, 1 had gone bankrupt and 1 had run away. In the same letter he proposed abatements for remaining tenants of up to 30 percent (for those who came into the land as prices were beginning to fall or those in parishes with exceptionally high poor rates) and that

⁵²¹ NRO L(C)1502; L(C)1504; L(C)1505; L(C)1506; L(C)1508.

⁵²² NRO L(C)1502.

⁵²³ Johnstone, ‘Farm Rents and Improvement’, p.54.

⁵²⁴ NRO, L(C)1506.

⁵²⁵ NRO, L(C)1508.

Should any one of them be so unreasonable after the great sacrifice you have made as to grumble at the allowance he is no longer observing of the considerations and ought to have notice to quit.⁵²⁶

Thus at this point Pearce considered it necessary to reduce rents for new tenants by a greater amount than for current and there would also be costs incurred in maintaining the holding or improving it so that new tenants would rent it as well as looking for a new tenant. Therefore costs incurred in replacing a tenant were far greater than the cost of abating the rent for a current one.

Vacant holdings were clearly more of a worry to the Langham estate than lower rental income. In 1822 Pearce wrote to Langham advising he grant further abatements 'rather than run the risk of having the land unoccupied' which he worried may even result in landlords having to 'farm the land themselves'.⁵²⁷ Pearce was also concerned that lands had already been neglected, with tenants having little or no money for investment for several years leaving their holdings 'in a deteriorated state'.⁵²⁸

By 1829 tenants were threatening to quit the Langham estate and Pearce had a list of 13 tenants who had given notice to quit on Lady Day 1830. Yet the maintenance of tenants by rent abatements was still a successful management policy on the estate. Of those who had given notice to quit 6 had agreed to stay in return for rent reductions, two were considering reductions (Pearce thought at least one would accept) and one of the remainder had *received* notice to quit due to his arrears.⁵²⁹ This left only 4 tenants' notices to quit being followed through.

Quittals and Evictions: When and Why Tenants Left the Land

Where a tenant was unable to pay his rent and had lost confidence in the land or in ever being able to make a living from it (at present rent) or simply felt he could make a better life for himself and his family elsewhere he might have given notice to quit the land. Where a tenant was heavily in arrears he may make a deal with his landlord or steward to ease the burden of

⁵²⁶ NRO L(C)1087.

⁵²⁷ NRO L(C)1112.

⁵²⁸ NRO L(C)1104.

⁵²⁹ NRO L(C)1177.

arrears but tenants also reacted to mounting arrears by quitting the land, absconding or simply ignoring the arrear. In the last case the estate would often be obliged to step in either to write-off the arrear as irrecoverable, to distrain the tenant's goods in order to recoup the loss or to evict and replace the tenant on the holding.

The accounts of the Montagu estate show that there was usually land in hand regardless of the economic situation as lands changed hands and tenants left or died. However, the levels of tenant quittals varied greatly, increasing where prices were low but falling when profits were high. The often hereditary nature of holdings, passing them down from generation to generation, can be identified in the Montagu accounts and was studied by Cragoe. This longevity of tenant families demonstrates that tenants were not prepared to leave the land and thus it makes sense that those quitting voluntarily would increase in a recession when farmers could no longer support themselves and had perhaps lost confidence in the longer-term profitability of the land.⁵³⁰ In terms of insolvency levels, landlords were generally concerned with minimizing these both in order to appear good landlords and to keep the land under cultivation, aiding capable men in keeping their farms. Stead found that fewer than 5% of tenants failed across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, although he said this number may have been higher as not all insolvency was recorded.⁵³¹

Lord Overstone wrote extensively about tenants leaving the land in the recession of the late nineteenth century and Lord Fitzwilliam and his steward often discussed the quantities of land falling into hand as a result of recession in the eighteenth century.⁵³² Indeed the majority of tenants quitting the land throughout the nineteenth century appear to have done so during periods of low prices, with William Pearce commenting in February 1823 that he had failed to find new tenants for any of the lands being quit at Lady Day and he would have written 'long since' but he had been hoping to let these lands first.⁵³³ The economic slump of the 1880s saw a similar reaction, with Beckett finding that landlords were more willing to negotiate to keep

⁵³⁰ M. Cragoe, *An Anglican Aristocracy: The Moral Economy of the Landed Estate in Carmarthenshire 1832-1895* (Oxford, 1996), p.34. The Montagu accounts include a number of instances of lands being passed from parent to child which are directly noted in the account. including James Stratford taking on his father's holding in 1841 but one can also identify surnames continuing on the estate throughout the entire period of this study. NRO, Montagu Estate Accounts, No. 389.

⁵³¹ Stead, 'Risk and Risk Management', pp.357-8.

⁵³² See for example, D.P. O'Brien, *The Correspondence of Lord Overstone* (Cambridge, 1971), pp.1328-9.

⁵³³ NRO L(C)1117.

tenants on the soil as they struggled to replace them.⁵³⁴ Indeed, Barbara English observed that in the 1880s some estates had so much land in hand they began to farm it themselves.⁵³⁵ Thus the nature and status of landholding amongst tenants appears to have made many reluctant to leave their lands, only quitting where prices were too low for them to continue. This attachment of tenants to the land continued throughout the period of this study.

James Langham's correspondence, however, shows that perhaps not all tenants quitting the land did so entirely voluntarily and notice to quit was also employed as a negotiation tool. In 1822, when Bennet Sharpe asked for a greater abatement than that he had been offered and said otherwise he would quit the land, Pearce calculated that at the abated rent the tenant could be replaced and thus his notice was accepted. Pearce even commented to Langham

Sharpe cannot object to such a rent with reason. If however he has sunk his capital and cannot go on stocking and cropping the farm – the Rent to be paid by him becomes a nullity – in short it will be better he should leave the farm than go on involving himself in further distress. These are times when the weak must be borne down - and I fear he was never strong enough to undertake the Quantity of land he engaged with.⁵³⁶

Yet this is not the only example of one of the Cottesbrooke tenants using notice to quit in order to negotiate a greater reduction in rent. In 1821 it was noted that several tenants had threatened to quit the land but that none had actually given notice to quit. Therefore quitting the land was of course a resort for tenants when they felt they could make a better living elsewhere than they could farming but threatening to quit was also used (intentionally or otherwise) to negotiate a better rent and enable tenants to stay on the land.⁵³⁷

J.R. Wordie argued that quitting the land was usually the resort of smaller tenants who did not have the cash reserve of their larger counterparts. This therefore meant that in times of low prices larger farmers could cut their spending and pay their rents whilst those with only basic consumption would have to give up their lands.⁵³⁸ However, the poor were more likely to have

⁵³⁴ Beckett, 'Agricultural Landownership', p.737.

⁵³⁵ English, 'Patterns of Estate Management', p.39.

⁵³⁶ NRO L(C)1109.

⁵³⁷ Cragoe, 'Anatomy of an Eviction Campaign', p.179 also found evidence of this use of notice to quit.

⁵³⁸ J.R. Wordie, 'Social Change on the Leveson-Gower Estates, 1714-1832', *The Economic History Review* 27:4 (1974), p.600.

their arrears forgiven or ignored by stewards and these arrears were not monetarily as high as those of larger farmers. Nor did the poor expect to profit greatly from their lands, whilst those more well off may have sought profit elsewhere more easily. Indeed those who gave notice to quit on the Langham estate were noted as significant landholders, as was Bennet Sharpe who wished to negotiate a greater abatement for himself by threatening to quit the land. Plus it was the poor tenant or cottager who often gained the compassion of a steward, it was they who would be allowed to remain in their cottages through illness or in old age as there was not a great loss to the estate nor an assumption that they would have money to fall back on to keep them out of the poorhouse. Small tenants who were deemed likely to recoup their losses were also allowed to remain in arrears or move to smaller agricultural holdings they could run effectively. But the figures and actions of Northamptonshire landlords indicate that whilst the poor did not have a cash reserve in times of low prices it was more likely that the larger tenants, not the smaller, would leave the estate.

Eviction

Eviction was rare but did occur. It was deemed a failure of an estate to have to evict a tenant, not least because the arrears owed were unlikely to be recouped if the tenant was removed from his livelihood. Indeed even the threat of eviction was so rare that Turner *et al* noted that many tenants did not get leases for their holdings.⁵³⁹ As such stewards would only advise on eviction and it was the landlord who made the decision. Even two hundred years prior to the period of this study evictions were rare but Appleby found the reasons for such to be similar to those of our period:

Individual tenants were evicted from time to time, of course, for non-payment of rents or fines, or for a felony.⁵⁴⁰

Whist stewards would refrain from evicting in some cases owing to mitigating circumstances or a belief that the arrear could be recovered and the tenant make the holding profitable given time landlords appear to have been less lenient, more interested in maximising their profits, especially if their own finances were struggling. Lord Fitzwilliam told Guybon in 1703 to

⁵³⁹ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, pp.199-200.

⁵⁴⁰ A.B. Appleby, 'Agrarian Capitalism or Seignorial Reaction? The Northwest of England, 1500-1700', *The American Historical Review* 80:3 (1975), pp.582-3.

take grounds away from tenants that run in arrear and let them to others. I wrote you about Adam Johnson, Cornell and others and their arrears. I hope you have secured these rents and relet the lands.⁵⁴¹

Outside Northamptonshire Roebuck also observed Sir Marmaduke Constable ordering his steward to evict those in arrears, including those having difficulty in paying.⁵⁴² Even the compassion of stewards would be lost where a tenant was seen to be unable to recover from their debts. In 1816 Pearce wrote to Langham of tenants in arrears. Of the three he discussed he suggested one was 'too far gone to be recovered' and he believed her son to be 'an idle one' and suggested she be evicted. This condemnation of the tenant's son was not one of his morals but one of the likelihood of him being able to farm the land profitably and pay off the arrears. The other two he was convinced would pay off their debts so suggested no such action.⁵⁴³ Thus Pearce, like Philip Pain, was happy to allow tenants to remain on the land as long as the debt could eventually be recovered. Therefore evictions for economic reasons did take place but in practice there were often mitigating circumstances and it was seen as a last resort, usually against those deep in debt who were seen as unwilling to work to pay off the debt rather than those struggling, despite landlord views to the contrary.

These evictions were of individuals. Where groups of tenants were falling into arrears the wider economic situation was usually to blame and rather than evicting tenants estates would allow arrears or abate rents. Indeed, Hunt commented on the Kent estates of Lord Darnely that

Tenants in difficulty between 1819 and 1823 were not evicted, since the landlord preferred to adopt a realistic attitude rather than see his land withdrawn from cultivation.⁵⁴⁴

In 1821 rather than evicting tenants the Langham estate sought to retain as many as possible. Pearce sent a list of 13 tenants in arrears but noted

I believe all the foregoing Tenants brought every shilling they could raise (for every one paid Money on account) – and I have no fear of losing any thing by them should

⁵⁴¹ *Fitzwilliam Correspondence*, p.118.

⁵⁴² Roebuck, 'Absentee Landownership', p.6.

⁵⁴³ NRO L(C)1089.

⁵⁴⁴ Hunt, 'Agricultural Rent', p.108.

they find they cannot go on as I consider the Property each has on his respective farm will be more than sufficient to discharge the arrears that may be due.⁵⁴⁵

So economic eviction was mainly reserved for those who should have been able to pay their rents and was undertaken in the interest of longer-term profit to the estate. Where many tenants were struggling and new tenants could not be found estates were less likely to evict, especially where economic circumstances were likely to improve and tenants would be able to pay off their debts.

Despite the profit-driven motives detailed above some evictions were undertaken for the benefit of the tenant who it was deemed would not be able to profit from their lands and would struggle as long as they remained unsuccessfully farming them. In rare cases (about 5 can be identified across the period and these are across three of the estates) an associate or relative stepped in to pay the rent for a tenant. This occurred in the case of Mrs Ewen on the Fitzwilliam estate whose 1700 rent was paid by a Mr Brimrose. Guybon, however, advised Fitzwilliam that Mrs Ewen should not be allowed to keep the land because he doubted that Mr Brimrose would maintain the buildings on the land and as it was understocked it was less likely Mrs Ewen would be able to make a living herself from it. He did advise she be allowed to find new habitation though:

But so she is not destitute of a habitation she shall continue the farm for a year until she can provide otherwise. If I hear when I come next spring that she can deal with it I may let her continue, taking a lease but I will promise nothing.⁵⁴⁶

Eviction for what was deemed to be the good of the tenant was not limited to cases where others were paying the rent, or indeed where tenants were presently in arrears. In 1822 Pearce asked Langham for his opinion on the lease of a holding on the Cottesbrooke estate. Mrs Hales was to be evicted but had since paid her rent. Her son had since claimed he should take her holding (with the help of his wife's family in paying the rent). Pearce, concerned that Mrs Hales did not have the finances to properly stock the land asked Langham if he should transfer the holding to the son.⁵⁴⁷ Thus where tenants struggled to pay their rent on the basis of inability to farm profitably the estate would sometimes evict for the long-term benefit of not only the estate

⁵⁴⁵ NRO L(C)1105.

⁵⁴⁶ *Fitzwilliam Correspondence*, p.80.

⁵⁴⁷ NRO L(C)1107.

but also of the tenants themselves, who would have continued to struggle in poverty had they remained on the land until they faced bankruptcy.

The majority of evictions took place for economic reasons, be they tenurial poverty or estate profit, but there were other reasons tenants were sometimes evicted. Occasionally a landlord would reclaim an expanse of the estate to create a park and the tenants on that land would be evicted, or if a tenant had committed a felony he would be asked to leave the estate.⁵⁴⁸ The other reason often suggested for tenant eviction in the latter part of this period was political – tenants would be evicted if they did not vote as their landlords required them to. However, Cragoe commented there was little evidence of this in England and, in his comprehensive study of Carmarthenshire, found accusations of political eviction unfounded and the tenants evicted were so for defaulting on rents.⁵⁴⁹ In Northamptonshire in 1868 Lord Overstone was accused of managing the way his tenants voted by Fitzpatrick Henry Vernon, losing candidate for North Northamptonshire, in a letter to *The Times*. Overstone's reply (printed 3 days later) went thus

I believe I may state without any reservation that I have never communicated with any tenant on my property, personally or in writing, upon the subject of his vote; and as regards my tenants in North Northamptonshire I can add that my agent has in no way interfered with them... I do allow my tenants on this and on all similar occasions to vote as they please.⁵⁵⁰

Thus the majority of evictions in Northamptonshire and indeed England more generally in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were for economic reasons with few evictions taking place for social reasons such as the tenant's poor character or the landlord creating a park and accusations of political evictions generally proving unfounded.

Conclusion

Arrears and abatements were both expected in times of economic recession and both were utilised by the estate as methods of management to keep the estate under cultivation and to ensure lands were tenanted when farmers' incomes improved. Low levels of arrears or high arrears accrued by just a few tenants were viewed as a failure of rent collection but when arrears became more widespread it was usually a result of economic conditions and landlords

⁵⁴⁸ Appleby, 'Agrarian Capitalism', p.583.

⁵⁴⁹ Cragoe, 'Anatomy of an Eviction Campaign', pp.179-80.

⁵⁵⁰ University of London MS804 1386/4; MS804 1386/5.

would often tolerate or even write off some level of arrears to aid their tenants to weather tough economic climes.

Where arrears were high and agricultural incomes low for a number of years abatements were a useful and sometimes necessary device to aid tenants to weather the recession and remain on the land, although they were undesirable to estates as they represented a definitive loss of income. Where a recession was prolonged abatements could be extended to permanent rent decreases but this was undesirable to the estate and often landlords specified that abatements were for a set period only or until prices rose above a certain level. Tenants also used abatements to their advantage requesting them where prices were depressed or even threatening to quit the land were their rent not abated or permanently reduced.

Conclusion

Rural society in the nineteenth century has been the subject of many historical studies. There has been great interest in landed society in terms of improvements and developments in farming, changes in rural social relations and the structure of rural society in this time of significant economic change. Within this context the agricultural community was bound together by agricultural rents, the principal link between landowners and tenant farmers. Rent levels and the setting and payment of rents were closely linked to changes in prices, farm sizes and agricultural improvement, making them an important factor in the agricultural economy of the nineteenth century. In practice, rent levels were as much a social construct as an economic one. The negotiation and agreement of rents depended on personalities of individuals and the circumstances of individual tenants as well as the social and financial value of land.

The study began life as an examination of the moral economy of the landed estate, examining correspondence and other qualitative data in order to examine estate management and the relative roles of landowners, estate stewards and agricultural tenants as rural society changed over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, the availability of large amounts of accounts data led to a different focus. Rather than the moral economy and social views of landlords, the available evidence painted a clearer picture of their economic decisions and the rental economy on the Northamptonshire landed estate than of paternalism and the moral economy. As a result the study developed into an examination of the rental economy. Accounts data shows the flexibility in the economy afforded by the tolerance of arrears and granting of abatements, both of which were an essential part of the rental economy. The period of study was also amended to 1801-1881 as it allowed for a more in-depth examination and was a period for which a wealth of accounts data was available. Whilst the study has moved almost entirely away from its roots, the relative roles of different groups upon the landed estate and the economic ties which bound them remain a central focus.

Whilst rent levels themselves have been considered by a number of historians and examined as an essential part of both the agricultural economy and the landed estate, less work has been done on the payment of rents and estate management of rental income. The importance of rents paid, in addition to rent levels set, has been examined in detail in this study to provide a more complete picture of the nineteenth-century rental economy in Northamptonshire. This demonstrates the importance of tenants in paying their rents and the function of the estate in collecting them, adding a further dimension to our knowledge of the nineteenth-century agricultural economy. As Cragoe pointed out, there was no definitive method of setting rents as farming income was dependent upon future prices. Rents were set based on often outdated

land valuations and a prediction of prices and profit to be made at the next harvest.⁵⁵¹ Evidence from this study indicates the importance of individual negotiations in the initial agreement of rents, which becomes even more prevalent when looking at arrears and abatements, with landlords taking into account tenants' standing and reputation in the local community, their wealth and that of their families, plus their age and farming ability. These factors were in addition to the more directly economic factors such as the acreage of the tenant's farm, type of farming undertaken, capital invested (in terms of machinery and animals, not just investment in the soil) and, of course, prevailing prices and trends in the wider agricultural economy.

The accounts data used in this study provides detail on the payment of rents, agreed rent levels and the views of landowners and stewards on the estate and rental economy, but they also have notable limitations. One of the principal problems with the accounts data is the limited information they include. What is left out of the accounts (primarily farm sizes, but also often the type of farming undertaken) in itself indicates the level of knowledge of the estate possessed by its owners and stewards but unfortunately limits the information available to historians. As a result, it is not possible to create a study of rent per acre comparable with Turner *et al's* national index and instead the spread of rents has been examined. The study of arrears and abatements is more detailed as the accounts include detail of agreed rents, amounts paid, accumulated arrears, abatements and arrears forgiven. The wider application of abatements across an estate provides an indication of both the agricultural economy and the individual estate. As landlords personally looked at rents and set abatements, in the interest of maintaining the long-term profitability of the estate, accounts figures are supplemented by opinions expressed and ideas and solutions developed in annotations on the accounts and estate correspondence, forming an interesting and informative study.

Within the accounts data itself there are also further limitations. Not only is data bias acquired through choosing estates on the basis of available evidence but it can be difficult to distinguish farm rents in books containing all forms of agricultural rent.⁵⁵² Robert Thompson, writing in 1907, commented on the fact that not all account books had survived and in those which had it was difficult to separate out agricultural holdings from woods, moors, parks and residential

⁵⁵¹ M. Cragoe, *An Anglican Aristocracy: The Moral Economy of the Landed Estate in Carmarthenshire 1832-1895* (Oxford, 1996), pp.50-1.

⁵⁵² D.R. Stead, 'Risk and Risk Management in English Agriculture, c.1750-1850', *The Economic History Review* 57:2 (2004), p.352.

buildings.⁵⁵³ Where identifiable, non-agricultural holdings have been removed from the sample. However, some, particularly smallholdings, are not possible to identify and have been retained in the figures. This does mean the data used includes a large number of small rents. As a result the spread of rents across the estate is examined but it must be borne in mind that this is not limited to farm rents.

The principal concern of this thesis with regards to the payment of rents is how Northamptonshire tenants and landlords responded to negative changes in the economy and how the landed estate as an entity weathered recession. As shown in chapter 4, the rural rental economy underwent a number of changes across the nineteenth century. Generally speaking, rent levels were increasing at the beginning of the nineteenth century owing to the inflationary effect of the French Wars. When the wars ended in 1815 these artificially high prices fell and the agricultural economy underwent a number of peaks and troughs, not stabilising again until the 1830s. From the 1830s the agricultural economy then grew (at a slower rate than at the beginning of the century) until the major agricultural depression of the 1870s which continued beyond the end of the century.

Available account books and periods covered in estate correspondence do limit the scope of this study. Whilst the estate accounts for the Montagu Boughton estate are fairly complete, those for the other estates are more fragmentary. As a result a sample across the period 1801-1881 have been used to provide the long-term picture with the case study of 1815-1831 providing extra detail of the post-French Wars recession.

As J.D. Chambers, Turner *et al* and others found, there is a strong link between agricultural rents and prevailing agricultural prices, although there is a time-lag between a change in price levels and a corresponding change in rent levels.⁵⁵⁴ In terms of increasing rent levels a number of reasons for rising rents have been identified. Andrew Appleby distinguished two types of rent increases – those as a result of improvements to the land and those designed to transfer a greater amount of income from the land to the landowner.⁵⁵⁵ It is within this context that landlords are often portrayed – as profit maximisers who increased rents wherever possible in

⁵⁵³ R.J. Thompson, 'an inquiry into the Rent of Agricultural Land in England and Wales during the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 70:4 (1907), p.588. A problem also commented on by historians since, including H.G. Hunt, 'Agricultural Rent in South-East England, 1788-1825', *AgHR* (1958), p.99.

⁵⁵⁴ Chambers, 'Enclosure and Labour Supply', p.342; M. Turner, J.V. Beckett & B. Afton, *Agricultural Rent in England, 1690-1914* (Cambridge, 1997), p.200.

⁵⁵⁵ A.B. Appleby, 'Agrarian Capitalism or Seigneurial Reaction? The Northwest of England, 1500-1700', *The American History Review* 80:3 (1975), pp.592-3.

order to transfer the profits of the land from their tenants to themselves. The Northamptonshire data shows that what this meant in practice was that landlords were much more closely involved in the management of their estates and took a great interest in the survival of their tenantry and the long-term profits of the estate, not simply transferring money from the land to their own pockets. Landlords were often absent from their estates and, as Webster found, the prevalence of stewards was increasing in this period; however, this did not mean they were detached from their estates entirely.⁵⁵⁶

In practice, Northamptonshire landlords negotiated some rents personally and decided when to abate rents and by how much, as well as managing arrears and evictions. The correspondence of Lord Overstone to his steward Beasley and his friends and family show he had a great interest in the maintenance of his estate and had a practical understanding of estate management whilst the Montagu accounts have memoranda from the Lords Montagu questioning arrears and notes from their stewards explaining the breakdown of new rents and justifying underpayments. Landlords were also often avid improvers in their own right and were the ones to put forward the capital to encourage improvement or aid tenants wishing to improve. Some, such as Lord Overstone, even led by example by adopting improvements on the home farm in order to encourage tenants to adopt similar methods or technologies on their own farms.

Landlord involvement in the setting and negotiation of rents was therefore significant. The Northamptonshire evidence also demonstrates that landlord decisions were not made in isolation. Whilst the estate set and collected rents, tenants had to agree to them upon taking a lease and pay them thereafter. As shown in chapter 5, tenurial grievances and mass complaints were reflected in rent levels in terms of estates tolerating arrears or abating rents whether in response to falling prices, poor harvests or even to prevent unrest amongst labourers. Arrears have thus been of interest to historians and viewed as a method utilised by tenants to show that rents were too high or to undertake political protests against the estate. The payment of rents was managed by the estate to a certain extent though and where necessary action was taken against individual tenants or abatements and other methods were utilised in order to aid tenants in time of need and to maintain both tenantry and long-term profitability of the estate.

The time-lag between falling prices and falling rents was when other temporary measures were used in order to prevent tenant bankruptcies and maintain the long-term profitability of the estate. The utilization of arrears and abatements to manage estates and their importance in the

⁵⁵⁶ S. Webster, 'Estate Improvement and the Professionalization of Land Agents on the Egremont Estates in Sussex and Yorkshire, 1770-1835', *Rural History* 18 (2007).

rental economy of the nineteenth century has been less of a focus of historians, with even Turner *et al*'s study of national farm rents not undertaking an in-depth look at abatements.⁵⁵⁷ Yet both measures were vital methods of estate management essential to the nineteenth century rural rental economy. Indeed, the role of the estate in managing rent levels and responding to negative changes in the economy was as important as its role in negotiating and setting rents. The payment and collection of rents from the estate's point of view was as important as the agreement of levels.

It is well established by Clay and others that tenants provided a buffer between landlords and market prices, with rents agreed and due even where prices fell or harvests were poor.⁵⁵⁸ As this thesis demonstrates, this was more complex than simply setting rents and waiting for the money to come in. Tenants were, in the main, willing to pay their rents when they were able and would pay off arrears when their finances improved but where they were not able to pay there had to be flexibility in the rental economy.⁵⁵⁹

Whilst the responses and operations of the estate and those upon it are the essence of the rental economy they acted in response to external factors throughout the nineteenth century. Whilst the economy was, in the main, growing throughout the period, with an increasing population migrating to towns and cities putting greater pressure on English agriculture to produce larger quantities of food, there were a number of economic slumps in which prices fell and the agricultural economy (and by extension the rental economy) had to respond in order to survive. The most notable of these in the nineteenth century were the recession following the end of the French Wars in 1815 and the recession of the 1870s. However, whilst the recession of the 1820s was a result of a mixture of bad harvests and a dramatic fall from the artificially inflated prices of the wars, the 1870s were affected by poor harvests and increased competition from overseas where an unprotected English market was increasingly infiltrated by cheap imported goods, particularly as transport from America improved and refrigeration techniques became possible, meaning the methods which the agricultural estate had previously adopted to survive were no longer working.⁵⁶⁰ In desperation landowners invested in and improved land and dropped

⁵⁵⁷ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*.

⁵⁵⁸ C.G.A. Clay, 'Landlords & Estate Management in England' in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England & Wales* vol.5:2, 1640-1750 (Cambridge, 1985), p.170.

⁵⁵⁹ The willingness of tenants to pay their rents can be seen throughout this thesis where arrears were cleared as the economy improved and in rents being paid even in times of low agricultural income. Furthermore, Turner *et al* noted rents not being paid to be a sign of recession. Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.179.

⁵⁶⁰ D.W. Howell, *Land and People in Nineteenth-Century Wales* (London, 1977), p.3.

rents in order to try and retain tenant numbers and those heavily indebted struggled and faced bankruptcy. Lord Overstone actually commented that for land to become profitable a new way of profiting from it may need to be found and, indeed, in 1907, Robert Thompson was undertaking academic study in order to find a method of making English agriculture profitable once again.⁵⁶¹

The nature of the recession of the 1870s and the inability of estates to recover is a part of the reason this study has utilised the post-French Wars recession as a case study, as this was a more atypical recession and one where traditional methods of recovery were successful and estates recovered. Indeed, the period 1815-1831 demonstrates the core concepts studied in this thesis and the response of estates to economic slump in terms of negotiation of rents themselves, the tolerance of arrears, implementation of abatements and even investment and improvement of lands.

In terms of method, it has been shown that both putative (year-on-year) and accrued arrears are important if one wishes to gain a complete picture of the rental economy. Whilst the putative arrears (in which Turner *et al* placed the greater importance) indicate the ability of tenants to pay their rents in any given year, accrued arrears better demonstrate estate management of arrears over time. Looking at accrued arrears enables one to look beyond collection issues and other short-term problems and to see how the rental economy operated across a number of years.⁵⁶² The build-up of arrears over time better demonstrates tenants trying to pay their rents in a struggling economy rather than simply tenants attempting to clear arrears when they could. Taken together with abatements both arrears calculations enable one to build a more complete picture of how the rental economy operated in a recession.

Accrued arrears are also the most closely linked to temporary abatements. Indeed, Lord Overstone reduced rents after 1870 only where accrued arrears were high and tenants were complaining.⁵⁶³ Abatements themselves were a short-term solution intended to keep tenants on the land and solvent until the economy improved.⁵⁶⁴ In practice abatements were only granted by the Northamptonshire estates of this study in limited circumstances. As shown in chapter 5,

⁵⁶¹ University of London MS804/1575; R.J. Thompson, 'An Inquiry into the Rent of Agricultural land in England and Wales during the nineteenth century', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 70:4 (1907).

⁵⁶² For example, William Pearce's comments that some tenants were "always tardy" in paying their rent would be shown in the putative arrears but cleared by the next account, NRO L(C)1089; . Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.183.

⁵⁶³ University of London MS804/1180.

⁵⁶⁴ Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent*, p.183.

where a tenant could be found to agree the unabated rent the current tenant would often be given the choice of paying the full rent or leaving the land. In the recession of the 1820s abatements worked as a management strategy to enable tenants to remain on the land but, as on the Langham estate, a number of abatements were made and agreed on the proviso that they would last only until prices improved.⁵⁶⁵ The recession of the 1870s was different, however, with arrears and abatements leading to permanent rent reductions and investment in the soil and landlords and stewards unable to prevent extensive numbers of tenant quittals.

The setting and payment of rents were central to the economy of the landed estate, affected by stewards, tenants and external factors – primarily prices and advances in farming – all overseen by landlords. The negotiation of rent levels and the flexibility of the rental economy in response to changes in the wider economy provide vital information on this aspect of landed estates and their management, as well as the tenant economy and landlord-tenant relations. The interest of Northamptonshire landlords in maintaining the long-term profitability of their estates goes some way towards explaining why they were prepared to negotiate rents and their interest in maintaining tenants on the land. To the landlord a tenant would not only provide an income but also maintain the land and losing a tenant would incur costs of finding a replacement and having the land out of cultivation as well as the loss of rental income whilst a new tenant was found. Tenants, on the other hand, were more interested in profiting from the land in the short term but were eager to improve the land and maximise their own profits.

In all, this study highlights the importance of the rental economy to both the landed estate and the agricultural economy in nineteenth-century Northamptonshire. The payment of rents was as important a part of estate management as the setting and agreement of rent levels and abatements. Chapters 4 and 5 revealed that the rental economy was much more flexible than is often supposed, with tenants holding powers of negotiation and having the power to withhold the payment of their rents, whilst landlords had powers to evict (which were not often used), powers of negotiation and the power to temporarily reduce rents or tolerate arrears. All of these enabled both tenants and estates to survive fluctuations in the economy and weather recessions such as the one following the French Wars. Agricultural rents were of vital importance to the Northamptonshire economy and measures were taken to ensure the survival of the estate and the tenants upon it. The majority of these measures were intended as temporary but where recession was prolonged abatements became rent reductions and arrears were written off in order to ensure the survival of the tenancy and, as a result, that of the landed estate.

⁵⁶⁵ NRO L (C)1106.

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