

**PATERNALISM IN CRISIS:**  
**ARISTOCRATIC RESPONSES TO THE AGRICULTURAL DEPRESSION**  
**IN ENGLAND, 1870-1900**

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## **Abstract**

The publication of David Roberts' *Paternalism in Early Victorian England* in 1979 has sparked some debate as to the extent in which paternalism existed as a solid, definable concept or ideology and the degree to which it influenced Victorian politics, society and culture. This thesis has attempted to reopen this debate with a fresh perspective on paternalism, in order that its importance, on both aristocratic behaviour and the 'decline and fall' of the British aristocracy in the late nineteenth century, may be reasserted. The thesis also aims to reassert the importance of the agricultural depression in providing an atmosphere that encouraged and necessitated great change in rural England during this period. This thesis will rely on evidence obtained from the estate records of three aristocratic families and will particularly relate to the lives of three aristocratic paternalists - namely Henry Chaplin, the second earl of Leicester of Holkham and the seventh duke of Devonshire. The central argument of this thesis is that, despite the potential for aristocratic paternalism to be flexible to change, the aristocracy largely failed to adapt their traditional understanding of their roles and duties in local and national politics and society to the new challenges that were facing them. Great weight is added to the importance of the agricultural depression in providing the principal circumstance that contributed to their decline, by placing them in a 'sink or swim' environment. Largely speaking, their responses to the agricultural depression often had negative effects on their paternalism. It is hoped that this thesis will encourage others to pursue research into aristocratic paternalism in the twentieth century or alternatively, industrial paternalism in the late nineteenth century.

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## **Author's Declaration**

This study follows an undergraduate dissertation on aristocratic paternalism in the mid nineteenth century entitled "'A father's profile, and a father's form': Paternalism and the 2nd Earl of Yarborough in North Lincolnshire, 1846-62". When information from this previous dissertation is used in the following study, it is fully referenced accordingly.

A.G. Dale, January 2013

## **Introduction**

In his momentous two volume report on the state of English agriculture, entitled *Rural England* and published in 1901-02, H. Rider Haggard concluded that 'the impression left upon my mind by my extensive wanderings is that English agriculture seems to be fighting against the mills of God. Many circumstances combine to threaten it with ruin, although as yet it is not actually ruined.'<sup>1</sup> He went on:

Of the three classes connected with the land – the landowner, the tenant farmer, and the labourer – I believe that, taking the country through, the owner has suffered most. In many counties... there is often nothing at all left for him after the various expenses have been met, whereas, if it is in any way encumbered, landed property is a millstone round his neck. In such counties the possession of land is becoming, or has already become, a luxury for rich men, to whom it is a costly toy or a means of indulging a taste for sport. Than this no state of affairs can be more unwholesome or unnatural; the land should support men, not men the land.<sup>2</sup>

Haggard's work, while offering explanations at the time, still poses exciting questions to those who are interested in British politics, society and economics in the late nineteenth century. His topic remains the vocation of modern historians who are still posing questions about the agricultural depression. Was the state of English agriculture as poor as Haggard claimed? Was there such a thing as the Great Depression in agriculture during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? If so, what were its causes and consequences? What affect did this supposed agricultural depression have on the fabric of rural society? More particularly, what affect did the agricultural depression have on the landowning class, especially the larger landowners and members of the aristocracy and gentry? What were the landed elites' responses to the agricultural depression on their own estates and in national politics? What were the ramifications of landowners' responses to the agricultural depression upon their position within the social hierarchy, both locally and nationally? Did the agricultural depression mark the beginning of the so called 'decline and fall' of the British aristocracy?<sup>3</sup>

Historians, such as P. J. Perry and Richard Perren, have tended to agree that the agricultural distress - beginning in the mid 1870s and continuing beyond the turn of the century, with short-lived periods of minor prosperity in between - was predominantly caused

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<sup>1</sup> H. Rider Haggard, *Rural England, Vol. 2*, (Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1902), p.536

<sup>2</sup> Haggard, *Rural England, Vol. 2*, p.543

<sup>3</sup> David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, (Pan Books Ltd, London, 1992)

by a decline in cereal prices and adverse weather conditions.<sup>4</sup> The reduction in cereal prices was largely due to competition from the emerging American and German agricultural sectors, which were flooding the British market with enormous quantities of grain and thus, by undercutting the price of British produce, they necessitated a fall in prices.<sup>5</sup> To some degree this was 'masked by a run of bad seasons and poor harvests from 1875, culminating in one of the wettest years on record for 1879'.<sup>6</sup> The agricultural depression can therefore be said to have largely affected arable farmers, predominantly in the south and east of England, while pastoral farmers mostly residing in the north and west of England benefitted to a degree from the fall in cereal prices, as it resulted in cheaper feed for their livestock. That said, pastoral farmers did suffer from disease brought about by adverse weather.<sup>7</sup> As Perren claims, 'continued wet weather in 1880 and 1881 brought about sheep rot, causing an estimated loss of 6 million animals worth a total of £12 million'.<sup>8</sup>

While falling prices and adverse weather account for the most important causes of the agricultural depression, Perry has highlighted other secondary causes. While legislative action in the form of the successive Agricultural Holdings Acts of 1875 and 1883 did occur, the government largely failed to respond to the depression in a way that was acceptable to the agricultural community, i.e. by introducing protection or reducing taxes.<sup>9</sup> Tenant farmers regularly blamed high rents for worsening their problems, although it will be argued here that, on the whole, landlords actually reduced rents rather generously.<sup>10</sup> Perry also claims that the restrictions put on tenants by landlords and 'old issues' within landlord-tenant relations further exacerbated the effects of the depression, however it will be argued here that the gradual deterioration of landlord-tenant relations was more of a consequence of agricultural depression than a cause.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Perren, *Agriculture in Depression, 1870-1940*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995), pp.7-16, P. J. Perry, *British Farming in the Great Depression, 1870-1914*, (David & Charles, Newton Abbot, 1974), pp.40-66

<sup>5</sup> Perren, *Agriculture in Depression, 1870-1940*, pp.7-16, Perry, *British Farming in the Great Depression, 1870-1914*, p.54

<sup>6</sup> Perren, *Agriculture in Depression, 1870-1940*, p.7, Perry, *British Farming in the Great Depression, 1870-1914*, p.54

<sup>7</sup> Perren, *Agriculture in Depression, 1870-1940*, p.7

<sup>8</sup> Perren, *Agriculture in Depression, 1870-1940*, p.7

<sup>9</sup> Perry, *British Farming in the Great Depression, 1870-1914*, pp.60-62

<sup>10</sup> Perry, *British Farming in the Great Depression, 1870-1914*, pp.62-63

<sup>11</sup> Perry, *British Farming in the Great Depression, 1870-1914*, pp.63-64

Despite contemporary views at the time and the popular view within the historiography, not all historians have agreed that there was such a thing as an 'agricultural depression' in this period. The leading dissenters have been Gordon Mingay, David Chambers and F. M. L. Thompson, who, in highlighting the regionally diverse experience of agriculture in this period, have argued that there was "no general depression in English Farming".<sup>12</sup> Thompson has claimed that 'the misfortunes and disasters of some farmers and farming sectors were the opportunities of others, that corn-growers suffered but livestock producers prospered' and that the notion of depression was essentially constructed out of the 'farmers' self-perception'.<sup>13</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, which focuses predominantly on large estates and their owners in the arable, corn-growing east of England where the signs of economic distress were most evident, the depression will be treated as such. It is enough that the characters in the narrative here presented believed themselves to be suffering at the hands of a depression in agriculture and it is important that it is treated as such because their actions in this period were so often influenced by this belief.

Much comment has already been made upon the consequences of the agricultural depression for the landlord, tenant-farmer and labouring classes and upon rural society as a whole; therefore only a summary here will be necessary. The agricultural depression put great strain on the relationships between tenants and their landlords. As the depression attacked their prosperity, tenant class consciousness was increasingly aroused in the late nineteenth century and tenant-farmers pushed for greater tenant rights, greater autonomy in decision making on their farms and the reduction of rents. Furthermore, as the agricultural depression gradually became the established economic environment and many tenants who were unable to cope were forced to quit, tenant farming became a less desirable vocation and to a degree landlords had to appease their tenants in order to keep their farms occupied. In an article concerning Farmers' organisations in Lancashire in the 1890s, including the Lancashire Tenant Farmers Association, Alistair Mutch argues that such organisations were on one level a direct response to immediate economic circumstances, since their main demands were rent reductions.<sup>14</sup> This 'necessitated the building of organisations independent of landowner leadership'.<sup>15</sup> Yet on another level 'the associations were an organisational crystallization of

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<sup>12</sup> F. M. L. Thompson, 'An Anatomy of English Agriculture, 1870-1914,' in Holderness, B. A., and Turner, M., (eds.), *Land, Labour, and Agriculture, 1700-1920: essays for Gordon Mingay*, (Hambledon Press, London, 1991), p.211

<sup>13</sup> F. M. L. Thompson, 'An Anatomy of English Agriculture, 1870-1914,' pp.221, 240

<sup>14</sup> Alistair Mutch, 'Farmers' Organisations and Agricultural Depression in Lancashire, 1890-1900,' *Agricultural Historical Review*, 31 (1983), p.33

<sup>15</sup> Mutch, 'Farmers' Organisations and Agricultural Depression in Lancashire, 1890-1900,' p.33

farmers' desire to share in the leadership of rural society, the culmination of deeper shifts in that society'.<sup>16</sup>

The effect of the depression on the agricultural labouring class was varied. In one sense their real wages increased as the price of bread dropped and therefore they afforded for themselves more meat and milk in their diet, which further benefitted pastoral farmers. Yet many labourers also lost their jobs as their employers attempted to cut costs by using new technologies, converting to pastoral farming and leaving fields out of cultivation in line with grain prices. Nigel Scotland has demonstrated how significant rural outmigration was at this time, with as many as 100,000 leaving rural Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Suffolk in this period.<sup>17</sup> The apparent fragmentation of rural society, suggested by Mutch, was perhaps further exacerbated by the emergence of the National Agricultural Labourers Union and other agricultural trade unions in the 1870s. Pamela Horn argues that landlord and tenant responses to trade unionism were varied. While some raised wages and improved conditions, others responded by sacking their workforce.<sup>18</sup>

What then of the effect of the depression upon the landowner class? David Cannadine and F. M. L. Thompson have attributed the agricultural depression as a primary cause of the so called 'decline and fall' of the British aristocracy and the landed elites.<sup>19</sup> As Cannadine claims, the 'collapse in agricultural prices meant that estate rentals fell dramatically, and that land values plummeted correspondingly. As a result, the whole territorial basis of patrician existence was undermined...[and]... land was no longer the safest or securest form in which to hold wealth'.<sup>20</sup> However the effects of the depression were worsened when taken alongside the many other changes occurring in British politics and society during the late nineteenth century. The gradual strengthening of the industrial powerbase at the hands of the weakening power of the landed elites had been occurring throughout the century. Political and social agitation, which had also been developing throughout the century, was heightened during the depression and most obviously demonstrated itself in the widespread demands for extensions to the voting franchise. The landed elites were forced to heed such demands and the resultant democratization of British politics, particularly the Third Reform Act in 1884-85, signified that

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<sup>16</sup> Mutch, 'Farmers' Organisations and Agricultural Depression in Lancashire, 1890-1900,' pp.32-33

<sup>17</sup> Nigel Scotland, 'Methodism and the "Revolt of the Field" in East Anglia, 1872-96,' *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 41.1 (1977), p.42

<sup>18</sup> Pamela Horn, 'Landowners and the Agricultural Trade Union Movement of the 1870s,' *Sources for Agricultural History*,

<sup>19</sup> Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, p.26, F. M. L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century*, (Routledge, London, 1980), pp.293-326

<sup>20</sup> Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, p.27

'the age of the masses had superseded the age of the classes'.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, 'in the counties, the reform of local government meant that the "rural houses of lords" were swept away. And at the centre, the end of *laissez-faire*, and the rapid growth of government, portended the eclipse of patrician-dominated administration.'<sup>22</sup>

A fair critique of this argument, particularly with regard to David Cannadine's work, is that it focuses too much upon the upper echelons of the landed elites - those very wealthy and landed aristocrats whose experience during this period was not necessarily relevant to all members of the landed elites; chiefly those small landowners and members of the gentry whose existence was much more common than their grandee counterparts. To a degree, this thesis is open to the same criticism, in that it also focuses on large landowners and very prominent members of the aristocracy and gentry. However, this is a study of aristocratic paternalism and as will hereon be argued, it was in the larger estates that such a traditionalist mentality had best been protected until the late nineteenth century. Among smaller landowners, who held less power and influence in their localities, it had already begun to deteriorate in the years before the 1870s.

Historians E. H. Hunt and S. J. Pam have turned the question of the agricultural depression's effect on the landowning class almost on its head by asking how the aristocracy responded to the depression. They dispute claims by others, such as Avner Offer, that farmers and landlords failed to adapt under the depression and made their own situation worse.<sup>23</sup> According to Hunt and Pam, tenant farmers' cropping was responsive to the fluctuating price of cereals and some switched to pastoral farming when the resources were available to them.<sup>24</sup> They categorise landlords' responses into 'managerial' responses, i.e. reducing rents, granting rent abatements, maintaining estate investment levels and giving tenants greater freedom over cropping by removing obstructive lease requirements; and 'entrepreneurial' responses, i.e. promoting local economic growth, finding new markets for their tenants' produce, encouraging cooperation, improving estate infrastructure, etc.<sup>25</sup> On the whole, Hunt and Pam argue that landlords' managerial responses were impressive. As a result of these measures, they agree that landlords shouldered most of the cost of the depression.<sup>26</sup> However, they criticise landlords for their apparent lack of leadership and entrepreneurship, and for

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<sup>21</sup> Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, p.26

<sup>22</sup> Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, p.28

<sup>23</sup> E. H. Hunt and S. J. Pam, 'Responding to Agricultural Depression, 1873-96: managerial success, entrepreneurial failure?', *Agricultural Historical Review*, 50:2 (2002), p.226

<sup>24</sup> Hunt and Pam, 'Responding to Agricultural Depression,' pp.226-38

<sup>25</sup> Hunt and Pam, 'Responding to Agricultural Depression,' pp.238-52

<sup>26</sup> Hunt and Pam, 'Responding to Agricultural Depression,' pp.238-42

failing to recognise that the depression required innovative solutions.<sup>27</sup> Landlords, they claim, failed to encourage their farmers to meet the increasing demand for fruit, vegetables, eggs, poultry, butter, cheese and bacon because of 'institutional and cultural constraints'.<sup>28</sup>

Sue Farrant provides an example of successful landlord entrepreneurship in the lower Ouse valley in Sussex. She claims that the Brand family, who at the centre of their Glynde estate built a dairy next to the railway station to open up new markets for their tenants' milk, successfully managed to offset the worst effects of the depression in their locality.<sup>29</sup> But in support of Hunt and Pam's argument, Farrant claims that such an experience was rare during the depression.

Mark Rothery asserts that those members of the gentry who best survived the depression were those who diversified away from land and into investments of a safer non-agricultural character.<sup>30</sup> These were mainly fluid investments, usually in stocks and shares in colonial railway, banking and mining companies.<sup>31</sup> This had important ramifications both on the depression and the role of the landowner in agriculture. As will later be discussed, there was some irony in the aristocracy's investment in foreign infrastructures, as it served to heighten the competition British grain growers were facing by enabling the easier transportation of foreign grain and hence a reduction in its price. By increasingly relying on non-agricultural ventures to supplement their income, the aristocracy and gentry were also beginning to lose their zeal for agriculture and became increasingly inattentive to the needs of their estates. The traditional ties that had bound them to their land over the many centuries were slowly being severed. As will be seen, this had an important effect on paternalism.

Yet aristocratic responses to the depression were not only economic. At risk was not only their wealth, but also their power, status and influence and their position at the top of Britain's social hierarchy. It was in the localities that the aristocracy had first established their ascendancy and it was in the localities during the late nineteenth century that it was most importantly, but also most subtly, being tested. Paternalism, or the aristocrat's inherent, benevolent sense of duty, had hitherto secured and bolstered his local ascendancy and yet the challenges that were brought about by the depression were having a profound effect on paternalism's ability to facilitate the aristocracy's aims. The traditional paternal mentality

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<sup>27</sup> Hunt and Pam, 'Responding to Agricultural Depression,' pp.244-50

<sup>28</sup> Hunt and Pam, 'Responding to Agricultural Depression,' p.244

<sup>29</sup> Sue Farrant, 'The Management of Four Estates in the Lower Ouse Valley (Sussex) and Agricultural Change, 1840-1920,' *Southern History*, 1 (1979), pp.165-70

<sup>30</sup> Mark Rothery, 'The wealth of the English landed gentry, 1870-1935,' *Agricultural Historical Review*, 55 (2007), pp.251-53

<sup>31</sup> Rothery, 'The wealth of the English landed gentry, 1870-1935,' pp.251-53

required some adaptation in order for the aristocracy to successfully cope with effects of the depression in their locality and hence maintain their ascendancy.

The publication of David Roberts' *Paternalism in Early Victorian England* in 1979 has sparked some debate as to the extent in which paternalism existed as a solid, definable concept or ideology and the degree to which it influenced Victorian politics, society and culture. Roberts defines a Victorian paternalist as believing that society should be 'authoritarian, hierarchic, organic and pluralistic'.<sup>32</sup> A paternalist should also be notable, according to Roberts, for accepting that 'property has its duties as well as its rights',<sup>33</sup> and that the principal duties were 'ruling, guiding and helping'.<sup>34</sup> Roberts accepts that paternalism in this period is a broad and amorphous concept and incorporated 'varying attitudes and beliefs'.<sup>35</sup> Dividing the main body of his book into three parts, Roberts discusses the intellectual and literary revival of the concept, the theory in action at a grassroots level and its manifestation within Parliament. He argues that paternalism was revived among the governing classes in the early 1800s from the latitudinarianism and indifference of the eighteenth-century, only to peak in the 1840s and decline thereafter.<sup>36</sup> This is a view which is largely supported by Kim Lawes' *Paternalism and Politics: The Revival of Paternalism in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain*.<sup>37</sup> Mark Girouard has also contributed to Roberts' argument by highlighting the influence of traditional, chivalric notions of duty upon the Victorian aristocracy.<sup>38</sup>

Reactions from Roberts' reviewers were mostly positive, noting his contribution to a topic that had been largely under-researched. Gertrude Himmelfarb claimed that Roberts had preserved the concept's amorphousness, whilst 'giving it some historical concreteness', and that 'the very difficulty of definition testifies to the importance of the concept'.<sup>39</sup> Dianne Sadoff was praising of the use of the family to serve as a metaphor for the study of culture and

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<sup>32</sup> David Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England*, (Croon Helm, London, 1979) p.4

<sup>33</sup> Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England*, pp.4-5

<sup>34</sup> Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England*, pp.4-5

<sup>35</sup> Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England*, p.1

<sup>36</sup> Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England*, pp.19-22

<sup>37</sup> Kim Lawes, *Paternalism and Politics: The Revival of Paternalism in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain*, (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2000)

<sup>38</sup> Mark Girouard, *Return to Camelot Chivalry and the English Gentleman*, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1981)

<sup>39</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, 'Review: Paternalism in Early Victorian England by David Roberts,' *Journal of Modern History*, 52:3 (1980), pp.513-14

history.<sup>40</sup> Initially, Roberts' main critics were Boyd Hilton, Paul Littlewood and Norman Gash who seemed to agree that Roberts' understanding of paternalism was too amorphous, and that whilst complaining 'that previous historians have defined the term paternalism too narrowly...he seems to have spread its net too widely to be useful'.<sup>41</sup> Conservative historian Norman Gash seems to go even further in arguing that paternalism was the 'traditional social attitude' that provided the 'common, pervasive background of thought and action', and that Roberts invites confusion by describing the rule as though it were the exception.<sup>42</sup> Following this line of argument, Gash seems to contest whether there was a 'revival' of paternalism in the early 1800s and the extent to which there may have been a decline after the 1840s.

More recently Boyd Hilton appears to have altered his position on paternalism and is now more in line with David Roberts. In his recently published Oxford History of the early Victorian era, Hilton supports Roberts' idea of a revival of paternalism, claiming that the 'longings for a chivalric "olden time" were reactive rather than consensual... but they were undoubtedly revivalist – not survivalist – in mode, and would not have emerged but for the traumas of the late eighteenth century revolutions'.<sup>43</sup> Hilton claims that in the "war of ideas" that was sparked by these revolutions, one of the most disruptive elements politically was a 'socio-economic version [of Liberalism] based on market values', which 'provoked a backlash in the form of a revived paternalism'.<sup>44</sup> Hilton also appears to agree with Roberts that paternalism declined during the mid nineteenth century, claiming that 'a degree of consensus' was established again in the 1850s, 'when another profound shift in sensibility occurred'.<sup>45</sup>

This thesis will, to a degree, support Norman Gash's critique of Roberts' conception of paternalism. It proposes that Roberts' notion of paternalism is too broad and multifaceted to be workable. In order to address the amorphousness of Roberts' interpretation, it is argued here that one broad notion of paternalism will not suffice in explaining the many facets of the concept. Instead this thesis proposes that in order to fully understand paternalism's effect on

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<sup>40</sup> Dianne Sadoff, 'Review: Paternalism in Early Victorian England by David Roberts,' *The Antioch Review*, 38:4 (1980), p.525

<sup>41</sup> Boyd Hilton, 'Review: Paternalism in Early Victorian England by David Roberts,' *The Historical Journal*, 24:3 (1981) p.772, see also Norman Gash 'Review: Paternalism in Early Victorian England by David Roberts,' *The English Historical Review*, 96:378 (1981), p.168 & Paul Littlewood, 'Review: Paternalism in Early Victorian England by David Roberts,' *The British Journal of Sociology*, 32:2 (1981), p.301

<sup>42</sup> Gash 'Review...', p.168

<sup>43</sup> Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, & Dangerous People? England 1873-1846*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2006), p.26

<sup>44</sup> Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, & Dangerous People? England 1873-1846*, p.30

<sup>45</sup> Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, & Dangerous People? England 1873-1846*, p.30

British politics, culture and society in the nineteenth century, many smaller, more distinctive studies investigating the different types of paternalism in their different spheres of influence are required. This thesis will specifically investigate aristocratic paternalism and its influence upon the landed estate and within the localities of England.

Aristocratic paternalism, as expressed in the localities, was intrinsic and inherent, stemming from a set of virtues passed down dynastically through the generations of the family. At its core was not the theoretical, literary tradition that Roberts over emphasises. Although it had political ramifications, it was not the same as the political paternalism with manifestations across the Parliamentary parties that both Roberts and Hilton have discussed. In its simplest form, aristocratic paternalism was an inherited, benevolent sense of duty to the inhabitants of one's estates. It was so well established within the array of aristocratic behaviour that it was almost instinctive. In essence it was a social norm that influenced the aristocracy at large and although not every patrician adhered to it, for most, it provided the 'common, pervasive background of thought and action'.<sup>46</sup>

Dominant ideologies are difficult to define and can present historians with manifold problems. However, without adding unwanted perplexity, paternalism could be viewed as a dominant ideology among the aristocracy, made up of the dual strands of traditionalism and localism. It was conservative and somewhat reactionary in that it harked back nostalgically to a rural, feudal, 'golden age' where chivalry and honour had dictated behaviour and all classes were thought to be happier. Paternalism was also a championing of localism, in that a smaller and less intrusive central government would enable and necessitate a powerful and influential aristocracy in local governance and society. It is here where Roberts and Hilton's notion of a political paternalism in Parliament and national government, when pitted against aristocratic paternalism in the locality, contributes to the confusion in defining the term. Roberts particularly has focused on the successive early Victorian Tory governments' failure to enact paternal legislation, apart from the occasional piece championed by the backbencher Lord Ashley, because of the general support for laissez faire in Parliament and government. Here he has added confusion and not clarity to the concept, because he has failed to understand that localised paternalism and centralised laissez faire were not competing but cooperating philosophies among the landed elites that promoted greater individual power and influence in the localities.

Paternalism also encouraged the rural classes within the individual aristocrat's estate or locality to subscribe to deference as a dominant ideology. As Hilton claims, nineteenth century society may be viewed in terms of 'a comfortable reciprocity between deference and

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<sup>46</sup> Gash 'Review...', p.168

paternalism' and 'a massive consensus, based upon the widespread acceptance of aristocratic values and aristocratic leadership', by the tenants, estate workers, shopkeepers, innkeepers, country attorneys, and others who made up the populations of the provincial villages and small towns. The aristocracy created local communities around their country houses, 'in which all had their place and attendant rights and duties'.<sup>47</sup> These local communities were 'bound together by charity, which emphasized both the benevolence of the giver and the dependence of the recipient'.<sup>48</sup>

Matthew Cragoe has emphasized the importance of families on landed estates holding tenancies dynastically, in much the same way that estates themselves were owned by dynastic families.<sup>49</sup> As this thesis will show, it was not only landownership and tenancies that were dynastic; positions of responsibility, such as that of the land agent, could also be held by successive generations of the same family. The dynasticity of the many families on the estate facilitated paternalism and the acceptance of one's place within the estate's social hierarchy. Landowners could emphasize the shared traditions and ancestries on the estate and therefore ensure the inhabitants would construct their identities based on a sense of belonging to the estate community.

This localised aristocratic paternalism, individual of Roberts' attempts at a comprehensive definition of paternalism, did not decline in the mid-nineteenth century as he has indicated. True though it may be that the theoretical, literary and Parliamentary manifestations of paternalism may have begun their decline after their peak in the 1840s; the intrinsic paternalism of the aristocracy in the localities and at the grassroots level, in being more subtle, was better established and hence lasted decades longer. It was not until the mid-1870s that this manifestation of paternalism was profoundly tested. As the title of this work suggests, the agricultural depression, combined with the many other political and social changes of the late nineteenth century, put aristocratic paternalism into a period of crisis. Although, as will be suggested later, aspects of it survived into the twentieth century.

What then were the ramifications upon paternalism of the many challenges facing the aristocracy in this period? The agricultural depression had the potential to negatively affect paternalism in three distinct ways. Firstly, in carrying out their duties to their tenants, landlords attempted to relieve the burden on them by reducing their rents. They also largely attempted to maintain the pre-depression levels of estate expenditure, at least until the

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<sup>47</sup> Mutch, 'Farmers' Organisations and Agricultural Depression in Lancashire, 1890-1900,' p.33

<sup>48</sup> Mutch, 'Farmers' Organisations and Agricultural Depression in Lancashire, 1890-1900,' p.33

<sup>49</sup> Matthew Cragoe, *An Anglican aristocracy : the moral economy of the landed estate in Carmarthenshire, 1832-1895*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996), pp.33-34

1880s. This meant that the financial burden of the depression predominantly fell on the landowning class. In reducing their wealth, as it did for so many, it had the potential to reduce their ability to fulfil the benevolent duties entailed by their paternalism, such as in patronising charities and community organisations or building schools, churches or chapels. If such benevolent activity declined, the aristocrat risked losing their local status and the deference of their dependents. Secondly, landowners, in being aware of their declining rental income, attempted to adapt to the depression by looking for other non-agricultural sources of income, which mostly resulted in their passive investment into stocks and shares of a variety of companies. The potential danger here was that in relying less on land for their wealth and more on investments, traditional ties to the land would gradually break down, along with the sense of duty to the estate inhabitants. Finally, the depression had a profound effect on the disposition of the other rural classes. Both the tenant-farmers and the agricultural labourers began to develop a strong sense of class consciousness, which occasionally broke out into class agitation, for example with the National Agricultural Labourers Union strikes or the National Federation of Tenant Farmers' Clubs' demands for greater tenant rights. As Alistair Mutch highlights, such movements unified farmers or farm labourers 'across estate boundaries and so threatened to break down that local authority which landlords fostered'.<sup>50</sup> Farmers' organisations more particularly 'threatened to replace the vertical links between landlord and farmer with horizontal links between farmers'.<sup>51</sup> This meant that even on estates where distress and agitation was extremely rare, paternal landowners were still facing an underlying and gradual shift towards the fragmentation of rural society and the disintegration of its social hierarchy.

Aside from the problems entailed by the agricultural depression, aristocrats were also facing political changes that directly affected their ability to display their paternalism on their estates. Throughout the century, central government had gradually been extending its influence and encroaching on the power of the aristocrat in the locality. Central government was increasingly taking on roles for itself in the localities that were hitherto the privilege of the large landowner or aristocrat, such as the provision of education. The culmination of the growth of the jurisdiction of central government at the hands of local aristocrats resulted in the local government reforms of 1888-99, which created and empowered county councils and made these and parish councils directly elected.<sup>52</sup> As a result local governance became more

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<sup>50</sup> Mutch, 'Farmers' Organisations and Agricultural Depression in Lancashire, 1890-1900,' p.33

<sup>51</sup> Mutch, 'Farmers' Organisations and Agricultural Depression in Lancashire, 1890-1900,' p.33

<sup>52</sup> G. R. Searle, *A New England?: Peace and War 1886-1918*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2004), pp.125-27,

codified and increasingly the reserve of career politicians rather than local lords.<sup>53</sup> The electoral reforms that had occurred intermittently throughout the century were also gradually eroding the local political power of the aristocracy. These reforms, particularly the Secret Ballot Act of 1872, had also reduced the aristocrat's ability to ensure the deference of his tenants.<sup>54</sup> In extending the voting franchise to the labouring class, the reforms also furthered their politicisation. Yet it is perhaps testament to the permanence of paternalism and deference on the estates of England that even after political coercion had been so hindered, estates still tended to vote at large for the political party of the landlord.

This thesis aims to reassert the importance of paternalism in enabling greater understanding of the mid- and late-nineteenth-century aristocracy. It is hoped that it will therefore revive the debate on the influence of paternalism upon the Victorian aristocracy, which has been largely cast aside since the publication of Roberts' seminal work in 1979. It is also hoped that this work will contribute to the wider debate surrounding the British aristocracy's 'decline and fall' and provide greater understanding of the importance of the agricultural depression in initiating and catalysing the deterioration of their power, status and ascendancy.

The central argument of this thesis is that, despite the potential for aristocratic paternalism to be flexible to change, the aristocracy largely failed to adapt their traditional understanding of their roles and duties in local and national politics and society to the new challenges that were facing them. However, the aristocracy were not lame ducks and this thesis will describe a variety of their responses to the problems facing them and their attempts to adapt their roles and paternalism into the new age. Both individual circumstances and the more general political, social and economic problems conspired against them and made adaptation, with their paternalism still intact, almost unattainable. This adds even greater weight to the importance of the agricultural depression in providing the principal circumstance that contributed to their decline, by placing them in a 'sink or swim' environment. Since paternalism was in essence an intrinsic sense of duty, it had clear potential to be flexible to the interests and characters of the aristocrats in question, in that they may have differed in their understanding of their specific duties. It also had the potential to be flexible to the new demands put upon it by the economic and political challenges to the aristocracy's local hegemony. As will be shown, for many, who were so used to agricultural prosperity, the depression caught them off guard. They hadn't the foresight to know how long it would last or what its long term political and social implications were. Paternalism and the desire to

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<sup>53</sup> Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, pp.26-28

<sup>54</sup> R. C. K. Ensor, *England 1870-1914*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1960), pp.23-24

maintain good relations with their tenants inspired them at large to reduce rents and to maintain expenditure. Yet, in hoping that the adverse seasons and falling prices were a short term trouble that would soon 'blow over', many failed to make provisions for the long term security of their wealth and power. Those who did often did so to the detriment of their paternalism. As a result the existing political and social pressures on their dwindling power and influence were further exacerbated, as they could no longer generate deference among their dependents to the degree required.

In order to investigate paternalism in the late nineteenth century and the responses of aristocrats to the agricultural depression, this thesis will be divided into three chapters, each focusing on a different landowner in a different area of the country. The case studies will be Henry Chaplin MP, later first viscount Chaplin; Thomas William Coke, second earl of Leicester of Holkham; and William Cavendish, seventh duke of Devonshire. Each chapter will investigate their differing approaches to estate management and their different responses to the agricultural depression and the many other challenges that faced them. Their estate records will make up the bulk of the primary source material for this thesis. Chaplin's estate records are contained in the Lincolnshire Archives, while Leicester's and Devonshire's are stored in their respective country houses – Holkham Hall and Chatsworth House – and have been accessed with the permission of the families. The thesis will predominantly focus on the period between 1870 and 1900. However, where necessary, information may be brought to the readers' attention from outside this period.

Chapters one and two will concern Henry Chaplin MP and the second earl of Leicester of Holkham, whose estates were located in the east of England in the very rural and predominantly arable counties of Lincolnshire and Norfolk respectively. In 1866, Lincolnshire grew 294,014 acres of wheat, outgrowing even Yorkshire (at 290,793 acres).<sup>55</sup> In 1871 Norfolk grew 207,452 acres of wheat, out of a total of 457,069 acres 'under corn crop'.<sup>56</sup> These counties extreme reliance on arable agriculture as their main industry, meant that they were hit particularly hard by the agricultural depression. This, with their relatively sparse population, perhaps make them untypical of most English counties, but in such places paternalism was most likely to thrive. Having been particularly affected by the depression and being in isolation from 'the major metropolitan and provincial centres of English political life', their communities undoubtedly depended on the leadership and patronage of their upper class families.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Richard J. Olney, *Lincolnshire Politics 1832-1885*, (Oxford University Press, London, 1973), p.23

<sup>56</sup> Susanna Wade Martins, *A Great Estate At Work; The Holkham Estate and its Inhabitants in the nineteenth century*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008), p.31

<sup>57</sup> Olney, *Lincolnshire Politics 1832-1885*, p.viii.

Chapter three will concern the seventh duke of Devonshire, whose colossal estates spanned 14 counties in Great Britain and Ireland.<sup>58</sup> Yet his estate management will only be discussed briefly and the chapter will predominantly be concerned with his involvement in industry in the Furness area of Lancashire.

There are various similarities and differences between the three case studies. While it is true that Chaplin was only a 'squire', or a member of the gentry, until his ennoblement in 1916, his 23,000 acres, when compared to the average acreages in Bateman's *Great Landowners of Great Britain*, puts him into the upper echelons of the landed classes.<sup>59</sup> In 1883, Leicester owned a massive 44,090 acres, while Devonshire owned a colossal 198,572 acres.<sup>60</sup> In this sense, despite large variations in their landownership, they were all firmly established within the aristocratic patrician class, while Devonshire also qualifies to be part of the minority of super-wealthy and anciently established aristocrats.

They also had different circumstances which make their narratives unique. For example they were not all as wealthy as they seemed. Chaplin was already mortgaged to the hilt before the depression had even begun and upon inheriting the dukedom in 1858, Devonshire found himself to be deeply encumbered by the debts left by his extravagant predecessor. These personal circumstances complicate the narrative in interesting ways and present the characters in this thesis with additional dilemmas to respond to. Equally the differing personalities and interests of the aristocrats adds greater curiosity to the story and explaining their different characters may serve to enable a better understanding of their different responses to the problems they faced. Chaplin, for example, was rather different from Leicester and Devonshire, in that he was a popular socialite and a charismatic, ambitious politician, with a keen interest in sports, hunting and gambling. Leicester and Devonshire, on the other hand, were rather similar in that they lived rather reclusive lives in their country houses, they were indifferent to politics and they both held more middle class tastes and virtues. The result was that Chaplin's many leisure interests prevented him from being a fully attentive and resident landlord, while Leicester and Devonshire were diligent men who were heavily involved in their estates' management and other concerns. As will be seen, the many similarities and differences of the three case studies had wide-ranging effects on their paternalism.

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<sup>58</sup> John Bateman, *Great Landowners of Great Britain*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, (Harrison, London, 1883), p.130

<sup>59</sup> Bateman, *Great Landowners of Great Britain*, p.84

<sup>60</sup> Bateman, *Great Landowners of Great Britain*, pp.130, 263

## **Chapter 1 – The Paternalism of ‘the Squire’: Henry Chaplin MP Esq. (later the first viscount Chaplin) and his Lincolnshire estates**

In 1926, the Marchioness of Londonderry published a memoir concerning the life of her late father, Henry Chaplin, the first viscount Chaplin (1840-1923).<sup>61</sup> Full of flattery and adulation towards its protagonist, the memoir reads as one would expect having been written by a dutiful daughter of means wishing to preserve the legacy of her not too distantly departed father. Yet Londonderry was seemingly conscious of its wider ramifications, particularly to historians concerned with social and political change in late nineteenth-century England. In the book she writes that upon her father’s death on 29 May 1923, ‘it was universally felt that the world had lost more than an outstanding figure on the turf and in the hunting field – more than a great authority on agriculture – more than a singularly picturesque and lovable personality. The “Squire”, as he was affectionately called by his friends [and tenantry], was all these things.’<sup>62</sup> She goes on:

But he was something else. In spite of his vigorous individuality, he was a representative – almost the last representative – of that type of landed gentry whose political and social influence had meant so much to Victorian England. He belonged essentially to that old school of country gentlemen to whom a long line of squires had bequeathed a tradition of responsibility to their country no less than to their acres.<sup>63</sup>

Indeed R. J. Olney’s Oxford Dictionary of National Biography article on Chaplin concurs with Londonderry’s assessment of her father, by concluding that he was ‘one of the last of the country gentlemen party.’<sup>64</sup> Londonderry goes on further to say that since the time of her father’s prominence, things had changed. Heavy taxation and periods of agrarian depression had diminished the possibility of squires being able to play prominent roles in politics or maintaining their lavish lifestyles of leisure and sport. Moreover, the great country houses and estates of the Victorian landed elites had passed into the hands of ‘strangers who belong to a

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<sup>61</sup> Henry Chaplin’s year of birth is somewhat disputed. It appears Chaplin himself was unsure as to the year of his own birth, see E. Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir Prepared by his Daughter, the Marchioness of Londonderry*, (Macmillan & Co., London, 1926), p.146

<sup>62</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p.1

<sup>63</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, pp.1-2

<sup>64</sup> R. J. Olney, ‘Chaplin, Henry, first Viscount Chaplin (1840-1923), politician and sportsman,’ in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,

<http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.york.ac.uk/view/article/32363?docPos=1>, (accessed on 29/09/2012)

different world and have inherited no traditions with the acres they have purchased'.<sup>65</sup> She concludes, quite rightly, that the memoir has 'the interest of a completed chapter to which there can be no sequel. It tells of men and women and modes of life that will not come again.'<sup>66</sup>

Chaplin was born into an ancestry of squires that predated him by 200 years. It was by default that the Blankney and Tathwell estates, each originally owned by separate wings of the Chaplin family, were brought together under the ownership of Thomas Chaplin in 1730. It was these two estates in Lincolnshire which made up the vast majority of the 23,000 acres that Henry Chaplin inherited as a minor in 1856.<sup>67</sup> Ancestry and tradition were important status conferrers in the hierarchical, late-Victorian society and, as will later be seen, emphasis on such things could be used by paternalists as a key rhetorical device when communicating with their subordinates.

In Chaplin's more immediate ancestry and in the relationships that were formative in his upbringing, his paternal influences are most evident. His father, the Rev. Henry Chaplin, who died when the young Henry was only 8 years old, was 'a country gentlemen of the old type as well as a clergyman'.<sup>68</sup> The young Henry then spent the greater part of his childhood living with his uncle Charles, the old 'Squire' of Blankney. Londonderry writes that 'Charles Chaplin was a survivor of a most ancient order of squires... a complete autocrat on his own land', and yet one who was 'regarded with universal respect and a good deal of awe', since his was a 'benevolent despotism'.<sup>69</sup> Charles was childless and Henry was brought up as his uncle's heir, spending the larger part of his childhood on the estate, where he undoubtedly learned that 'property has its duties as well as its rights'.<sup>70</sup>

Chaplin was a lifelong Conservative and an important figure in both local and national politics. Upon entering parliament in 1868 as MP for Mid Lincolnshire, he almost immediately gained the favourable attention of Disraeli. Due to his solid understanding of the questions relating to land and agriculture, he was appointed a member of the Royal Commission on the

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<sup>65</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p.2

<sup>66</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p.2

<sup>67</sup> Olney, 'Chaplin, Henry, first Viscount Chaplin (1840-1923), politician and sportsman,'. Lady Londonderry disputes the year that Charles Chaplin, Henry's uncle, died leaving him the estate. She claims that Henry's uncle was still alive and writing to him in 1859. See Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, pp.18-19

<sup>68</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p.10

<sup>69</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, pp.11-13

<sup>70</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p.11, David Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England*, (Croon Helm, London, 1979), pp.4-5

agricultural depression (1879-1881). He later served in a number of cabinet positions in Conservative governments, including Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1886), with special responsibility for agriculture and President of the Board of Agriculture (1889-1892), as the first with a seat in cabinet. Henry Blyth remarks that 'from his father he inherited the Christian outlook, but from his uncle he inherited the religion of Toryism'.<sup>71</sup> From his friend and mentor Lord George Bentinck, Chaplin inherited the ardent support for protectionism that was at the centre of his political creed. As his daughter claims, 'to the end he remained convinced that Tariff Reform was the only measure which could restore a satisfactory means of livelihood to the English farmer'.<sup>72</sup> From a political career marked by his understanding of agriculture and his advocacy of protection, he attained, in the later stages of his life, the unofficial position of leader of the agricultural interest in parliament.

Bentinck also mentored his younger friend on the delights of a busy sporting life. Throughout his life Chaplin was a keen sportsman and gambler and as with his political ambitions, these interests also made claims on his time and to an extent removed him from the routine management of his estates. Throughout his adulthood, Chaplin spent huge sums gambling on horse racing, amongst other sports and buying racehorses. Chaplin was equally obsessed by shooting, deerstalking and hunting, serving as a member and master of two hunts in Lincolnshire. Londonderry remarks that when resident on his estate, he was hunting up to five or six days per week. David Cannadine adds that Chaplin 'virtually bankrupted himself with the Blankney [Hunt], was forced to sell his hounds in 1883'.<sup>73</sup>

Alongside his active political and sporting commitments, Chaplin juggled a social life that was equally lively. He was a popular character within London society and had a passion for lavishly entertaining his friends and acquaintances. While a student at Oxford, Chaplin befriended HRH the Prince of Wales and there developed a lasting 'taste for high society and extravagant living'.<sup>74</sup>

Not only did his busy sporting and social lives have a detrimental effect on his ability to keep a watchful eye on the management of his estates but they also had an equally negative effect on his wealth. 'Within five years of inheriting his uncle's estates and their rent roll of over £30,000 a year, Henry Chaplin had mortgaged much of his land to secure loans of

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<sup>71</sup> Henry Blyth, *The Pocket Venus, A Victorian Scandal*, (Sphere Books, London, 1968), p.31

<sup>72</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p.151

<sup>73</sup> David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, (Picador, London, 1992), p.361

<sup>74</sup> Olney, 'Chaplin, Henry, first Viscount Chaplin (1840-1923), politician and sportsman,' & Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, pp.15-23

£95,000.<sup>75</sup> Despite his excessive borrowings he continued to spend on racing, hunting, shooting and entertaining and disregarded the 'endless warnings from his stewards'.<sup>76</sup> If agriculture had remained prosperous over the course of the nineteenth century, then perhaps Chaplin's rental income could have justified the interest on his debts enough so that despite being heavily mortgaged he could have at least retained his estates. But agriculture crashed into a prolonged slump, Chaplin continued his excessive personal expenditure and had to hand over his Blankney estate to his chief mortgagee, Lord Londesborough, in 1897 and sell off his Tathwell estate just three years later.

Chaplin's story is a significant one with important ramifications to a study of paternalism in the late nineteenth century. As the title of this thesis suggests, the period was a critical one in which paternalism as a traditional social outlook and as a model for the structure of rural society needed to be updated if it was to remain intact at the dawn of a new century. Chaplin's narrative is one of a landlord largely unfazed by the political, social and economic adjustments going on around him and unwilling to adapt his outdated ideas of what the roles and duties of a landowner entailed.

His story poses important questions. As politics, sport and society made increasing claims on his time and made him 'an inattentive and only partially resident landlord',<sup>77</sup> how much of the routine estate management was left to his agents? What of Chaplin and his agents' responses to the agricultural depression? Did he relieve his tenants of the economic burden of depression by taking it on himself? Did he initiate any endeavours to promote economic growth on his estates with new ideas and entrepreneurialism? What of his benevolence during a period when rural communities on his estate were being impoverished by agrarian depression? Did Chaplin provide the leadership one would expect from a paternalist to his dependents? How did he view his political roles and duties? Were these influenced by his paternalism?

This chapter will attempt to provide answers to above questions. It will be the contention of this case study that while Chaplin carried out many of the established roles and duties that were the mainstay of the traditional paternalism of the landed elites, his paternalism ultimately failed to adapt to the new challenges that were posed by the agricultural depression and the other changes in late Victorian politics and society. Chaplin's failure to adapt had catastrophic results both personally, as he lost his estates, and to the

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<sup>75</sup> Anne De Courcy, *Society's Queen: The Life of Edith, Marchioness of Londonderry*, (Phoenix, London, 2004), p.15

<sup>76</sup> De Courcy, *Society's Queen*, p.15

<sup>77</sup> Olney, 'Chaplin, Henry, first Viscount Chaplin (1840-1923), politician and sportsman,'

aristocracy at large, as his was an example of a potentially prevalent experience awaiting all those who would also failed to adapt. In this sense, to Londonderry's claim that her father was the 'last representative' of the landed gentry, can be added an additional layer of meaning.

The chapter will be divided into four ensuing sections. The first will investigate the nature of estate management under Chaplin and the role of his agents. It will then discuss the characteristics of the relationships between landlord, agent and tenant on the estate. The second section will detail Chaplin and his agents' responses to the agricultural depression and the successes and failures contained therein. It will be argued that while they followed national trends in reducing rents and maintaining expenditure, they failed in what E. H. Hunt and S. J. Pam have called their 'entrepreneurial' role in promoting local agricultural economic growth as a route for the entire estate to climb out of the grips of depression.<sup>78</sup> The third section will discuss Chaplin's benevolence and patronage of local charities, societies and institutions like churches and schools. Finally, the fourth section will discuss Chaplin's political career in greater detail and draw conclusions based on the ramifications of the narrative here presented.

## I

In 1879 British agriculture had suffered a series of bad harvests, the prolonged effects of which, when coupled with the lowering of grain prices due to foreign competition, meant that contemporary farmers were beginning to feel the harsh effects of a depression which showed no immediate possible signs of recovery. That same year Chaplin wrote to his wife, claiming that he must go to see tenants "who are on the verge of giving up, before October, which is the time they give me notice to quit... it is a matter on which I must decide things for myself and on which Burton [the agent] can hardly act for me. Besides which I could keep them and he couldn't."<sup>79</sup> Chaplin's comment is revealing, not only of how a landlord could sympathise with his struggling tenants, but also of how he perceived his own role and decision-making power in relation to that of his agent. His comment suggests that while the agent was left to handle the majority of day-to-day management decisions, the very important decisions had to be made by, or at least in consultation with, the landlord. More significant is the comment "I could keep them and he couldn't", which suggests that while the agent had to make decisions from a more mercilessly economic stance, the landlord was able to be more moral and paternal as it was his own wealth that was at stake.

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<sup>78</sup> E. H. Hunt and S. J. Pam, 'Responding to Agricultural Depression, 1873-96: managerial success, entrepreneurial failure?', *Agricultural Historical Review*, 50:2 (2002)

<sup>79</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, pp.97-98.

The chief agent on Chaplin's Lincolnshire estates was John Francis Burton, of the Lincoln-based law firm Burton and Scorer and Co. His primary vocation was as an attorney and he eventually went on to become clerk of the peace for Lindsey (a large district covering north Lincolnshire), 'the pinnacle of the legal profession of the county'.<sup>80</sup> As Olney remarks 'it was not uncommon for attorneys to act as agents to one or more landowners, supervising the financial as well as the more purely legal side of estate management'.<sup>81</sup> Burton's appointment as agent to Chaplin's estates marks the increasing use of upper middle class professionals, as opposed to men from farming backgrounds, to fill the position of agent on nineteenth-century estates. Yet Burton's appointment also highlights the successes of his father, who, as another beneficiary of the Chaplins' patronage, was appointed Conservative agent for the North Lincolnshire elections of 1835 and 1841.<sup>82</sup> Landlord's clearly liked to occupy their land and the positions for the provision of the duties it entailed with men they knew.

The vast majority of the documents within Chaplin's estate records are written in Burton's handwriting and generally signed by him also. Indeed, Chaplin's handwriting and signature appears quite rarely in the general records, materializing more frequently in the estate letters and correspondence than elsewhere. Furthermore, the only remaining evidence of the management of Chaplin's estates exists amongst other legal papers in estate records deposited with the Lincolnshire Archives by the law firm Burton and Scorer and Co. Neither Chaplin nor any of his descendents ever deposited estate records with any archives. This evidence supports the claim that the administration and management of Chaplin's estates was predominantly left to the agent, although Chaplin may have made the very important decisions by himself. Unfortunately it is impossible to assess the level of communication, discussion and consultation between the agent and the landlord, as a large proportion of this work would have been done verbally, leaving no evidence for the historian.

'A really large estate might employ as head agent a man of legal training, with local agents to provide knowledge of agriculture and to exercise day-to-day supervision.'<sup>83</sup> This was certainly the case on Chaplin's estates. A name which appears regularly in the estate records is that of William Bartholomew, who was a mature and well experienced tenant on the Chaplin estates when Henry Chaplin came to inherit them. Alongside being a successful tenant farmer, Bartholomew appears to have been employed by Chaplin and perhaps also by his uncle, as a

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<sup>80</sup> R. J. Olney, *Rural Society and County Government in Nineteenth Century Lincolnshire*, (History of Lincolnshire Committee, Lincoln, 1979), p.47

<sup>81</sup> Olney, *Rural Society and County Government in Nineteenth Century Lincolnshire*, p.46

<sup>82</sup> Olney, *Rural Society and County Government in Nineteenth Century Lincolnshire*, pp.46-47

<sup>83</sup> Olney, *Rural Society and County Government in Nineteenth Century Lincolnshire*, p.46-47

sort of agent and advisor.<sup>84</sup> As an inhabitant of the estate, with a wealth of local farming knowledge, Bartholomew would have been invaluable to an only partially resident landlord like Chaplin. As testament to the landlord's preference for the dynastic succession of the families on their estates, Bartholomew's son, Bart Bartholomew, was also one of Chaplin's tenants.<sup>85</sup>

Another duty of the land agent was to provide financial advice to their employer. Land agents were more limited in their ability to be paternal or be sympathetic to suffering tenants because of their awareness of the importance of estate finances; after all it was not their money to spend but it was their job to lose. Chaplin, who was largely inattentive to his own financial position, had far greater potential to spend money on patronage and benevolence than his agents. Since it was the agent's job to attempt to keep the landlord's expenditure at a reasonable level, a general point can be made that unlike the landlord, the agent could express only limited paternalism. It must be noted, that Chaplin's agents largely failed to get him to curtail his excessive expenditure, despite their 'endless warnings'.<sup>86</sup> They also failed to advise him to invest his money in non-agricultural passive ventures, e.g. stocks and shares in colonial companies, at a time when so many other members of the aristocracy and gentry were doing so to supplement their fallen income during the agricultural depression.<sup>87</sup>

Two undated newspaper clippings retained in Chaplin's estate records, both letters to the editor concerning a dispute over tenancy agreements within the Nottinghamshire Chamber of Agriculture, reveal to an extent the nature of landlord-tenant relations and the rise in class agitation between the two groups in this crucial period. The dispute appears to have been over one of the Agricultural Holdings Acts which would have interfered with the freedom of contract between landlord and tenant and given tenants the right to appeal to the Inclosure Commissioners in issues arising from their contracts. It resulted in the resignation of the chairman of the chamber, John Chaworth Musters, a landowner in the county. The language within the articles suggests that there existed 'a position of political hostility between landlord and tenant', with those few apparently 'intelligent' and 'first-class tenants entirely agree[ing] with their landlords'.<sup>88</sup> Musters, upon resigning, wrote that he felt 'that the chamber is becoming more and more a political and agitating body, than an association to forward the true interests of all connected with agriculture – the landlord, tenant farmers, the

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<sup>84</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office (hereon L.A.O.), BS/13/1/13, Estate Letters

<sup>85</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/13, Estate Letters

<sup>86</sup> De Courcy, *Society's Queen*, p.15

<sup>87</sup> Mark Rothery, 'The wealth of the English landed gentry, 1870–1935,' *Agricultural Historical Review*, 55 (2007), pp.251-53

<sup>88</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/6, Papers RE tenant right and tenancy agreements.

labourers and the public generally'.<sup>89</sup> Since the clippings were retained within the estate records it is likely that Chaplin, as an agriculturalist and a landowner in a neighbouring county, as well as his agents, watched this story unfold very closely.

This rise in tenant class consciousness may be explained in both economic and political terms. The agricultural depression strained the relationship between the landlord and tenant classes and provided an atmosphere in which tenant class identity was developed. The shrunken agricultural economy pitted the tenant class against the landowners in a struggle to regain wealth lost during the depression. Yet the political preoccupation with the Irish Question in Westminster had ramifications for all British tenant farmers. The rallying of the Irish on mass against their 'absentee aristocracy' in support of the 3Fs cause (fixity of tenure, free sale and fair rent), forced the government to act. The resulting Agricultural Holdings Acts of 1875 and 1883 went some way to improving and increasing tenants' rights across the whole of Great Britain. The actions of Irish farmers also provided inspiration to English tenant farmers.

Alistair Mutch, in his study of farmer's organisations in Lancashire 1890-1900, has argued that farmers' believing that their 'industry was in the grip of depression' formed organisations which sought to achieve reductions in rent and greater tenant rights.<sup>90</sup> This 'automatically brought them into conflict with the traditional leadership of the landed gentry' and further necessitated tenants' organisation.<sup>91</sup> Yet he also argues that the rise of these organisations was not a mere reflex to economic factors but a culmination of a development of tenant-class identity. He concludes that the farmers' assertion of their interests as a class against those of their landlords, led to a fragmentation of rural society and ultimately contributed to the declining influence of the landed aristocracy in local and national government.<sup>92</sup> The argument presented in this thesis will largely concur with Mutch's conclusions, though it will be stressed that the apparent fragmentation of rural society occurred more gradually than Mutch seems to imply. Although the development of tenant-class identity was not a mere reflex to economic factors and had deeper roots, the sustained period of agricultural depression did provide the single most important reason for the eventual breakdown of the paternalistic society on large estates. Yet as testament to the strength of the paternal-deferential bonds between landlords and tenants, the full effects of the agricultural

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<sup>89</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/6, Papers RE tenant right and tenancy agreements.

<sup>90</sup> Alistair Mutch, 'Farmers' Organisations and Agricultural Depression in Lancashire, 1890-1900,' *Agricultural Historical Review*, 31 (1983), p.35

<sup>91</sup> Mutch, 'Farmers' Organisations and Agricultural Depression in Lancashire, 1890-1900,' p.35

<sup>92</sup> Mutch, 'Farmers' Organisations and Agricultural Depression in Lancashire, 1890-1900,' pp.35-36

depression on the harmony within rural society were not fully realised until well after the turn of the new century.

In Lincolnshire, Chaplin and his agents were able to prevent agitation over tenant rights on the Blankney and Tathwell estates and Chaplin's tenants remained, on the whole, rather docile. Chaplin achieved this by largely ignoring the governments' attempts to legally codify tenant rights (under the Agricultural Holdings acts) and by persuading his tenants to ignore their legal rights in preference for customary rights.

Customary tenant rights in Lincolnshire, where they were first developed in the 1740s, were already quite generous and wide-ranging.<sup>93</sup> Outgoing tenants could expect to be paid for virtually all work done, including the labour and seed costs, for the incoming tenant. They could also expect to be paid for improvements they made to the land, such as underdraining, or the buildings, provided they had the permission of the landlord.<sup>94</sup> J. V. Beckett notes that customary tenant rights offered for the tenant 'security for his investment, and for the landlord it saved him the need to prosecute a tenant who defaulted on his rent and left early. He could deduct some or all of the arrears from the sum to be paid by the new occupier to the outgoing tenant, and thereby recover the arrears without resorting to unpopular and harsh measure which might end with a tenant being imprisoned.'<sup>95</sup>

The governments successive Agricultural Holdings Acts were essentially an attempt to legally entrench abovementioned customary rights. As J. V. Beckett claims, customary tenant right 'became the basis of the Agricultural Holdings Acts of 1875 and 1883. The Agricultural Holdings Acts therefore gave tenants greater power and greater means for ensuring that their landlords did not attempt to evade paying their claims.'<sup>96</sup> Resources such as the law courts and the Inclosure Commission were now made more available to tenants for helping them to resolve disputes with their landlords arising from tenancy agreements or the lack there of. This empowerment of tenants was at the expense of the power and authority of the landlord and their supposed rights to freedom of contract.

Like John Chaworth Musters, Chaplin viewed the Agricultural Holdings Acts with distrust and he deliberated over how he could evade the authority of the Acts.<sup>97</sup> He was advised that Clause 37 of the 1875 Act 'effectually preserves freedom of contract, but it appears by Clause 38, that a Landlord must give notice of rejecting the Act, which assuming the Act to be just and reasonable, is an invidious thing for a Landlord to do, especially for such

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<sup>93</sup> J. V. Beckett, *The Aristocracy In England 1660-1914*, (Basil Blackwell Ltd, Oxford, 1986), p.189

<sup>94</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/6, Papers RE tenant right and tenancy agreements.

<sup>95</sup> Beckett, *The Aristocracy In England 1660-1914*, p.189

<sup>96</sup> Beckett, *The Aristocracy In England 1660-1914*, p.189

<sup>97</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/6, Papers RE tenant right and tenancy agreements.

a prominent supporter of the government as Mr Henry Chaplin'.<sup>98</sup> When the 1883 Act took a step further in legally codifying tenant rights, Chaplin was no longer bound by his support of the government. He opted to ignore the Act by asking his tenants to sign new printed agreements, in which they had to forgo the rights granted to them by the act in substitution for a continuation of the customary tenant rights that they were used to and to accept these as 'fair and reasonable'.<sup>99</sup>

Why then did landowners like Chaplin and Musters prefer, and latterly champion, customary tenant rights over legally based rights? Their reasoning was both superficial and ideological. The Agricultural Holdings Acts essentially made landlords more legally accountable and potentially culpable for expensive legal proceedings and fines and in this sense their hostility to the Acts is quite natural and somewhat expected. In affecting the balance of power between landlord and tenant, the Acts also had a negative effect on the landlord's ability to express paternalism on the estate by making its inhabitants more independent. Paternalism could only thrive in the traditional functions of the aristocracy, where the government, local or national, and the law had yet to encroach. Without outside interference, tenants would have to rely on their paternal landlord who, in the ideal, knew well his responsibility to fairly compensate his tenants based on the customs and traditions of his predecessors. In the legal codification of tenant right, paternal landlords saw the erosion of the importance of the paternal-deferential relationships that were at the core of estate life.

This highlights regional contrasts in the development of tenant-class identity. In Lincolnshire where customary tenant rights were first developed in the mid eighteenth century, they had become so well established by the late nineteenth century that tenants largely accepted their continuance without agitation, even when this meant forgoing greater security under the legally codified rights. In Nottinghamshire, Lancashire and other parts of the country, where customary tenant rights were more recently established, perhaps not as generous and probably more constrictive than in Lincolnshire, tenants were more steadfast in promoting their rights and as a result agitation between the classes was more common.<sup>100</sup>

It is testament to the strength and endurance of paternalism on Chaplin's estate that there is no evidence that he faced any opposition from his tenants when evading the implications of the 1883 Act. On the whole, as will be shown throughout this chapter, landlord-tenant relations on Chaplin's estates were very good. One particular example of this was when Chaplin's friend and fellow MP for Mid Lincolnshire, Weston Cacroft Amcotts, wrote to him

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<sup>98</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/6, Papers RE tenant right and tenancy agreements.

<sup>99</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/6, Papers RE tenant right and tenancy agreements.

<sup>100</sup> Perry, *British Farming in the Great Depression, 1870-1914*, p.62

complaining that a new railway line had taken land the Louth Corps of Volunteers used for a shooting range and asked if he would allow a new range on some of his land. Chaplin replied 'I have no objection if it is agreeable to my tenant, but it must depend upon what he thinks about it'.<sup>101</sup> Luckily for Amcotts and his Corps, Chaplin's tenant, George Oliver, reciprocated with characteristic deference to his landlord's paternalism, and replied 'I have no objection to them having the new range on my farm, if the Squire [does] not object'.<sup>102</sup>

## II

Upon returning from one of the initial Royal Commission meetings on the agricultural depression in 1879, Chaplin took a four day tour of all of the farms on his estates. He wrote to his wife claiming that he had done so in order to see for himself the hardship "on those who, in spite of bad times, and all their previous hopes, have been doing their very best all the same."<sup>103</sup> He wrote of terrible rains that, if persistent, "will mean almost ruin for them all".<sup>104</sup> Some farmers he claimed were even on the verge of giving up. The disconsolate tone of his writing is given greater poignancy when contrasted to the earlier hope he expressed that the Royal Commission "must do good, and cannot fail to do so".<sup>105</sup> Londonderry gives the impression that his dismal tone stems not only from sympathy for his tenants' but also from a share in their distress.<sup>106</sup> Chaplin was beginning to realise that as landlord it fell to him to take effective measures in response to the agricultural depression and to attempt to relieve the burden on his tenants. By doing so, Chaplin would have to accept significant cuts to his rental income, alongside the expectation of his tenants to maintain estate expenditure at a time when he was already severely in debt.

Traditional assessments have claimed that landlords largely failed to respond to the depression, which caused its effects on both tenant farmers and landowners to be prolonged. Hunt & Pam state that 'some have claimed that landlords innovated too little. Others have drawn attention to the supposedly restrictive effects of traditional leases.'<sup>107</sup> Some historians, such as Avner Offer, have vehemently maintained 'that failure occurred because agriculture was handicapped by incompetent, risk adverse, and rapacious landlords, and by the pernicious

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<sup>101</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/13, Estate Correspondence

<sup>102</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/13, Estate Correspondence

<sup>103</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, pp.97-102, 99.

<sup>104</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p.99

<sup>105</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p.97

<sup>106</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p.102

<sup>107</sup> Hunt and Pam, 'Responding to Agricultural Depression,' p.226

effects of the English estate system'.<sup>108</sup> Hunt & Pam, along with Cormac O'Grada and F. M. L. Thompson, have doubted the veracity of this damning portrait of landlord responses to agricultural depression and also the idea that tenant farmers and landlords 'failed'.<sup>109</sup> In their article, Hunt and Pam have created a criteria for assessing Essex landlords' competence in responding to the depression, grouping their actions into either managerial or entrepreneurial responses and measuring the levels of success and failure in each. Hunt and Pam argue that in their managerial responses, landlords were 'competent and socially responsible', in that they, generally-speaking, reduced rents to ease the burden on their tenants, removed obstructive clauses in their leases to allow tenants greater freedom to grow different crops and maintained the levels of estate investment that tenants had grown used to during the so-called 'Golden Age' of British farming.<sup>110</sup> However, in terms of landowners' entrepreneurial responses, Hunt & Pam are rather more critical. They claim that 'the depression had brought new challenges requiring more than merely managerial responses' and that 'in their more-demanding entrepreneurial role, landlords, unquestionably, were less successful'.<sup>111</sup> Hunt & Pam describe this entrepreneurial role as providing leadership on their estates, improving infrastructure and transport links, encouraging co-operation among their deferential tenants and neighbours, promoting smallholding, encouraging tenant farmers to diversify, investing in new ventures and opening up new markets that helped to collectively sell their tenants' produce.<sup>112</sup>

This section will attempt to apply Hunt & Pam's criteria for managerial and entrepreneurial successes and failures to the case of Henry Chaplin and his Lincolnshire estates. It will argue that as was the case among Essex landlords, Chaplin's managerial response was at least competent, while his entrepreneurial response was rather non-existent. However, considering Chaplin's already rather disastrous financial situation at the beginning of the depression, his level of self sacrifice in ensuring that his tenants were freed up from the financial burden of depression requires some explanation. It is doubtful that any landowner enjoyed having to reduce his own rental income whilst attempting to keep estate expenditure up, but the contrast lies in the fact that most of Chaplin's contemporaries could at least afford it: Chaplin could not. Was Chaplin just desperately holding out for the return of agricultural prosperity? Or did he accept sacrifices to his own wealth to help his tenants because of an underlying sense of duty towards them? At first, like many of his contemporaries, Chaplin

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<sup>108</sup> Hunt and Pam, 'Responding to Agricultural Depression,' p.226

<sup>109</sup> Hunt and Pam, 'Responding to Agricultural Depression,' p.226

<sup>110</sup> Hunt and Pam, 'Responding to Agricultural Depression,' pp.238-44

<sup>111</sup> Hunt and Pam, 'Responding to Agricultural Depression,' pp.248-49, 251

<sup>112</sup> Hunt and Pam, 'Responding to Agricultural Depression,' pp.243-50

probably viewed the depression as a short term slump and was willing to take on some of its burden with a view to recouping losses when things picked up. Yet as the depression drew out and began to establish itself as the dominant economic environment, the continuation of assistance Chaplin offered his tenants carries more significance. It will be further argued here that paternalism as a mentality and an inherent sense of duty is an important contributing factor when explaining Chaplin's responses to the agricultural depression on his Lincolnshire estates.

In 1879 Chaplin wrote of his friend, a tenant on his estate and a 'first-rate' farmer, "poor Howard... is quite broken-hearted. However, I consoled him by promising some relief from his payments at rent day."<sup>113</sup> It appears that both Mr Howard and his son, another tenant on the estate, were struggling to pay their rents due in part to the series of bad harvests that had begun in the mid 1870s.<sup>114</sup> Yet they were far from the only tenants receiving some form of rent relief from Chaplin. A list of tenants claiming rent reductions contains no fewer than 11 names renting over 7000 acres in both the Blankney and Tathwell estates, with two more pencilled in presumably later.<sup>115</sup> The rent paid by the tenants (which is presumably at the reduced rate where only one figure is given) varies greatly, and is likely dependent on the quality of land, buildings, etc, with some paying more than 28s/acre and others as little as 18s/acre.<sup>116</sup> Calculations on the document suggest some were claiming even further rent reductions, such as Abraham Knott whose rent on his 220 acre farm was reduced 24s.11d/acre to 18s.1d/acre, which alone gave Chaplin a £70 reduction in his annual rental income.<sup>117</sup> The list also contains the names of two Howards (R. G. & F. R.) claiming rent reductions on separate farms on the estate. This suggests that even the competent farmers like Mr Howard (senior) whose heath farm, Chaplin had claimed was "an example to the whole country," were suffering at the hands of bad harvests and foreign competition.<sup>118</sup> Frustratingly, the list, which is practically the only piece of evidence detailing the extent of reductions within the records, is undated. Due to the scale of the agricultural depression it is likely that the list was an early one and that rent reductions and arrears continued to grow in size and had to be granted to many more tenants as the depression wore on. Documents within the estate records are generally fragmentary and often undated. It is certainly conceivable that documents detailing further and wider rent relief have merely been lost.

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<sup>113</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p.101

<sup>114</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p.101

<sup>115</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/1, Draft Memoranda, Reports, Accounts, etc.

<sup>116</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/1, Draft Memoranda, Reports, Accounts, etc.

<sup>117</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/1, Draft Memoranda, Reports, Accounts, etc.

<sup>118</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p.101

Hunt and Pam argue against the traditional view that during the depression landlords made retrenchment the 'order of the day' and that estate improvements were 'stopped at once'.<sup>119</sup> They instead claim that the provision of long-term capital was considered, like rent adjustment, as a traditional responsibility of landlords, even in difficult economic conditions and that investment levels were retained and in some cases increased, until after the mid 1880s where the overall picture suggests more restrained expenditure.<sup>120</sup> A review of Chaplin's expenditure on improvements to his estates concurs entirely with Hunt and Pam's argument. Chaplin's 'Building Fund' reveals that between January 1878 and February 1880, he spent over £6900.00 on the erection of new buildings and improvements to old ones.<sup>121</sup> These include new labourers' cottages at Tathwell, a new foreman's house on Fowler Cartwright's farm, a new farmstead at Scopwick and alterations and additions to Mr Knott's house at Blankney Barff.<sup>122</sup> Estate accounts within the estate records are very fragmentary and actually non-existent for most years. However, as an indication, the 1880 (and only) accounts, in which the estimated total gross income for the Blankney and Tathwell estates 'from every source' was £28,226, suggest that approximately 12% of the annual gross income of the estates was invested back into improving and erecting buildings.<sup>123</sup>

Due to the fragmentary nature of the building accounts in the estate records it would be ill-advised to suggest a total expenditure on buildings for the 1870s and early 1880s. Yet it can be safely suggested that the abovementioned £6900 spent during 1878 and 1879 makes up the bulk of the expenditure on agricultural buildings on the estate during the 1870-85 period. Only some extensive alterations work done at the Temple Grange Farm in 1872 and five pairs of cottages erected at Tathwell, Hallington and Hangham in 1873 are excluded from the above figure, and total in themselves a further £2900.<sup>124</sup> Other than these figures there is no other evidence of any further building work carried out on the estate. As with rent reductions, it may be argued that Chaplin did continue to improve the estate with building work but is misrepresented by his incomplete estate records from which many documents could have been lost. The halting of investment in the early 1880s was most likely due to his finances becoming 'severely embarrassed'.<sup>125</sup> Chaplin should not be judged too harshly for this. His curtailing estate investment in the mid 1880s was in line with English

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<sup>119</sup> Hunt and Pam, 'Responding to Agricultural Depression,' p.238

<sup>120</sup> Hunt and Pam, 'Responding to Agricultural Depression,' pp.238-241

<sup>121</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/3, Detailed accounts of work done.

<sup>122</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/3, Detailed accounts of work done.

<sup>123</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/1, Draft Memoranda.

<sup>124</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/3, Detailed accounts of work done,

<sup>125</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p.115

landowners at large, whose estate investment was more 'restrained' after the 1880s, but never amounted to an 'investment moratorium'.<sup>126</sup>

Improvements on Chaplin's estates were extensive. They reveal an estate office that paid attention to detail and accommodated tenants to a high standard. For example in the account of the works done to the Temple Grange Farm in 1872, under the 'Hall Passage' section there is a list including an 'elliptical arch', 'cloth on swing door', 'beaded bell board' and '1 dozen black cloak hooks', to name but very few of the costs.<sup>127</sup> These efforts to make tenants' houses elaborate persisted well into the early 1880s, when the depression was well established. With vacant farms becoming more plentiful across the country during the depression, it was clearly important for landlords to make a good impression in order to retain existing tenants or secure new ones.

Yet Chaplin's improvements to the buildings on the estate were not solely aimed for the benefit of his tenants. A large proportion of the building work carried out in this period was on new pairs of cottages for labourers. As previously mentioned five new pairs of cottages were built on the Tathwell estate in 1872, at a cost of over £1300 and a further five double cottages on the Tathwell estate and one double and one single on the Blankney estate, during 1877-78 at a cost of over £1950.<sup>128</sup> These too were elaborate buildings that were carefully designed and built to ensure comfortable living for farm labourers on the estate. H. Rider Haggard, during his famous tour of rural England, wrote that 'at Blankney... are some of the best cottages I have seen, built of stone and very picturesque. Indeed, this may be called a model village.'<sup>129</sup> He even included a picture of the Blankney cottages when his report, *Rural England*, was published in 1901-02.<sup>130</sup> It increasingly became a landlord's responsibility to attract a decent workforce to the area for the use of his tenants, particularly as the depression caused high levels of rural outmigration. The location of labourers' cottages was of huge importance in their working life. An article in the *Times* in 1847 suggests that labourers in Lincolnshire could have to walk more than five miles to work in a morning and the same distance back home at night, if their cottage was not situated on or near to the farm where

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<sup>126</sup> Hunt and Pam, 'Responding to Agricultural Depression,' p.240

<sup>127</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/3, Detailed accounts of work done , L.A.O., BS/13/1/10, Plans, Specs, Contracts & Tenders

<sup>128</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/3, Detailed accounts of work done, L.A.O., BS/13/1/10, Plans, Specs, Contracts & Tenders, L.A.O., BS/13/1/5, Land Improvements Company

<sup>129</sup> H. Rider Haggard, *Rural England*, Vol. 2, (Longmans, Green, and Co., London, 1902), p.230

<sup>130</sup> Haggard, *Rural England*, Vol. 2, p.230

they worked.<sup>131</sup> In attempting to address such a grievance and providing decent cottages for labourers, Chaplin demonstrated that his paternal duties extended to all classes on the estate.

In order to pay for these improvements to estate buildings, Chaplin, following trends among the wider aristocracy, relied on government loans from the Land Improvements Company (hereon referred to as the L.I.C.). Loans were subject to strict specifications and plans and required the approval of an appointed surveyor and the final sanction of the Inclosure Commissioners before work could begin.<sup>132</sup> The expenses and interest on the loans were particularly low which made them very popular in this period.<sup>133</sup> Though the evidence again is fragmentary in the records, it suggests that Chaplin had no fewer than four contracts with the L.I.C., in which were included most of the abovementioned works, such as the Tathwell cottages and the works at Temple Grange Farm (Contracts: 1730 & 2306).<sup>134</sup> However, the loans often did not cover the entirety of the costs for the buildings, for example contract 1730 for the 5 pairs of cottages at Tathwell dated August 1871 totals £1175, whereas from the building accounts we can see that they actually cost £1301.<sup>135</sup> Chaplin would have had to pay the excess as loans could not be extended. Hunt and Pam emphasize that nationwide government loans for this purpose were 'considerably higher in 1875-99 than between 1850 and 1874,'<sup>136</sup> which is understandable in the context of depression and falling rental incomes. But what is important to note is that struggling landlords, like Chaplin, took out such loans to maintain levels of estate investment before considering reducing expenditure or embarking on a policy of strict retrenchment. So incisive was the paternal sense of duty towards their estates' inhabitants that they continued to spend even after they could no longer afford to do so.

The agricultural depression brought with it great changes which threatened the traditional social order and the bonds which had previously united the rural classes. Whilst rural outmigration drained estates of the talent and energy associated with youth, class relationships were strained under the burden of depression. Farmers' organisations and labourers' trade unions were on the rise, gradually causing rural society to fragment. Good and fair estate management was no longer the primary duty of a paternal landlord. They had to take on what Hunt and Pam refer to as the 'entrepreneurial' role.<sup>137</sup> Paternalism, as the

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<sup>131</sup> *The Times*, 08 September 1847

<sup>132</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/5, Land Improvements Company

<sup>133</sup> Hunt and Pam, 'Responding to Agricultural Depression,' pp.238-40

<sup>134</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/5, Land Improvements Company

<sup>135</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/3, Detailed accounts of work done, L.A.O., BS/13/1/5, Land Improvements Company

<sup>136</sup> Hunt and Pam, 'Responding to Agricultural Depression,' p.238

<sup>137</sup> Hunt and Pam, 'Responding to Agricultural Depression,' p.243

dominant, traditional mentality subscribed to by the aristocracy, had to rise to the challenges that faced it if it was to survive and if the aristocracy were to remain as Britain's social and political elite. In essence, landowners had to adapt their traditional, paternal mentalities and find a way to enable their estates to climb out of the depths of depression. In 1878, Chaplin began talks and agreements with the Great Northern Railway Company (hereon referred to as the G.N.R.), regarding a proposed line between Spalding and Lincoln.<sup>138</sup> In return for his support in Parliament for their new line, he was able to obtain from them promises that the line would run through three miles of the Blankney estate, with stations at Metheringham and Scopwick (to adjoin a public road). He also gained their agreement to build a piece of agricultural siding which would hold 15 trucks for the use of the brickyard at Blankney and their promises to provide all maintenance to the track, bridges, fences, hedges and gates (including hunting gates) at his and his tenants' convenience.<sup>139</sup> Yet whilst these talks were occurring, a large number of his tenants and some labourers on the estate had signed a petition from the competing Great Eastern Railway Company (hereon referred to as the G.E.R.) in support their proposed line between Sleaford and Lincoln.<sup>140</sup> The petition claims that the line would place the area 'upon a main track line with direct and uninterrupted communication between London and the agricultural district of the east of England on the one hand and the manufacturing and coal producing district of Yorkshire and the North on the other and each district... will have a better and more direct access to the markets for its produce than now exists'.<sup>141</sup> By agreement with the G.N.R., Chaplin was obliged to support them and ensure through the control of his tenants that they did not create any obstructions.<sup>142</sup> As a result, Chaplin coerced his tenants into dropping their support for the G.E.R., in favour of the G.N.R. A copy of the G.E.R. petition is littered with pencilled-in lists of tenants' names, with ticks and crosses next to them.<sup>143</sup> A letter mentions six tenants who signed in favour of the G.E.R. who 'would not have done so had they known Mr Chaplin was in favour of the Gt Northern, they have promised to sign in favour of the Gt Northern'.<sup>144</sup> Deference was clearly still the prevailing attitude among Chaplin's tenants. Another letter from

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<sup>138</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/4/4, Subject Items: Agreement with Great Northern Railway

<sup>139</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/4/4, Subject Items: Agreement with Great Northern Railway

<sup>140</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/4/5, Subject Items: Petition by farmers for support of Great Eastern Railway northern extension

<sup>141</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/4/5, Subject Items: Petition by farmers for support of Great Eastern Railway northern extension

<sup>142</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/4/4, Subject Items: Agreement with Great Northern Railway

<sup>143</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/4/5, Subject Items: Petition by farmers for support of G.E.R. northern extension

<sup>144</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/4/5, Subject Items: Petition by farmers for support of G.E.R. northern extension

the G.N.R. congratulates Chaplin's agent: 'we are glad to hear that the tenants are withdrawing their support from the Great Eastern scheme'.<sup>145</sup>

As it happened, the two companies merged in 1879 to form the Great Northern and Great Eastern Joint Lines (hereon referred to as the G.N.&G.E.R.), making such tenant coercion rather unnecessary.<sup>146</sup> However the route from this point to eventually opening the line in 1882 was still far from straightforward.<sup>147</sup> There ensued disagreements between Chaplin and the engineers of the G.N.&G.E.R. over the situation of one station (Kirkby Green) and the necessity of siding at Blankney brickyard. Chaplin's agents persisted and eventually the engineers yield over both issues 'in deference to Mr Chaplin's wishes'.<sup>148</sup> While it is unclear why the situation of Kirkby Green station was so important, the siding at Blankney brickyard was of 'great importance' to Chaplin as it would have opened up wider markets for selling his bricks and their transportation to other areas of the estate for improvement works more easy.<sup>149</sup>

On 11 March 1881, after gaining all the assurances he needed from the company, Chaplin sold the 30 acres required for the track across the estate to the G.N.&G.E.R. for £5276.<sup>150</sup> The sale came with an agreement that the company would construct for the use of his tenants level crossings, gates, drains etc where required.<sup>151</sup> Chaplin also managed to secure from them their agreement to build the stations on the line through the estate at 2 miles apart, when 'the usual distance is about 4 miles'.<sup>152</sup> The opening of the new line in 1882 should be seen as an important success for Chaplin; one that is surprisingly omitted by his daughter from his memoirs. He competently executed the role of leader and representative of the community and by using his status and the appeal of his vote in parliament he guaranteed what he and his tenants wanted and needed from the railway. The line itself provided great potential for the future economy of the estate by opening up new markets for the farmers' produce. And although the railway line itself was not an innovation, it provided a base and infrastructure from upon which new ideas and companies could be launched. In return for his involvement and association with the creation of new railway line, Chaplin was provided with greater status both locally and nationally. After all, it was likely the fact that railway provision

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<sup>145</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/4/5, Subject Items: Petition by farmers for support of G.E.R. northern extension.

<sup>146</sup> <http://www.lner.info/co/GER/jointlines.shtml> cited on 29/02/12.

<sup>147</sup> <http://www.lner.info/co/GER/jointlines.shtml> cited on 29/02/12.

<sup>148</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/4/7, Subject Items: Agreements RE Kirkby Green Station and siding at Blankney.

<sup>149</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/4/7, Subject Items: Agreements RE Kirkby Green Station and siding at Blankney.

<sup>150</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/4/10, Subject Items: Agreement for sale of lands to G.N.&G.E.R

<sup>151</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/4/10, Subject Items: Agreement for sale of lands to G.N.&G.E.R

<sup>152</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/4/7, Subject Items: Agreements RE Kirkby Green Station and siding at Blankney.

could confer greater status which caused so many aristocrats to become so heavily involved in the railway boom.

The problem was that Chaplin's entrepreneurialism and his efforts at promoting local economic growth to lead the estate out of the depression largely ended with the opening of the line. If we compare Henry Chaplin to Henry Brand, later first viscount Hampden, who owned the Glynde estate in the lower Ouse valley between 1853 and 1892, we find Chaplin's leadership somewhat wanting.<sup>153</sup> Brand like Chaplin had embarked on a costly programme of investment and had granted rent abatements when necessary. Yet Brand also suggested that his tenants 'should take more advantage of their railway links to widen their range of products'.<sup>154</sup> He had already seen the benefits of railway links in his development of three cement works on the estate which relied on them.<sup>155</sup> Brand's very successful solution to the depression on his estate was to build a dairy in Glynde, about half a mile from the station, which was centrally located to 'ensure a regular supply of milk... from the farms around it,' and sought markets in London and the other towns nearby.<sup>156</sup> The dairy, which in 1890 was turned into a company enlarged rapidly, for the benefit of many farmers in the locality. As Sue Farrant states, the Brands had 'made a positive contribution towards change of land use and consequently retained their estate.'<sup>157</sup> On the other hand, Chaplin had made little such contribution and ultimately lost his estate.

While there is no evidence to suggest that Chaplin obstructed agricultural adjustment, equally there is no evidence to suggest he promoted it either. When cereal prices remained so low for so long, farmers needed to diversify in order to protect themselves from the worst effects of the depression. This could mean changing the crops in their rotations, for example to market garden produce or even to switching to pastoral farming. The landlord could provide assistance and guidance to his tenants, which is probably what was expected of Chaplin, the self proclaimed agriculturalist. Although it he did make efforts to relieve the economic burden of depression on his tenants and should be noted for his altruism in doing so, he failed to provide them with the leadership and innovation required for the whole estate to prosper and the local economy to grow. Paternalism as a traditional, established set of duties to provide good and fair estate management, was adhered to by Chaplin, but he failed to recognise the

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<sup>153</sup> Sue Farrant, 'The Management of Four Estates in the Lower Ouse Valley (Sussex) and Agricultural Change, 1840-1920,' *Southern History*, 1 (1979), pp.165-70

<sup>154</sup> Farrant, 'The Management of Four Estates in the Lower Ouse Valley...' p.167.

<sup>155</sup> Farrant, 'The Management of Four Estates in the Lower Ouse Valley...' p.165

<sup>156</sup> Farrant, 'The Management of Four Estates in the Lower Ouse Valley...' p.168

<sup>157</sup> Farrant, 'The Management of Four Estates in the Lower Ouse Valley...' p.169

necessity for taking on new responsibilities when new challenges emerged. To some degree paternalism failed Chaplin; but equally Chaplin failed paternalism.

### III

David Roberts argues that ‘benevolence was not really the core [of paternalism], it was rather only a part of a wider set of duties’.<sup>158</sup> This thesis will attempt to reset the importance of benevolence within aristocratic paternalism, by providing examples of its importance in each case study. Just as landlords had maintained investment on the estate during the depression, it was equally important to maintain their benevolent activities or else they risked undermining the traditional paternal social bonds between the rural classes, which were already under attack from increased class agitation. Those charitable endeavours which promoted a sense of community could be a powerful tool in a paternalist’s repertoire for counteracting the gradual fragmentation of rural society.

While Chaplin’s primary concern was clearly the welfare of his tenants and the relationships he had with his tenancy, his paternalism also contained a duty to improve life on the estate for all its inhabitants, particularly as the depression would have seen some members of the rural population becoming increasingly poor while the rural economy was in decline. Like many of his fellow paternalists, Chaplin saw the fulfilment of this duty in his leadership of the benevolent institutions of the estate which attempted to elevate its moral economy, such as schools and churches, and in his wider benevolence, as subscriber and patron to a number of charities, societies and organisations which promoted a sense of community.

In 1872, Chaplin spent just over £315 on the erection of a new School House in Tathwell.<sup>159</sup> This is the only evidence of Chaplin’s school building activity which exists in the estate records. When compared to the second earl of Yarborough, who on his north Lincolnshire estate built no fewer than nine schools between 1847 and 1858, Chaplin’s school building record appears quite meagre.<sup>160</sup> However, Chaplin cannot be judged too harshly for this disparity, as it is largely due to the epoch in which he lived. Whilst Yarborough was a landlord during the mid-nineteenth century when the aristocracy’s involvement in School building was at its height, by the late nineteenth century, School building had slowed, as most villages with a sufficient demand for a School would have already been provided for. Yet

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<sup>158</sup> Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England*, pp.5-6.

<sup>159</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/3, Detailed accounts of work done

<sup>160</sup> A. G. Dale, ‘A father’s profile, and a father’s form’: Paternalism and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Yarborough in North Lincolnshire, 1846-62,’ unpublished

Chaplin's account books still display an on-going support for education through school subscriptions. Chaplin was a subscriber to both the Kirkby Green and Scopwick School Funds paying each £15 annually and an extra £1 paid in June to the 'School Feast Fund'.<sup>161</sup> He also subscribed £5.5s annually to Legbourne School on the Tathwell estate.<sup>162</sup>

Anne Hattersley claims that the paternalist's sense of duty was not fulfilled by mere 'voluntary contributions' to village schools but also by 'interaction' with them.<sup>163</sup> She defines such 'gentry interaction', as members of the gentry serving as 'school managers', with responsibility for monitoring teaching during regular visits, ensuring the good maintenance of the buildings and serving as 'benefactors' who could encourage children to work hard by providing rewards such as school feasts and visits to their mansion houses.<sup>164</sup> Hattersley suggests that interaction with Schools was usually a role for the women of gentry families, particularly wives and daughters and evidence suggests this was the case in the Chaplin family. In an 1879 letter to his wife regarding a conversation with Rev. Stephens, the rector at Blankney, Chaplin writes: "'The schools, etc., will wait until he can see you about them in the autumn"'.<sup>165</sup>

Another of Chaplin's letters, dated 5 April 1876, concerns an interesting saga surrounding Metherringham School, in which Chaplin as leader of the community was forced to become involved. Chaplin originally made over the school 'to the parish or the Clergyman for the purposes of education', but after the vicar in the parish went abroad and the Schoolmaster left soon after, 'the school, without any hearing to the parish, was shut up'.<sup>166</sup> The parishioners then gathered the necessary funds to hire a school master and reopened and conducted the school capably. Chaplin helped them by getting back the conveyance of the School house 'to hand over to a Committee' and found a suitable cottage for the new Schoolmaster.<sup>167</sup> When the vicar later returned from abroad, he immediately sacked the new schoolmaster, dismissed the scholars and locked up the building.<sup>168</sup> Chaplin then sought legal advice on behalf of the

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<sup>161</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/1, Draft Memoranda

<sup>162</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/1, Draft Memoranda

<sup>163</sup> Anne Hattersley, 'Paternalism and Education on Landed Estates in Rural Northumberland, 1850-1900,' *Northern History*, 44:1 (2007), p.112

<sup>164</sup> Hattersley, 'Paternalism and Education on Landed Estates...' p.113

<sup>165</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p.100.

<sup>166</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/13, Estate Correspondence

<sup>167</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/13, Estate Correspondence

<sup>168</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/13, Estate Correspondence

parishioners, writing to his legal advisors and asking 'how are the parishioners able to obtain legal possession of it again for School purposes?'<sup>169</sup>

The whole saga is strange and without any further information, it may be presumed that the difficulties arose from an altercation between the vicar and the parishioners. The issue appears to have been resolved for the time being, as in August 1878 Chaplin paid a subscription of £32 to the school to meet further 'difficulties in which the Trustees had become involved'.<sup>170</sup> Very little further evidence of the Chaplins' interaction with schools on the estates can be found in the estate records. Again this may be due to the deficient nature of evidence within the estate records, perhaps because of a failure on the part of the estate administrators to preserve documents. However it is not surprising that interaction with schools, in being largely the role of aristocratic and gentry' women rather than men, did not leave a paper trail in the estate records. Despite the school building activity declining, involvement with education on the estate was clearly still an important duty among the paternal aristocracy and gentry, even for landlords like Chaplin whose time was already well occupied with a burgeoning political career and an active social and sporting life. By implementing paternalism and enforcing deference in schools the landed elites hoped to 'strengthen a social order that was characterised by interdependence'.<sup>171</sup> And yet the scope for paternal landowners to be involved in education was gradually being eroded at a proportional degree to the rise in State intervention.<sup>172</sup> Here again we see paternalism in crisis, as the traditional roles set out for the landed elites were being commandeered by the state.

Chaplin was, surprisingly for the son of a vicar, not particularly devoted in his religion. He regularly made allusions to finding attendance of church services somewhat of a chore in private letters to his wife.<sup>173</sup> And yet as a paternalist and a Conservative, he no doubt valued the institution of the Church very highly. Vicars and Lords of the Manor, as fellow paternalists, could work together to improve the moral economy of the estate and this seemed to happen at Blankney. In 1879, under the new Rector Revd J. O. Stephens, a project to enlarge and restore both Blankney Church and the rectory was commenced. The 'Squire' and his wife 'took a very active interest' and contributed a good proportion of the costs.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/13, Estate Correspondence

<sup>170</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/1, Draft Memoranda

<sup>171</sup> Hattersley, 'Paternalism and Education on Landed Estates...' p.111

<sup>172</sup> Hattersley, 'Paternalism and Education on Landed Estates...' pp.111-114

<sup>173</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, pp.62-108

<sup>174</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p. 100, L.A.O., BS/13/1/11/1 Blankney Church & L.A.O., BS/13/1/11/2 Blankney Rectory

When Revd Stephens later declared his concern for the young boys attached to Blankney stables and the stud farm, Chaplin offered to “give them an address by way of trying to get them all to attend church better than [had] hitherto been the case”.<sup>175</sup> Only days after Chaplin appealed to his young employees, Stephens found four stable boys coming along the road ‘roaring drunk and kicking up a row’.<sup>176</sup> Chaplin responded “by hook or by crook, *I will find out* who they were and make an example”.<sup>177</sup> As a man who himself enjoyed excess and frequently partook in vices like gambling, it was perhaps the lack of discreteness among the boys rather than the actual consumption of alcohol that so angered Chaplin. However, in line with the good morals and virtues that were expected of all classes within Victorian society, Chaplin had a duty to discipline the boys. Yet this was not merely an attempt to keep up appearances. It was in the interests of a paternalist to maintain order and deference on the estate and this occasionally required firm action and discipline. While Victorian society understood itself to have a civilising mission abroad, the aristocracy were also assigned the role of improving the moral economy at home and in the localities, despite how they may have behaved in their own private lives. Encouraging their dependents to be a virtuous people could in essence be a positive reflection of the virtues of the aristocrat and increase his status in politics and society.

Evidence of Chaplin’s charitable activities, in the form of lists of his subscriptions, only exist for the years 1881 and 1882. This means it is difficult to assess whether his charitable spending was increased, decreased or maintained over any period of time. His subscriptions were quite wide ranging but tended only to include clubs based on the estates and those which he had a specific interest in. In 1881 we find subscriptions to Tathwell Pig and Clothing Club for £7 and Raithby and Maltby Clothing Club for £5.<sup>178</sup> Whilst for the first half of 1882 (where the records end), there are subscriptions to Lincolnshire Licensed Victuallers Association for £1.1s, Scopwick and Kirkby Green Clothing & Coal Club for £10 and Tathwell Pig and Clothing Club again for £7.<sup>179</sup> Chaplin also paid substantial poor rates of over £185 for Metheringham and Blankney during this year and a half between January 1881 and June 1882.<sup>180</sup> His charity seems to have been predominantly aimed at relieving the inhabitants of his estate from the worst effects of rural poverty, a particularly important cause in a time when the agrarian economy was so depressed.

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<sup>175</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p. 100

<sup>176</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p. 101

<sup>177</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p. 101

<sup>178</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/1, Draft Memoranda.

<sup>179</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/1, Draft Memoranda.

<sup>180</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/1, Draft Memoranda.

## IV

Chaplin's friend and contemporary, Lord Willoughby de Broke, once famously said of him: "When our Harry is broke, which is only a matter of time, all the crowned heads of Europe ought to give him a hundred thousand a year in order that he may show them how to spend their money."<sup>181</sup> Despite its frivolous tone, Willoughby de Broke's prediction of Chaplin's financial doom was ultimately vindicated. Indeed Londonderry claims that by 1892 her father's finances were 'severely embarrassed' and that it was evident that the Blankney estate, 'by now heavily mortgaged, must soon pass into other hands'.<sup>182</sup> In 1897 Chaplin was required to handover the Blankney estate to his chief mortgagee, Lord Londesborough.<sup>183</sup> And by 1900 he was forced to sell the Tathwell estate in order to pay off his other debts.<sup>184</sup> Yet Chaplin's financial difficulties, and the details of his losing the estates, are surprisingly almost undocumented in the estate records. Only one undated paper reveals that Chaplin had over 17,000 acres mortgaged across both the Blankney and Tathwell estate.<sup>185</sup>

The precise details of Chaplin's decline into the realms of financial nadir are perhaps less important to this study than an explanation of its causation. Chaplin's culture of excessive expenditure, which he developed as a young man and never managed to curtail, must be seen as a primary reason.<sup>186</sup> As this chapter has already shown, Chaplin was significantly in debt before agricultural prosperity began to wane and his refusal to reduce his personal expenditure when coupled with his fallen rental income ultimately proved disastrous. The agricultural depression therefore must be considered a secondary cause. If agricultural prosperity had continued and Chaplin's rental income remained high, then perhaps he could have at least afforded the interest on his excessive encumbrances. Finally Chaplin was 'an inattentive and only partially resident landlord', whose political, sporting and social lives increasingly distracted him from the management of his estate, not to mention being costly activities in themselves.<sup>187</sup> As an only partially resident landlord, Chaplin's response to the agricultural depression can at best be seen as 'managerial'. Had he been more attentive to the

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<sup>181</sup> Blyth, *The Pocket Venus, A Victorian Scandal*, p.268

<sup>182</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p.115

<sup>183</sup> Olney, 'Chaplin, Henry, first Viscount Chaplin (1840-1923), politician and sportsman,' & Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, pp.115-116, 120.

<sup>184</sup> Olney, 'Chaplin, Henry, first Viscount Chaplin (1840-1923), politician and sportsman,'

<sup>185</sup> L.A.O., BS/13/1/1, Draft Memoranda.

<sup>186</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, pp.115-121, 86, Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, p.214

<sup>187</sup> Olney, 'Chaplin, Henry, first Viscount Chaplin (1840-1923), politician and sportsman,'

needs of his estates and their inhabitants and brought entrepreneurship, innovation and greater leadership to his management of them, then perhaps he may have saved himself the embarrassment of near bankruptcy. Yet it is difficult to see how else than miraculously he could have taken on the 'entrepreneurial' role as described by Hunt and Pam. If he had any entrepreneurial attributes then surely he would not have allowed his expenditure to have gotten so out of hand in the first place.

This chapter has attempted to explain some of the challenges facing the landed elites in the late nineteenth century and the necessity for them to find new solutions to their problems in order to survive as the dominant group in British politics and society. Chaplin largely failed to adapt his traditional understanding of the duties and responsibilities expected of him in the locality to the new challenges that were facing him. He endeavoured to maintain and strengthen the relationships he had with his tenancy and the wider estate community, by providing the leadership, order, discipline and benevolence that had been the mainstay of landlord activity prior to the depression. Yet economic insecurity required heightened leadership with innovative and entrepreneurial action in order to overcome it and in this Chaplin and his traditional paternalism failed. Aside from the obvious economic consequences, the agricultural depression also provided an atmosphere in which hidden tensions between the rural classes were beginning to become aggravated and exposed in a way they never had been previously. While these tensions were probably more gradually developed, particularly in Lincolnshire, than other historians have perhaps claimed, by retaining the estate and adapting his paternalism to the new era, it is plausible that Chaplin could have offset their effects and the resultant breakdown of the rural social hierarchy.

It was Chaplin's political ambitions that were chief among his distractions from estate management. Henry Blyth remarks 'from his father he inherited the Christian outlook, but from his uncle he inherited the religion of Toryism'.<sup>188</sup> He remained to the end a zealous Conservative, both locally and nationally. In Lincolnshire he was a tireless campaigner. When in 1881, James Lowther stood as Conservative candidate for North Lincolnshire in a by-election, Chaplin spent three weeks campaigning across the region on Lowther's behalf. He regularly spoke at five different places in a day, sometimes to radical audiences and never finished until very late in the evening.<sup>189</sup> As a result of his efforts in the locality, 'he soon became a figure of note in the front rank of Conservative politics'.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Blyth, *The Pocket Venus, A Victorian Scandal*, p.31

<sup>189</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, pp.163-164

<sup>190</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p.165

Although Chaplin was a loyal party member, his politics are best seen in light of his protectionism and representation of agricultural interests. His daughter claims that he was 'born a Protectionist, and to the end he remained convinced that Tariff Reform was the only measure which could restore a satisfactory means of livelihood to the English farmer'.<sup>191</sup> G. R. Searle states that protectionism had been strong in Lincolnshire for a long time, but it was Chaplin who 'provided [it with] vigorous leadership',<sup>192</sup> and as a result he later earned himself the unofficial title of 'Veteran Protectionist'.<sup>193</sup> Londonderry writes of Chaplin in late 1870s, as 'the champion, as he already felt himself to be, of the agricultural interests of England, his hands were full in urging in parliament the claims of English land upon a pre-occupied government'.<sup>194</sup> He represented agricultural interests when he served as a member of the Royal Commission to investigate the depression and this was a prelude to his representation of agriculture in government and on the front benches.<sup>195</sup> In 1886 he was offered the position of President of the Board of Agriculture but refused it because it did not carry a seat in cabinet.<sup>196</sup> Here he fought to ensure that the problems facing agriculture would be given a fair hearing by ministers and he did not succumb to the vainglory of an offer of high office. He was ultimately successful, as when he was offered the position again in 1889, it did come with an offer of a seat in cabinet. In 1903, when leading members of the government, such as Joseph Chamberlain, stated their support for Tariff Reform, Chaplin must have felt truly vindicated in his lifelong devotion to the cause.<sup>197</sup> He was an obvious choice for an appointment to the Tariff Reform Commission as a representative of agriculture.<sup>198</sup>

It is plausible therefore that Chaplin chose to neglect efforts to improve his local status in preference for striving to achieve greater national status and prestige. While Chaplin did display paternalism in the locality when in residence and through his agents, perhaps he viewed the representation and leadership of national agricultural interests in parliament as a higher calling and a greater fulfilment of his paternal duties and responsibilities. Could Chaplin's paternalism have transcended the needs of individual farmers, or of farmers in certain localities, for the needs of all those involved in agriculture? In this sense, the apparent neglect of his estates, which ultimately led to his losing them, was not a failure of paternalism,

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<sup>191</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p.151

<sup>192</sup> G. R. Searle, *A new England?: peace and war 1886-1918*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2004), p.177

<sup>193</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p.180

<sup>194</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p.87

<sup>195</sup> Olney, 'Chaplin, Henry, first Viscount Chaplin (1840-1923), politician and sportsman,'

<sup>196</sup> Olney, 'Chaplin, Henry, first Viscount Chaplin (1840-1923), politician and sportsman,'

<sup>197</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, pp.179-83

<sup>198</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, pp.179-83

but rather the consequence of an elevation of his sense of paternal duty and a resultant change in the roles he perceived for himself. No doubt Chaplin enjoyed hearing the idea, from his former Sleaford constituents, that his legacy was one of contribution ““towards the advancement of agriculture, the beneficial results of which are recognized throughout the whole of the United Kingdom””.<sup>199</sup> It is hardly surprising then that upon losing his Sleaford seat in 1906, he fought and won the Wimbledon by-election the following year on a platform of representing ‘the agricultural interests of the country’.<sup>200</sup>

Yet Chaplin’s ardent championing of national agricultural interests poses significant questions about the wider aristocracy and gentry’s failure to do so. After all Chaplin was one of only a handful in parliament who were fighting on behalf of the interests of British agriculture and yet the majority of members, both backbenchers and those in government, were themselves owners of landed estates and were equally in danger of having their wealth permanently diminished. Indeed Chaplin’s appointment as the first President of the Board of Agriculture with a seat in cabinet in 1889 was in itself an acknowledgement by the landed elites that agriculture was severely in distress and needed representation in government in a way it never had previously. Successive governments and parliaments had hitherto always been made up of landowners. To some degree it was an acknowledgement by the British aristocracy and gentry of their own decline as the political and social elite and certainly an acknowledgement of the decline of land as a status conferrer. And yet Chaplin’s appointment to government was an attempt to appease him and the handful of other agriculturalists in parliament. The government almost entirely failed to act to improve the agriculture economy in Britain and the majority of Chaplin’s recommendations were ignored. What were the wider landed elites doing that Chaplin wasn’t? What caused their sense of urgency to protect agriculture to lessen? We know from the well documented effects of the agricultural depression that the landlord entrepreneurship mentioned by Hunt and Pam was not the common experience on British estates in this period. So what enabled the British aristocracy to adapt to the economic challenges that faced them? How did this affect paternalism and its legacy?

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<sup>199</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p.177

<sup>200</sup> Londonderry, *Henry Chaplin: A Memoir*, p.178

## **Chapter 2 – ‘All that is most desirable in a landed gentleman’: Thomas William Coke, second earl of Leicester and the Holkham estate**

On 29 November 1892, Thomas William Coke, the second earl of Leicester of Holkham (1822-1909), wrote to his acquaintance Henry Chaplin.<sup>201</sup> Chaplin, in his role as a member of the Royal Commission on Agriculture, had previously asked Leicester to provide evidence to be used in the Commission’s report. Leicester replied:

My dear Chaplin,

I enclose you a general Statement of the Annual rents on this estate when I came into possession in 1842, in 1878 when they were at their highest and in 1891 when the last payment was made. Since then a further great depression in Agricultural produce has taken place and rents will again be considerably reduced.

I have now two farms representing 729 acres let to a tenant free of all rent except the amount due for tithes, and 6d per acre for the right of Sporting. This arrangement will have to be carried out on other farms unless Agricultural produce increases in value.

...I think you will admit (if this is not an exceptional case) that Landlords will not bear much more squeezing.<sup>202</sup>

The tone of the letter, as one may easily infer, is quite dismal and given Chaplin’s disastrous financial position, the irony in Leicester’s writing ‘I think you will admit that Landlords will not bear much more squeezing’, is quite remarkable. As Leicester, who was widely considered a ‘model’ landlord, writes of farms having to be let rent free on the world renowned Holkham estate, the full extent of the effects of the agricultural depression become clearer.<sup>203</sup> While the data he enclosed within the letter displays what proportion of its burden rested on the landlords.

In 1842 the annual rents of the Holkham estate were £40,419.1.5¼, while the expenditure was £7,608.4.5½, leaving Leicester’s income at £32,810.16.11¾.<sup>204</sup> In 1878 annual rents reached their peak for the century at £60,218.1.6½, with expenditure also increasing to £20,653.10.3, leaving an income of £39,564.9.3½.<sup>205</sup> Yet by 1891 annual rents had dropped

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<sup>201</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/13, Letter to Henry Chaplin MP

<sup>202</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/13, Letter to Henry Chaplin MP

<sup>203</sup> Ernest Clarke and Susanna Wade Martins, ‘Coke, Thomas William, second earl of Leicester of Holkham (1822–1909), agriculturist and landowner,’ Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.york.ac.uk/view/article/32484?docPos=2>, (accessed on 29 September 2012)

<sup>204</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/13, Letter to Henry Chaplin MP

<sup>205</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/13, Letter to Henry Chaplin MP

back down to £43,790.15.7¼, while expenditure remained high at £20,323.2.11½, leaving a much reduced income of £23,467.12.8¼.<sup>206</sup>

Leicester also included within his letter the staggering totals for expenditure on the estate under both his father and himself. His father, the agriculturalist Thomas William Coke, first earl of Leicester of Holkham, best known as 'Coke of Norfolk', spent £536,992 on buildings and repairs between 1776 and 1841.<sup>207</sup> The second earl himself had spent £558,156 on buildings and repairs and the purchases of land between 1841 and 1891, revealing that between 1776 and 1891 the Leicesters had spent over £1million between them on improving the Holkham estate.<sup>208</sup>

The above figures became available to the public via popular newspapers at the time and were printed again in Leicester's obituary in the *Eastern Daily Press* in 1909.<sup>209</sup> They pose significant questions to a study of landlord paternalism during the late nineteenth century. If annual rents were cut so significantly, while expenditure was maintained during the depression, how did landed aristocrats like Lord Leicester survive with their estates and wealth largely intact at the turn of the century and beyond? More plainly, if the aristocracy's agricultural income was falling, what did they supplement it with in order to maintain their economic position? And how did this affect their social and political status, both locally and nationally? With land becoming less important to the aristocracy as a form of income, what happened to landlord paternalism and their sense of duty?

This chapter will reveal that the method via which Leicester survived the depression was by investing outside of agriculture, in a variety of different companies, within different industries, based locally, nationally and internationally. It is necessary here to introduce what P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins have termed 'gentlemanly capitalism'.<sup>210</sup> In their two volume work on British Imperialism from 1688 to the present, they have attempted to reassert the importance of the metropolis within their topic.<sup>211</sup> They argue that British imperialism owes much more to the growth of the financial and service sector in the City of London, than to British industry or bourgeois manufacturing.<sup>212</sup> In terms of social and political status too, they argue that 'City' men were more wealthy and in a more respectable line of work in the eyes of

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<sup>206</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/13, Letter to Henry Chaplin MP

<sup>207</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/13, Letter to Henry Chaplin MP

<sup>208</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/13, Letter to Henry Chaplin MP

<sup>209</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>210</sup> P. J. Cain, and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism Vol. 1: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914*, (Longman, London, 1993), pp.17-36, 51-52

<sup>211</sup> Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism Vol. 1*, pp.17-22

<sup>212</sup> Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism Vol. 1*, pp.17-22

the upper classes.<sup>213</sup> This enabled them to form a sort of loose alliance with the landed and political elites; one that the industrialists could have only hoped for.<sup>214</sup> As a result those elites dedicated to public service ensured foreign and economic policy was always in favour of the 'City', even when it wasn't in favour of industry.<sup>215</sup>

They argue that this loose alliance was based on what they call 'gentlemanly capitalism', which was a fusion of elements of tradition and modernity. Gentlemanly capitalists were a mix of aristocrats and 'City' men, i.e. bankers, financiers, etc.<sup>216</sup> In return for their acceptance into this loose alliance, 'City' men would help their aristocratic counterparts to invest their money wisely. Particularly during the agricultural depression aristocrats were advised to invest outside of agriculture, often into colonial railway, mineral and banking companies.<sup>217</sup> Invisible income was becoming increasingly socially acceptable.<sup>218</sup> Among gentlemanly capitalists the principles of free trade and sound money almost became virtues of morality and their colonial investments harmonized completely with their notions of Britain in her civilising mission abroad.<sup>219</sup> According to Cain and Hopkins, the gentlemanly capitalists' loose alliance was never a conspiracy but an openly accepted and acknowledged norm.<sup>220</sup> For the period following 1850 they also argue that the power base within the alliance gradually shifted, as the influence of finance grew whilst that of the landed interest declined.<sup>221</sup>

Cain and Hopkins' argument has significant ramifications to a study of paternalism in the late nineteenth century. If, as they claim, the British aristocracy followed the advice of their 'City' friends and invested their wealth outside of agriculture, then land would gradually lose its prominence as a source of income, power and status. It would gradually become less important to the aristocracy and as a result they would slowly shed the sense of obligation to their estates' inhabitants. The traditional paternal-deferential relationships within the estate hierarchy would slowly cease to be the norm and the hierarchy itself would fragment. It remains to be seen whether Leicester's non-agricultural investments were passive or whether they enabled him to become involved in the companies' administration and therefore provide

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<sup>213</sup> Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism Vol. 1*, p.470

<sup>214</sup> Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism Vol. 1*, p.470

<sup>215</sup> Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism Vol. 1*, pp.467-70

<sup>216</sup> Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism Vol. 1*, pp.22-36

<sup>217</sup> Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism Vol. 1*, p.185, P. J. Cain, and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism Vol. 2: Crisis and Deconstruction, 1914-1990*, (Longman, London, 1993), p.305

<sup>218</sup> Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism Vol. 2*, p.305

<sup>219</sup> Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism Vol. 1*, p.467

<sup>220</sup> Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism Vol. 1*, p.467

<sup>221</sup> Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism Vol. 2*, p.304

him with an opportunity to practice paternalism. Alternatively, did Leicester's non-agricultural income enable fresh investment in his estates or additional patronage expenditure within the locality?

Leicester remains somewhat absent from any of the recent historiography on late nineteenth century aristocracy or even rural history during the agricultural depression. Even in the literature that exists on the history of the family and the estate, the life and times of Leicester have been largely brushed over. Considering the great changes that befell Victorian politics, society, economics and culture during his long life, this is somewhat surprising. It is even more surprising particularly of the second half of the nineteenth century, when Leicester, as owner of the Holkham estate, witnessed agriculture move so quickly from its golden years to its darkest.

Susanna Wade Martins' PhD thesis, later published by Cambridge University Press, entitled *A Great Estate at Work: The Holkham estate and its inhabitants in the nineteenth century*, does deal in part with Leicester's ownership of the estate.<sup>222</sup> Yet, again, in Wade Martins' book only a small proportion of pages are concerned with Leicester whilst the rest of the work concerns his father 'Coke of Norfolk' or the estate itself. Leicester's father was 'Coke of Norfolk', a politician known as the 'father of the commons' who served as an MP for over 50 years, but is perhaps best known as a famous agriculturalist of the British agrarian revolution.<sup>223</sup> He was a proponent of enclosures, selective breeding in sheep and the four course crop rotation. His agricultural reputation meant that his sheep shearing events were internationally attended.<sup>224</sup>

When researching and writing her thesis in the early 1970s, Wade Martins had to work through mountains of unsorted documents at Holkham Hall, which later made up the bulk of her primary source material. Due to the jumbled nature of the sources Wade Martins was dealing with, it is likely she was not able to see all of the relevant material in order to sufficiently recreate nineteenth-century Holkham. Since then archivist Christine Hiskey has been employed by the Coke family, who still reside at Holkham, to sort through their documents and catalogue everything that still survives. In some cases, old records have been newly found that had been hidden away in obscure places.

Leicester, born at Holkham Hall in 1822 and mostly educated through home schooling, was brought up to love the 'wholesome rural life' and was a man of very simple tastes -

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<sup>222</sup> Susanna Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work: The Holkham Estate and its Inhabitants in the nineteenth century*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008)

<sup>223</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>224</sup> Susanna Wade Martins, *Coke of Norfolk 1754-1842*, (Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2009), pp.1-8, 184-

contented eating a meal of just bread and cheese with the poorest labourer on his estate.<sup>225</sup> Unlike his father, he never played a prominent part in politics and was largely not interested in the London season or high society.<sup>226</sup> However, he did follow in his father's footsteps in his devotion to agriculture. A member of the Royal Agricultural Society of England, much of his time and effort was spent on the improvement of his estates. Until old age and infirmity slowed him, Leicester was quite hands on with agricultural work. He met his bailiff daily, regularly watched his men in the fields, personally picked trees to be felled and even joined the working gangs in times of emergencies.<sup>227</sup>

Like Henry Chaplin, Leicester was a close personal friend of the Prince of Wales and even made a member of his council in 1866.<sup>228</sup> In his early days he had made Holkham a social centre and hosted regular shooting parties, at which the Prince was a regular guest.<sup>229</sup> Yet unlike Chaplin or the Prince, Leicester was by no means a socialite. In his reserved nature and almost middle class values he held much more in common with the seventh duke of Devonshire, the subject of the next chapter, than with Henry Chaplin.<sup>230</sup> Indeed, on one of his stays at Holkham, the Prince, perhaps bored of the diet of bread, cheese and beer, had asked his host for a brandy, Leicester had replied: "Your Majesty is welcome to anything in my house except brandy at nine o'clock in the morning".<sup>231</sup>

Where then does Lord Leicester and his family compare to their fellow aristocrats in terms of wealth and land? According to Bateman, in 1883, Leicester owned 44,090 acres all at Holkham in Norfolk.<sup>232</sup> Yet by the time of his death, this amount stood nearer to 50,000 acres, as Leicester had added to the estate by the steady but continual purchasing of land and the reclamation of land between Wells and Holkham.<sup>233</sup> The Holkham estate was world renowned for its innovative farming techniques and was often labelled a 'model' estate.<sup>234</sup> Therefore Holkham is, to a degree, unrepresentative of most British agricultural estates in this period because it is not a standard estate but a superlative one. Yet for the same reason

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<sup>225</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>226</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>227</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>228</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>229</sup> Clarke and Wade Martins, 'Coke, Thomas William, second earl of Leicester of Holkham (1822–1909), agriculturist and landowner,'

<sup>230</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>231</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>232</sup> John Bateman, *Great Landowners of Great Britain*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, (Harrison, London, 1883), p.263

<sup>233</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>234</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

understanding Holkham is incredibly valuable to the historian of this subject; Holkham provided for other estates the ideal to which they could strive to be. Cain and Hopkins also inform us that Leicester was in the top 50 income earners in Britain in the late nineteenth century; however it is not certain whether this was due to agricultural income alone or from his investments as well.<sup>235</sup>

This chapter will be divided into four further sections. The first will deal predominantly with agriculture on the estate itself. It will discuss the nature of the estate's management and explain the roles of the agents in relation to those of the landlord. It will also discuss Leicester's responses to the agricultural depression and argue that, like Chaplin, Leicester's was largely a managerial response. The second section will detail the nature of Leicester's investments outside of agriculture, as part of a wider trend among the aristocracy and explain the effect this had on paternalism. The third section will discuss Leicester's benevolence, particularly his charitable contributions to his favourite cause: public health. The final section will conclude the chapter and argue that while Leicester competently carried out the traditional roles associated with a paternal landlord, like Chaplin he largely failed to adapt his understanding of his duties to the estate during the challenging period of agricultural depression. Instead of providing the innovation and leadership to enable the whole estate to prosper, he invested his excess wealth into non-agricultural passive ventures and prospered alone. However he did spend some of this extra wealth on benevolence and put weighty support behind improving public health in the locality amongst other things.

## I

Upon returning to Holkham from a vacation in Norway in August 1865, Leicester found his tenants distressed and disillusioned.<sup>236</sup> It was revealed to Leicester that his agent, Samuel Shellabear, had sent a circular to every tenant on the estate which had attempted to 'coerce... [them] in their political action', presumably urging them to vote Liberal in accordance with Leicester's wishes.<sup>237</sup> His tenants were 'as a body... strongly and avowedly with the Liberal cause', yet he was quick to write another circular in which he claimed such coercion was 'in a manner utterly at variance with the principles and practice of myself and my house'.<sup>238</sup> Leicester's circular was earnestly apologetic. He claimed to have read firsthand the 'indignant expressions' of his tenants and to need no extra information to acquaint himself 'with the

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<sup>235</sup> Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism Vol. 1*, p.184

<sup>236</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>237</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>238</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

feelings of surprise and pain which it must naturally have excited in my tenantry'.<sup>239</sup> The original circular, he claimed, was accidentally sent because of miscommunication in the estate office, whereby he had urged on Shellabear the 'necessity of prompt and vigorous [political] action from Holkham', which Shellabear interpreted as an instruction to urge Holkham tenants to vote Liberal.<sup>240</sup>

Leicester was careful not brush over the incident as a plain misunderstanding, writing: 'the necessity of an explanation to you directly is apparent; the circular was addressed to you, was issued with apparent authority, and called forth feelings of sorrow and mortification which I both respect and justify'. 'At the same time gentlemen,' he bargains, 'I would have you think considerately of Mr Shellabear', who had displayed a little too much 'zeal in carrying out instructions' and had been stirred by 'the heat and fervour generated in an election'.<sup>241</sup>

Leicester concluded the circular by appealing to the sentimentality of his tenancy and by reminding them of their shared past, traditions and values:

coercion of the political views of the tenantry has never existed on the Holkham estate. My father gathered round him a body of tenantry who were attached to him by a community of sentiments; he and his tenantry were devoted to the Liberal cause... An honoured remnant of that family still exists on this estate: sons and grandsons occupy the places of their fathers and grandfathers who are gone. Like myself they have inherited the same great political principles: and I have a proud consciousness that no estate in England has a tenantry with more united sentiments, even in politics – that with us Liberal principles are an heirloom and a tradition, and that coercion, always a crime, would be to you an unparalleled blunder and folly.<sup>242</sup>

The circular is saturated in the type of rhetoric one would expect from a paternal landlord. The persistent allusion to shared experiences, traditions and values, including Liberalism, allowed Leicester to create a 'community of sentiments' (if it didn't already exist) in support of his position at the top of the estate hierarchy. After all, paternalism was, in a sense, the glorification of tradition. Membership of the estate community had always been conditional upon an understanding and acceptance of the divinely ordained hierarchy within the estate and the obligations of one class towards another. An espousal of shared tradition was merely a confirmation that this was still the case and each party still accepted it. Leicester's father, by gathering around him Liberal tenants (if we are to believe that coercion

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<sup>239</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>240</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>241</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>242</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

was never used on the estate), was simply enabling this acceptance to be more favourable to all parties involved.

By reminding his tenants that many of them occupy the places their parents and grandparents once occupied, he hoped they would remember that they too owe their position within the estate, as he did, to dynastic succession. The dynastic establishment of the tenant and labouring families on the estate enabled even greater acceptance of one's place within its hierarchy and one's duties to the community as a whole, because it anchored one's identity to the estate itself and gave him a greater sense of belonging. These families were tied into an understanding of the estate hierarchy as a natural order and therefore subscribed to the estate's dominant ideology: paternalism.

Like his father, Leicester was renowned for being an 'improving landlord', while the Holkham estate itself had attained a position of eminence among all those involved in British agriculture.<sup>243</sup> The extensive list of applicants for Holkham farms in 1906 reveals that although many were local men, residing in nearby villages like Wells and Mileham, others had applied from places as far away as Sunderland, Huddersfield and London.<sup>244</sup> What was it about Holkham that attracted this nationwide renown and made it so desirable to farmers far and wide seeking new tenancies? Was Holkham's desirability maintained during the depression?

Wade Martins has already noted in some detail the roles of the Holkham agent and the backgrounds and personalities of those men who occupied the position throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>245</sup> The agent was at the 'centre of a complex and often diverse business' and they diverged in how they viewed their roles and duties, which largely became dependent on their own interests.<sup>246</sup> The first and most famous Holkham agent, Francis Blaikie, appointed by 'Coke of Norfolk' in 1816, had a personal influence on the farming of the estate and took great interest in the characters of the tenants and particularly their sons.<sup>247</sup> He also had a personal influence on his employer's paternalism. Believing that Coke's estate expenditure had been too extravagant Blaikie intervened to ensure expenses were cut.<sup>248</sup> In this sense agents were capable of restraining and curbing a landowner's sense of duty. Here we see an agent championing good fiscal policy against over-enthusiastic paternal notions of duty. Blaikie was not sentimentalist or paternalist but a practical man. This casts some doubt on the idea that paternalism could become codified into the functions of the agent.

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<sup>243</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>244</sup> Holkham MSS., E/G/36, Applications for Farms 1906

<sup>245</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, pp.67-73

<sup>246</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.67

<sup>247</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, pp.67-71

<sup>248</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.69

While Blaikie may have restrained paternalism, later Holkham agents were clearly influenced by the paternalism of their employer. Samuel Shellabear, appointed in 1863, was heavily involved in setting up board schools in the villages of the estate and conducting much of their administration.<sup>249</sup> He also served as chairman of the Wells school board.<sup>250</sup> There is, therefore, no certainty of paternalism's penetration into the role of the agent. Throughout the century the position of agent was filled by diverse men of differing characters. There was some scope for an individual agent to decide what his job responsibilities were and in turn agents had some autonomy in deciding the extent to which paternalism would influence their office.

Initially at least, the agent's background was often in farming. Many, like Blaikie, were the sons of farmers or yeoman and 'had practical skills rather than formal education'.<sup>251</sup> Agents could train their clerks in the estate office to succeed them. Blaikie was succeeded by his clerk, Mr Baker, upon retiring in 1832.<sup>252</sup> Also William Keary's replacement, Shellabear, had worked his way up through the estate office, without any other farming background and was more of 'an administrator than a practical farmer'.<sup>253</sup> Wade Martins claims that before the 1860s, Holkham agents had greater influence on farming on the estate – because they regularly travelled the area speaking to the tenants and because of their farming backgrounds, they were in the best position to offer advice based on their comparisons of techniques and knowledge of the land.<sup>254</sup> Yet with their increasingly administrative backgrounds after William Keary, 'it is probable that their influence over farming matters declined'.<sup>255</sup>

Plotting precisely the nature of estate management at Holkham and the ratio of power and influence over estate matters held by the landlord and the agent is a formidable task. Wade Martins states that some of the most important work of the agent was done verbally and so is lost to the historian or researcher.<sup>256</sup> Yet much the same can clearly be said of the landlord. Despite not having sufficient evidence to precisely identify Leicester's role against that of his agent, if indeed there was such a strict distinction between them, we may easily infer that Leicester was much more involved in his estate than the almost absentee landlord

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<sup>249</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.72

<sup>250</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.72

<sup>251</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.67

<sup>252</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.71

<sup>253</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.73

<sup>254</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.72

<sup>255</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.73

<sup>256</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.72

Henry Chaplin. As his obituary remarked, Leicester was a 'man of practical workaday affairs,' who 'kept a hand on all the strings'.<sup>257</sup>

In an undated letter to his daughter probably written during the harvest of 1864, Leicester expressed a wish that he could be 'in two places at once':

I cannot yet leave home. I have so many people to look after, and in many things there is no head for the work. I have saved some hundreds by being here during harvest. We have had very uncertain weather and had to get our corn when we could, the other week I had 103 men, women and boys cutting barley... which would not have been done if I had not been here... [and] saved a whole field that would have been much spoiled by heavy rain which came in the night. We have just had 40 hours of rain. If today is very gloomy and nothing can be done, it is beginning to look very serious for us farmers. But I am in a better position than my neighbours...

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While it is not clear which farms Leicester is referring to, it is likely the subject is the Home Farm, which was farmed 'in-hand' by the Coke family.<sup>259</sup> The sentiments within the letter reveal how Leicester viewed his role and the obligations entailed therein. His tone certainly suggests that he was motivated by a firm sense of duty to his own farm and its employees. Yet in being present during the busy harvest period he was able to share in the experience and plight of all tenant-farmers on the estate. He even identified himself alongside his tenants as a 'farmer'. This was not a typical paternal action, as paternalists characteristically always endeavoured to uphold the social hierarchy and their place at its apex. Yet by working and identifying himself alongside his tenants, Leicester was able to gain a greater appreciation of their existence and in doing so, he enabled healthier landlord-tenant relations at Holkham.

True to his rather middle class values and simple tastes, Leicester also attempted to gain greater insight into the plight of labourers on his estate and improve their conditions. Throughout his ownership of the Holkham estate, Leicester showed a great interest in cottage improvement.<sup>260</sup> Indeed he aimed to house all labour locally and estimated that one cottage per 50 acres was required.<sup>261</sup> However, the average workforce on the estate actually required one cottage per 30 acres and given the importance of female and child labour up until the 1870s, it is little wonder that overcrowding was rife on the estate at the beginning of

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<sup>257</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>258</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/12, Letter to Daughter RE Harvest

<sup>259</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, pp.77-83

<sup>260</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, pp.216-43

<sup>261</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.241

Leicester's tenure as landlord.<sup>262</sup> William Keary's 1851 report on the estate included a section on cottages let directly by Leicester – which at the time amounted to 128 of a total of approximately 300 cottages.<sup>263</sup> He noted the poor condition of many of the cottages, particularly the 'wretched thatched' cottages.<sup>264</sup> Many were without decent sanitary facilities and some without a privy at all. Poor sanitation and overcrowding no doubt contributed to the cholera epidemic in Tittleshall, which was caused by a 'defective state of the drainage of the village'.<sup>265</sup> Keary optimistically wrote 'there can be little doubt that the causes which occasioned the late dreadful mortality will be removed' and his prediction was largely vindicated by Leicester's enduring commitment to cottage improvement.<sup>266</sup>

The initial period following 1851 was largely spent attempting to remedy the ills Keary brought to attention in his report. Yet in the longer term, greater attention was taken to the state of the cottages on the estate. An 1885 notebook in the records entitled 'Complaints of Cottagers' contains a list of labourers living in estate cottages alongside their various requests for repairs. Phrases like 'pump out of order', 'water bad', 'windows very bad', 'stairs want attending to' and 'wet comes in at roof', appear regularly.<sup>267</sup> Some cottagers, such as the widow Mrs Butters, would ask for extra space or new amenities, like store rooms, new ovens, garden gates and washhouses.<sup>268</sup> Although these items were often 'not promised', the situation was regularly reviewed.<sup>269</sup> Evidence of the letting of land at Holkham suggests that as early as 1860 (and perhaps earlier) allotments of roughly two acres were being given to labourers like Edward Arnold of Wells.<sup>270</sup> It is evident that the primary task of Leicester's cottage improvement campaign was to improve existing cottage accommodation and to provide better facilities for labourers' houses and gardens. While not all cottagers' complaints were addressed, the estate office did at least become better at recording them for future reassessment.

Yet Leicester's concern for the welfare of labourers was not only confined to improving existing cottage accommodation; a significant piece of his legacy rested on his extensive and prolonged building campaign for the provision of new cottages. Between 1850 and 1880, there

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<sup>262</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, pp.224-25, 238-41

<sup>263</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.217

<sup>264</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.217

<sup>265</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.217

<sup>266</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, pp.217-18

<sup>267</sup> Holkham MSS., E/G/36, Complaints of Cottagers

<sup>268</sup> Holkham MSS., E/G/36, Complaints of Cottagers

<sup>269</sup> Holkham MSS., E/G/36, Complaints of Cottagers

<sup>270</sup> Holkham MSS., E/G/34, Letting of Lands

was a steady rise in expenditure on new cottages and it is estimated that 100 new cottages were built in this time.<sup>271</sup> And yet it appears that this rise in expenditure was further increased so that by 1895, there were 730 cottages on the estate.<sup>272</sup> In order to reach his target of having one cottage per 50 acres on the estate Leicester would need 100 more; yet taking account of the level of rural out-migration, which had risen particularly during the agricultural depression, the estate probably had sufficient cottages to prevent overcrowding by the turn of the century.

Wade Martins argues that Leicester's interest cottage building and the resultant increase in expenditure for such activity was due to the repeal of the Settlement Laws in 1865, which 'removed the incentive to keep down the number of labourers resident in an estate parish'.<sup>273</sup> She reminds her readers that the proportion of total estate expenditure spent on cottages was always low and that Leicester's approach to cottages building was one of economy.<sup>274</sup> Yet Wade Martins seems to underplay the level of paternal concern Leicester displayed towards the labouring classes. Firstly, the repeal of the Settlement Laws does not account for the interest in cottage improvement before 1865, when it was first cultivated. If Leicester was not interested in improving cottage provision on the estate before 1865, then why was Keary instructed to carry out such an extensive report in 1851? And why did Leicester then act on its findings and embark on a lasting cottage improvement program? Despite Wade Martins' claims, Leicester's interest in cottage provision was in actuality more influenced by paternalism than by economic expediency.

His paternal influences were certainly evident in a speech he made to the Norfolk Agricultural Association in 1866, in which he claimed to own 521 cottages supplying about 450 able-bodied labourers.<sup>275</sup> He calculated that 950 labourers were required to cultivate the entire estate. The 'home supply' of labourers (those 450 living in estate cottages), he claimed, earned 10-12s per week and paid rents of £2.17.4 per year.<sup>276</sup> 'The other 500 who are needed for proper cultivation,' he went on to say, 'may be living in cottages put up by speculative builders and paying rents of between £4 and £5 per year. These houses are usually poor and hardly ever have a garden. The labourers have to walk three or four miles to work... The time is not far distant when the first requirements of a farm will not be ample farmsteads, but

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<sup>271</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.225

<sup>272</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.242

<sup>273</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.225

<sup>274</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, pp.224-25, 238-41

<sup>275</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.241

<sup>276</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.241

sufficient cottages.<sup>277</sup> Although the practical need to provide his tenants with a reliable workforce was clearly important to Leicester, one cannot disassociate this from a genuine concern that labourers should not suffer excessive rents, poor accommodation or having to walk such long distances to their workplaces. Leicester also resisted unrestrained capitalist thought when he prevented his cottagers from allowing lodgers and required their married children to find their own homes in an attempt to resolve overcrowding issues on the estate.<sup>278</sup>

Although cottage provision tended to be better on larger estates, the high standard achieved at Holkham by the turn of the century was 'certainly not achieved elsewhere' and as a result Leicester was praised by various Royal Commissions for his efforts.<sup>279</sup> The worst cottages tended to be on smaller estates, where there was less capital and less potential to build efficiently. Joseph Arch wrote that the 'worst sinners' were the small proprietors whose cottages were 'a disgrace to civilisation'.<sup>280</sup> Leicester's concern for the welfare of farm labourers, particularly their housing is accountable, at least in part, for why he was never singled out as a target for abuse on the labourers' union platforms.<sup>281</sup> Another reason may lie in his extensive and generous patronage of local charities and hospitals which will be dealt with in greater detail in a later section.

So far this chapter has attempted to promote the idea that Leicester held a close affinity to his tenants and their labourers which was the result of his paternalism. But how did Leicester react to the agricultural depression? Was his reaction merely managerial or entrepreneurial? And to what extent did his paternalism remain intact when the estate's rental income declined so drastically? It will here be argued that Leicester's was a managerial response to the depression, whereby he reduced rents and maintained expenditure but fell short in his creative solutions to the problems.

Rents on the Holkham estate were systematically reduced to relieve the tenants of most of the financial burden of depression. A document that compares the rents of just under 70 tenants between the years of 1878 and 1893 displays the impressive scale of reductions.<sup>282</sup> The lowest level of rent reduction for any tenant was 14.6 per cent, while the highest was 100 per cent.<sup>283</sup> In Leicester's 1892 letter to Chaplin, he had claimed that two farms amounting to

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<sup>277</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.241

<sup>278</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.241

<sup>279</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.242

<sup>280</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.243

<sup>281</sup> Clarke and Wade Martins, 'Coke, Thomas William, second earl of Leicester of Holkham (1822–1909), agriculturist and landowner,'

<sup>282</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/17, Rent Reductions 1873-93

<sup>283</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/17, Rent Reductions 1873-93

729 acres were being let rent free and remarked that this arrangement would likely have to be carried out on other farms.<sup>284</sup> Indeed a year later it was three farms amounting to 1298 acres being let rent free.<sup>285</sup> However, such examples were still infrequent. The average rent reduction between these years was 43.1 per cent.<sup>286</sup> Even by discounting those anomalous three farms at 100 per cent reduction when calculating the average it still stood at an impressive 40.44 per cent.<sup>287</sup>

The level of estate expenditure in 1878 was only slightly above that of 1891, with both figures residing above £20,000.<sup>288</sup> In the estate accounts for the years in between, expenditure was always around £20,000.<sup>289</sup> In 1881 it actually increased to £23,592 and further still in 1885 when it was £24,815; while in 1889 it was £19,028.<sup>290</sup> The more staggering figure in Leicester's letter to Chaplin was his total expenditure on the estate between 1841 and 1891, which amounted to £367,981 and with the purchase of estates (£190,175) amounted to £558,156.<sup>291</sup> The net gain in the acreage of the estate in these years totalled 2511 acres (1936 acres purchased and 575 acres gained through enclosure and reclamation).<sup>292</sup> Not only did Leicester maintain his spending on improving the estate up to 1892, but he also continued to purchase land to enlarge the estate. This was not a common action for landowners during the depression. Smaller landowners would rarely be in so good a position as to be able to purchase more land, if indeed they wanted to. One wonders with a fall in the profitability of arable farming, what enabled and inclined Leicester to enlarge the estate further, even if land prices had fallen.

After 1891, estate expenditure began to decline. In 1896 it was a mere £12,505.<sup>293</sup> In 1901 it increased a little to £13,488, but still fell short of its level in the 1880s.<sup>294</sup> There is no specific evidence within the records which explains this significant decline, however it is plausible that Leicester took heed of his own advice that landlords would 'not bear much more squeezing' and finally relented to a more frugal approach to expenditure. In doing so he was

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<sup>284</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/13, Letter to Henry Chaplin MP

<sup>285</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/17, Rent Reductions 1873-93

<sup>286</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/17, Rent Reductions 1873-93

<sup>287</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/17, Rent Reductions 1873-93

<sup>288</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/13, Letter to Henry Chaplin MP

<sup>289</sup> Holkham MSS., A/149 – A/282, Ledgers and Estate Accounts 1870-1901

<sup>290</sup> Holkham MSS., A/159, A/163, A/270, Ledgers and Estate Accounts 1881, 1885, 1889

<sup>291</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/13, Letter to Henry Chaplin MP

<sup>292</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/15-16, Purchases and Sales 1841-91

<sup>293</sup> Holkham MSS., A/277, Estate Accounts 1896

<sup>294</sup> Holkham MSS., A/282, Estate Accounts 1901,

part of a trend among landowners to reduce expenditure as described by Hunt & Pam.<sup>295</sup> However, Leicester's expenditure was maintained for longer than most landlords, who tended to reduce their expenditure, like Chaplin, in the mid 1880s. After such an extensive period of expenditure on his estates, which totalled £367,981 by 1891, it is reasonable to suggest that the estate no longer required annual expenditure at such a high level.<sup>296</sup> This was certainly the case for Leicester's cottage building program, which had largely been successful in achieving its goal by the turn of the century. While expenditure dropped after 1891, it never dropped as low as it was in 1841, when Leicester inherited the estate and it was a mere £7608.<sup>297</sup>

According to Hunt & Pam's criteria Leicester's was a 'managerial' response to the depression. He reduced rents and maintained estate expenditure and investment until the 1890s. This gave his tenant the confidence to carry on farming when the general mood in British agriculture was one of defeatism and fatalism. Was there any entrepreneurial response to the depression at Holkham? Apart from Leicester's usual estate expenditure on improvements like repairs, roads, drainage and new buildings, in what ways did he invest to could promote local agrarian economic growth?

As Chaplin's example has shown, a managerial response devoid of any entrepreneurship could lead to financial ruin for a landowner. What level of income was required for Leicester to be safe from similar financial ruin and for him to continue to reside at Holkham? How did he not only survive the agricultural depression but maintain his elite position among the wealthiest men in the country? The next section will argue that Leicester's 'entrepreneurial' response was, as with Chaplin, limited to the improvement of railway networks in the locality. It will propose that he maintained his enormous wealth largely by investing outside of agriculture, into various railway, mineral and banking companies and by drawing an additional income from the dividends on these investments. Unlike his estate management, his investments outside of agriculture were passive and this had important ramifications to the future of paternalism. These investments were only part of a general trend amongst the aristocracy and as a result they came to rely less and less on agriculture to supply them with wealth. Land had already been losing its status and importance in national politics and society and because of the depression it was failing to provide the aristocracy with wealth and status. Although they may have maintained the appearance of still being rural people, it was mostly a facade that concealed the fact that they were gradually losing interest in

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<sup>295</sup> E. H. Hunt and S. J. Pam, 'Responding to Agricultural Depression, 1873-96: managerial success, entrepreneurial failure?', *Agricultural Historical Review*, 50:2 (2002), p.240

<sup>296</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/13, Letter to Henry Chaplin MP

<sup>297</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/13, Letter to Henry Chaplin MP

agriculture and their association with land was disintegrating. This gradually removed the sense of duty and obligation the aristocracy felt to the inhabitants of their estates. The agricultural depression therefore provided the pretext for the gradual demise of paternalism.

## II

The agricultural depression had a profound effect on Leicester's disposition. Disheartened by the prolonged financial 'squeezing' he had been suffering, Leicester wrote to his agent, Shellabear, in 1884.<sup>298</sup> He requested Shellabear's opinion on the future financial prospects for his son, Viscount Coke, were he, Leicester, to die in the near future.<sup>299</sup> The tone of the letter is of trepidation, gloom and despondency. Leicester even justified his sombre tone, writing 'bear in mind that it is much wiser in a case of this kind to take a gloomy view, and in all matters of money to take care and be on the safe side'.<sup>300</sup>

Shellabear had already suggested to Leicester that the net income of the estate was unlikely to fall below £30,000 per annum in the future.<sup>301</sup> Yet Leicester still sought assurance from Shellabear that he earnestly believed this and that he could give good reasons why.<sup>302</sup> Leicester strongly believed that if the net income fell below this amount, his son would not be able to justify living at Holkham Hall and possibly face even worse financial difficulties as the estate itself depreciated in value.<sup>303</sup> This suggests that £30,000 was the annual income required to for an Earl of Leicester's living expenses and to keep Holkham Hall itself up and running.<sup>304</sup> One wonders, with the net profit of estate at only £28,316 in 1885, how was Leicester able to avoid such difficulties himself?

'My future is of little importance, not so that of Lord Coke,' he writes, 'and what that will be will depend much upon the manner in which I may apply the surplus that may be available during my life.'<sup>305</sup> Yet he goes on to say 'it was never my intention that Lord Coke should derive any advantage from any investments I might make, beyond giving him entire freedom from any charges on the Estate that might occur from my second marriage'.<sup>306</sup> It is

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<sup>298</sup> Holkham MSS., F/4E/1/5/1 – Letter to Shellabear 1884

<sup>299</sup> Holkham MSS., F/4E/1/5/1 – Letter to Shellabear 1884

<sup>300</sup> Holkham MSS., F/4E/1/5/1 – Letter to Shellabear 1884

<sup>301</sup> Holkham MSS., F/4E/1/5/1 – Letter to Shellabear 1884

<sup>302</sup> Holkham MSS., F/4E/1/5/1 – Letter to Shellabear 1884

<sup>303</sup> Holkham MSS., F/4E/1/5/1 – Letter to Shellabear 1884

<sup>304</sup> Holkham MSS., F/4E/1/5/1 – Letter to Shellabear 1884

<sup>305</sup> Holkham MSS., F/4E/1/5/1 – Letter to Shellabear 1884

<sup>306</sup> Holkham MSS., F/4E/1/5/1 – Letter to Shellabear 1884

not clear from the letter with whom or where Leicester had decided to dispose his surplus wealth, though the next section will make some suggestions.

Leicester wanted to ensure that although his son would be supported by an estate that was still sustainable, he would be free to achieve his own successes and not be reliant upon his father's surplus wealth. In the subtext of the letter is an insinuation of shame at having been successful in generating wealth outside of agriculture. Perhaps Leicester's middle class values are partly the cause of this discomfiture, yet it is likely that it existed among the aristocracy more generally. Despite the unity and affiliation between the aristocracy and the 'City men' that Cain and Hopkins allude to, the Victorian aristocracy were still extremely hierarchical in nature and obsessed by social status. Land for so many hundreds of years had been the basis of their power and influence and was vital to plotting one's place within the social hierarchy. As the depression wore on and land began to lose its status, it is little wonder the landed elites were somewhat embarrassed of their passive investments in non-agricultural enterprises. To the other classes, their investments must have been seen as a means of survival and by admitting as much, the aristocracy were essentially acknowledging their own 'decline and fall'.

The landed elites were predominantly paternalists, who were aware that landownership enabled them to hold high levels of local power and influence, which mere investment in other sectors could not. There was also a certain degree of emotional connection between the elites and their land. Often it had been bought by their distant ancestors and stayed within the family for many generations. An aristocrat's land was imbued with a great sense of tradition and would have been vital in constructing their identity. If agriculture did not recover then the economic, social and political value of land to them would diminish. And to rely on the wealth accumulated by other ventures was to betray the very foundation of their paternalism, power, influence and identity. However, without such careful diversification and adaptation of the source of their wealth, the aristocracy's 'decline and fall' would undoubtedly have begun much sooner and been much more severe.

According to Wade Martins, aristocrats had two distinct options when it came to spending their disposable income. 'They could either use it for very lavish living,' she writes, 'or they could invest it in concerns outside their estates'.<sup>307</sup> While the first option would support the local economy to an extent, by employing local labour, it would have very little effect on the local or national life.<sup>308</sup> The second option however, as well as generating wealth for the aristocrat in spite of the agricultural depression, 'could be of great benefit to economic growth

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<sup>307</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.61

<sup>308</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.61

and thus landed wealth could be providing capital for others'.<sup>309</sup> 'If the earl chose to invest his wealth rather than simply to spend it on conspicuous consumption,' she writes 'then his influence on the economy could extend well beyond the boundaries of his estates'.<sup>310</sup>

What Wade Martins overlooks is that by extending their influence beyond the estate in such a way, the aristocracy were also gradually reducing their influence within the estate. As they came to rely less on their estate's rental income and more on alternative means for providing them with wealth, land became less important to the aristocrat and so too did the obligations it entailed. Paternalism slowly became uprooted and was almost discarded as a social norm from the array of aristocratic behaviour. It is possible that this trend could have been slowed or even reversed, if wealth generated by non-agricultural concerns was used to reinvest back into the estate. This action could itself be motivated by paternalism and in turn secure a future for paternalism on English estates. The landowner could even use such wealth to invest in entrepreneurial schemes that could enable all the estate's inhabitants to prosper and thus further the cause of paternalism on his estate, by achieving greater local status.

Yet this did not commonly happen on the estates of England and certainly not at Holkham. For Leicester, his non-agricultural concerns were used to support his declining rental income but not used to significantly extend his landed influence. Although it is true that Leicester bought land and extended his estates during his lifetime, this never amounted to much more than a 5% increase.<sup>311</sup> The depression significantly reduced the demand for land as it was no longer seen as an economically profitable asset. Furthermore, Wade Martins claims that Leicester's rapidly increasing investment in stocks and shares in the 1870s and 1880s accompanied a decline in investment in estate improvement from about 20% to 10%.<sup>312</sup> She also asserts that even as late as 1890, agricultural income was still more important to Leicester, yet this will be contested hereon.<sup>313</sup>

Leicester's investments can easily be divided into two categories: they were either localised or international. His localised investments, often influenced by his own interests, were into local and occasionally national ventures. They were usually of an agrarian nature and often indirectly improved his estate and its infrastructure. The inhabitants of his estate could often enjoy the non-monetary benefits these investments produced and they were in this sense an expression of paternalism. Leicester's international, or colonial, investments were quite different. They were largely passive investments in colonial and foreign companies. Due

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<sup>309</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.61

<sup>310</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.61

<sup>311</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/15-16, Purchases and Sales 1841-91

<sup>312</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.64

<sup>313</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.64

to their passive nature, they cannot be seen as an expression of paternalism, although colonial investment could be seen as a kind of imperial duty for the aristocracy. They were generally much more profitable than his localised investments.

Throughout his long life 'Coke of Norfolk' invested in only two organisations – the Lynn Theatre and the Reform Club – and both of these were local. Both investments likely had the sole aim of consolidating his local social and political influence and were an ordinary expression of aristocratic benevolence.<sup>314</sup> 'Coke of Norfolk', a man who reprov'd of gambling as a vice, never wholeheartedly invested outside of agriculture because he distrusted such activity and feared losing money.<sup>315</sup> His great uncle (or Leicester's great great uncle) Thomas Coke, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Leicester of Holkham, of the earlier creation, had lost a significant amount of money through the 'South Sea Bubble'.<sup>316</sup> Coke had originally laid out £58,300 in 1720 on South Sea stock, but only actually ever made payment on £48,900 of this amount. When the bubble burst, his total loses reached a staggering £37,928.<sup>317</sup> R. A. C. Parker remarks 'the events of 1720 help to explain why the Cokes never plunged again into the stock market', until three generations of the family and 120 years had passed.<sup>318</sup> Perhaps the moral of this family fable escaped Leicester, because upon attaining his inheritance he quickly began to invest his surplus wealth in a variety of ways and continued to do so until he died.<sup>319</sup>

Leicester's early investments were also localised and reflected his interests. His first investment was in 1846 for £150 worth of stock in the Royal Agricultural College at Cirencester.<sup>320</sup> As a keen agriculturalist and member of the Royal Agricultural Society of England (R.A.S.E.), it is rather expected of Leicester, but it may have been made with his tenants in mind. The college promoted the scientific and innovative approach to farming for which R.A.S.E. and its supporters had become famous.<sup>321</sup> By investing in greater learning in farming, his tenants and British agriculture more generally could potentially benefit in the long term. His next investments were also in the agricultural vein. In 1853 he invested £100 into the Corn Exchange at Fakenham and again in 1857 he invested £24 into East Dereham Corn

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<sup>314</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.62

<sup>315</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>316</sup> R. A. C. Parker, *Coke of Norfolk, A Financial and Agricultural Study 1707-1842*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1975) pp.12-20

<sup>317</sup> Parker, *Coke of Norfolk, A Financial and Agricultural Study 1707-1842*, pp.15, 18, 19

<sup>318</sup> Parker, *Coke of Norfolk, A Financial and Agricultural Study 1707-1842*, p.20

<sup>319</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/5, Earl of Leicester's Investments 1843-1911

<sup>320</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/5, Earl of Leicester's Investments 1843-1911

<sup>321</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.62

Exchange.<sup>322</sup> Corn exchanges would help to open up new markets for farmers' produce and could enable opportunities for greater prosperity during the later depression. These were clearly investments and not donations but it is not clear how good the return on them was.

Leicester's investment in local railways followed a general trend among the British aristocracy at the time.<sup>323</sup> It was clearly not blind investment as he knew he would both directly and indirectly benefit from it. Not only would he see a return of capital but his tenants and other estate inhabitants would benefit from the improved communication and infrastructure on the estate, which in turn could make his property more valuable. In 1855 Leicester owned £11,640 worth of Wells and Fakenham Railway shares, but his involvement with the railway was nothing short of vital.<sup>324</sup> It was Leicester who had formed the Wells and Fakenham Company, alongside other smaller landowners and some directors of the Norfolk Railway Company in 1853. It was incorporated in 1854 with a capital of £70,000. The line was opened in 1857 and in 1862 it was vested in the Great Eastern Railway, of which Leicester was also an investor.<sup>325</sup> Indeed from his initial investment in the Wells and Fakenham company and the West Norfolk Junction railway (£2628), he began to invest in larger railway companies servicing wider areas around Norfolk. These included varied investments in the Great Eastern, the North Eastern, the Great Western and the London & North Western, which collectively totalled £49,763 in the 1870s.<sup>326</sup> A further £64,430 worth of British railway stock was purchased in the early 1880s.<sup>327</sup>

After 1870, Leicester's investments became much wider in their scope and the ensuing investments tended to be dominated by colonial railway, mineral and banking companies. Yet there were still a handful of local companies which received Leicester's backing. £1000 worth of shares in the Norfolk County School at North Elmham were purchased in 1874.<sup>328</sup> £5 was spent in backing the Walsingham Coffee House Company in 1880.<sup>329</sup> Rather expectedly, he

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<sup>322</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/5, Earl of Leicester's Investments 1843-1911, Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.62

<sup>323</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, pp.62-63

<sup>324</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.62

<sup>325</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.62

<sup>326</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, pp.62-63, Holkham MSS., F/2E/5, Earl of Leicester's Investments 1843-1911

<sup>327</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.63

<sup>328</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, pp.62-63, Holkham MSS., F/2E/5, Earl of Leicester's Investments 1843-1911

<sup>329</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, pp.62-63, Holkham MSS., F/2E/5, Earl of Leicester's Investments 1843-1911

invested £500 in the Norfolk and Norwich Agricultural Hall Company in 1881, £20 in the Farmer's Foundry Company in 1885 and £1000 in Lawes Manure Company in 1888.<sup>330</sup> From the 1880s he was investing in breweries, which were favoured by other aristocrats such as the Duke of Portland.<sup>331</sup> By investing in local businesses, Leicester was enacting a positive response to the agricultural depression, in that he was encouraging local economic growth, which generated greater demand for local produce and helped to create jobs for those who had been made redundant by farmers' cutbacks.

Leicester's colonial and foreign investments, which again followed the wider trends among the aristocratic export of capital, began in 1870 with the purchase of £10,891 of stock in the Great Indian Peninsula Railway Company.<sup>332</sup> Initially at least, aristocratic investment favoured the railways of the Empire and India was the most favoured recipient. The peak year for investment from Britain into Indian Railways was 1866 in which £7.7million of capital was provided.<sup>333</sup> In missing the peak years Leicester was clearly following the trend rather than setting it, but he soon caught up spending £51,533 on Indian railway stock between 1870 and 1878.<sup>334</sup> Alongside the Great Indian Peninsula Railway Company there were three other recipients of Leicester's investment: the Madras Railway Company (£17,411), the South Indian Railway Company (£11,552) and the Scinde Delhi and Punjaub Railway Company (£11,679).<sup>335</sup>

This investment in Indian railways occurred during the final 'golden years' of British agriculture, when Leicester's estate was still highly profitable. In order to understand the scale of Leicester's investments we must set them in context. The £51,533 he invested into Indian railways over a period of eight years was only £5000-£10,000 above the standard net profit of the estate for one year in the 1870s.<sup>336</sup> Indeed the grand total of Leicester's investments in the 1870s of £88,842 is still small in comparison to the total estate income for that decade of

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<sup>330</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, pp.62-63, Holkham MSS., F/2E/5, Earl of Leicester's Investments 1843-1911

<sup>331</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.63

<sup>332</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, pp.62-63, Holkham MSS., F/2E/5, Earl of Leicester's Investments 1843-1911

<sup>333</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, pp.62-63

<sup>334</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, pp.62-63, Holkham MSS., F/2E/5, Earl of Leicester's Investments 1843-1911

<sup>335</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.63, Holkham MSS., F/2E/5, Earl of Leicester's Investments 1843-1911

<sup>336</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, pp.62-63, Holkham MSS., F/2E/5, Earl of Leicester's Investments 1843-1911, Holkham MSS., F/2E/13, Letter to Henry Chaplin MP

£749,924.<sup>337</sup> Leicester's investments in the 1870s were still rather cautious and there was none of the sense of necessity or urgency to invest that there was in the following decade. While agriculture was still thriving his investments seem to have provided him with less important supplementary income.

As the depression was becoming prolonged, Leicester's investments increased in scale and he came to rely much more on their returns to supplement his falling rental income. After spending £64,340 on British railway stock in the early 1880s, in 1886 the focus fell again on colonial and foreign interests. However these were expanded out from India to Australia, Canada, South Africa, and South America. In the four years between 1886 and 1890, £55,090 was invested in these four areas. Again this mainly began with railway companies like the Quebec & Ontario and the Buenos Aires & Pacific, but soon after expanded to mineral companies, banks and government stock.<sup>338</sup> Companies as diverse as the Transvaal Gold Mining Estates and the Manitoba Mortgage & Investment Company received Leicester's backing.<sup>339</sup> The aristocracy's investment in banking companies supports Cain and Hopkins' notion of unity among aristocrats and bankers based on their gentlemanly capitalism.<sup>340</sup> During the 1880s, when total estate income was £441,521, Leicester's non-estate investments totalled £233,400.<sup>341</sup> This marks an increase of investments equalling 12% of total estate income in the 1870s to 53% in the 1880s. Clearly as agricultural depression became an established normality, Leicester and his fellow aristocrats felt a greater sense of urgency to invest their way out of financial insecurity.

Through a lack of evidence available to her at the time of her research Wade Martins was forced to speculate about Leicester's investments after 1891. Wade Martins suggested that the ensuing investments were of character similar to those of the 1880s except that more bank shares were purchased. Since then a more comprehensive document listing all of Leicester's investments throughout his life has been discovered and it largely vindicates her

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<sup>337</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.64

<sup>338</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/5, Earl of Leicester's Investments 1843-1911

<sup>339</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/5, Earl of Leicester's Investments 1843-1911

<sup>340</sup> Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism Vol. 1*, p.185, P. J. Cain, and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism Vol. 2: Crisis and Deconstruction, 1914-1990*, (Longman, London, 1993), p.305

<sup>341</sup> This investments total for the 1880s was calculated using 'Holkham MSS., F/2E/5: Earl of Leicester's Investments 1843-1911'. Wade Martins alternatively claims the 1880s investments total was £190,384 and hence 43% of total estate income in this period. The disparity has likely occurred because Wade Martins did not have access to the more comprehensive list of investments mentioned above. See the abovementioned document and Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.64

prediction.<sup>342</sup> The total expenditure on non-estate investments upon Leicester's death stood at a colossal £553,157.<sup>343</sup> This suggests that while his investments following 1890 were in a similar vein to those before, the 1880s remains by far the most productive decade for investment activity.

It is unclear from any document with the records what the exact returns on Leicester's investments were, although 5% is a figure that appears regularly alongside descriptions of stock in the registers. If we were to take this 5% as only a suggestive average for returns, then we could say that upon his death in 1911, Leicester's annual dividend income may have stood at over £27,000. Wade Martins claims that 'even as late as 1890 agricultural income was more important than that from investments'.<sup>344</sup> However it is likely that returns on investments overtook agricultural income at some point in the 1890s, as the suggested figure for Leicester's dividend income in 1901 (5% of £512,180) is £25,609, whilst the net profit of the estate was a mere £18,218.<sup>345</sup>

There is scope for arguing that by investing in the colonies, the aristocracy were fulfilling a duty, albeit a duty with wider national and international ramifications than those ordinarily local paternal duties. The British aristocracy, through their export of capital, were indeed extending their influence abroad, possibly as a reaction to their declining influence at home. However, there was a degree of irony in their investments in American railways. Leicester, following the wider trends among the aristocracy, purchased shares in a number of railway companies in the U.S.A., including the Chicago, Milwaukie & St Paul and the Illinois Central.<sup>346</sup> By doing so the aristocracy were contributing further to the problems causing the agricultural depression in Britain, as they were providing capital for the improvement of American transport links, which in turn meant that America was able to provide British food producers with even greater competition in prices. Furthermore, British industry, also suffering from the effects of a depression, was under-capitalised and in need of investment.<sup>347</sup> It is therefore difficult to view the aristocracy's colonial investments in terms of paternalism, even if they did justify them to themselves as part of a wider imperial duty.

Whilst the agricultural depression was significantly reducing Leicester's estate income, his investments outside of the estate were increasingly being used to enable him not only to survive the agricultural depression, but to remain among the top 50 wealthiest people in the

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<sup>342</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/5, Earl of Leicester's Investments 1843-1911

<sup>343</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/5, Earl of Leicester's Investments 1843-1911

<sup>344</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.64

<sup>345</sup> Holkham MSS., A/282, Estate Accounts 1901

<sup>346</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/5, Earl of Leicester's Investments 1843-1911

<sup>347</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.65

country.<sup>348</sup> However, crucially the capital returns from his investments were not being reinvested back into the estate. As Wade Martins asserts the increasing proportion of total estate income spent on investments during the years of the depression was accompanied by a decline in investment in estate improvement.<sup>349</sup> As with his patronage which will be dealt with in the coming section, the companies and ventures Leicester tended to invest in often reflected his own interests. He tended to follow wider trends and therefore his investments can be seen as representative of the aristocratic export of capital in this period.<sup>350</sup> Railway companies were the most popular beneficiaries of aristocratic investment. As the example of Henry Chaplin has shown, involvement in local railway ventures enabled the landowner to display their paternalist mentality and gain themselves greater local status and influence, which perhaps explains why railways initially provided such a popular outlet for investment. Involvement in railways local, national and international could confer greater status upon a Victorian landowner in the same way land had hitherto. As will be seen later philanthropy also had this ability. Local railway investment was also a positive response to the agricultural depression as it improved the infrastructure of an estate and the locality and had the potential to open up new markets for farmers' produce. Corn exchanges too had much the same effect of opening up markets for local farmers' produce, whilst Leicester's investment in the Royal Agricultural College was a means of promoting greater innovation in farming in response to the problems entailed by depression. Other local investments were also positive in that they could promote local economic growth and offset the worst effects of the depression.

Colonial investments may be seen as pertaining to a sense of duty that was part of the wider Imperial mission that had existed among the ruling patrician class since the formative days of the British Empire. However, in attempting to extend their influence in the wider world, possibly as a reaction to their acknowledged declining national influence, the aristocracy in actuality contributed further to the decline of their local influence. As land became less profitable, their estates could rely less and less upon their wealth, resources and time, especially since foreign investments were profitable and effortless. Land became less important to the aristocrat and as a result the aristocrat's sense of obligation to the estate declined, which can be seen in the decrease in estate expenditure at Holkham. Thus paternalism, as the dominant ideology which both enabled and enforced the social hierarchy in rural England, began to expire. Furthermore not only were struggling British industries in need of capital, but aristocratic foreign investment also indirectly pitted British agriculture

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<sup>348</sup> Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism Vol. 1*, p.184

<sup>349</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.65

<sup>350</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, pp.62-65

against greater competition from abroad, which further exacerbated the symptoms of depression.

Wade Martins claims that since Leicester's influence on non-agricultural economic affairs was slight, he must be classed 'primarily as an agriculturalist', even if he was relieved to be drawing income from other sources during the depression.<sup>351</sup> It is difficult to see how else Leicester would have viewed himself, given his family's established fame in agriculture and his implied disapproval of non-agricultural forms of income in the letter at the beginning of this section. Yet it is easy to view Leicester as the 'gentlemanly capitalist' that Cain and Hopkins have identified. Although evidence in the estate records has not been forthcoming, it is worth raising the question of who exactly was advising Leicester on his investments. Was it his agents or 'City' friends? Despite initially resolving not to allow his son Lord Coke to derive any benefits of his investments, in later documents we find Lord Coke's name appearing as an investor in his own right.<sup>352</sup> Towards the end of Leicester's life he also bequeathed large proportions of his stocks and shares to members of his family.<sup>353</sup> And yet what of the surplus wealth that Leicester's investments generated? We know that it was not used for re-investment in the Holkham estate, but was it used on philanthropic measures to bolster Leicester's status in the locality and to maintain the appearance of a healthy paternalism on the estate?

### III

On the 23 January 1897 a meeting was convened the Mayor of Norwich and Lord Leicester to decide how the county should commemorate Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee.<sup>354</sup> Leicester, as chair of the meeting, stood up to speak. Already 'partially blind and wholly deaf', he reminded his audience of his old age by reminiscing that he had been at Queen Victoria's coronation as a page to the Duke of Sussex.<sup>355</sup> He rightly predicted that, due to his old age and infirmities, it would be his last ever public speech.<sup>356</sup> He went on:

I have been her Majesty's Lieutenant for this county and for the city for more than half a century, and I thought this might be a fitting opportunity for me to make my final appeal to the County of Norfolk and the City of Norwich... The Mayor of Norwich agrees with me that it would be better now, as on many former occasions, that the county and the city should combine to

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<sup>351</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.64

<sup>352</sup> Holkham MSS., F/4E/1/1 Viscount Coke's Investments 1893-1901

<sup>353</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/5, Earl of Leicester's Investments 1843-1911

<sup>354</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>355</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>356</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

express their gratitude to her Majesty for the control that she has exercised, for the example that she has set, by which England is more prosperous, more happy, more contented, and, I believe, more moral than it was when she commenced her reign. It is for you to determine in what form you will commemorate this eventful year.<sup>357</sup>

After some applause, he went on to provide examples of national schemes begun in other parts of the country. In one such scheme, set up by the Duke of Westminster, to which Leicester had already contributed, funds were being raised for the Institution of Nurses for the Poor.<sup>358</sup> Although Leicester doubted that Norfolk inhabitants would be content without a memorial that would 'mark for future generations the great loyalty and respect... held for her Majesty in the year 1897', he also remarked 'I believe her Majesty would be best pleased if all contributions tended in some measure to the relief of the sick and suffering of her poorer subjects'.<sup>359</sup> It was decided that a new hospital for children would be established separately from the adult Norfolk and Norwich Hospital, of which Leicester was already a major benefactor.<sup>360</sup> The new hospital was to be called the Jenny Lind Hospital for Children and Leicester agreed to head the fund with a £3000 donation.<sup>361</sup>

This episode is revealing of the role of the aristocrat in both the provincial and civic life of the country at the turn of the century. As late as 1897 and in the grips of old age and infirmity, Leicester clearly still felt the weight of public expectation upon him and that his community was reliant on him to carry out duties for the public good. While he called on those in attendance and the wider community to contribute towards the hospital, he led by example and was the first to endow the fund with a large donation.

The episode is also revealing of the aristocracy's communicative role between the sovereign and her subjects. Leicester expressed his admiration for Queen Victoria's ability to make England happier, more content and most importantly more moral than it had been before. The subtext of these words was likely intended to remind his audience of the aristocracy's role in being the agents of these positive changes. While it may have been Queen Victoria who had led the campaign to improve the moral character of the nation, it was her nobility who were intended to provide moral leadership in the localities. Indeed paternalism enabled and encouraged them to promote the moral economy of their estates. By being

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<sup>357</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>358</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>359</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>360</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>361</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

publicly charitable an aristocrat could simultaneously promote charitable attitudes among the general populous towards one another and deepen the deference of the lower classes.

The organisations that received the patronage of an aristocrat tended to be linked to his individual interests. As Wade Martins remarks Leicester supported 'generously anything in which he was really interested'.<sup>362</sup> It is therefore unsurprising that in his old age infirmity, Leicester was a proponent of improving public health. Leicester's obituary in the *Eastern Daily Press* lists his substantial endowments to public health schemes, as the accumulated totals of large grants he had given over a long period of his life.<sup>363</sup> In addition to the £3000 he gave to the children's hospital, Leicester gave £15,000 to the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital Endowment, £20,000 to the Fletcher Home endowment (a convalescent home associated with the hospital), £20,000 to the Nurses Home.<sup>364</sup> Over the course of his life Leicester gave more than £58,000 or the equivalent of one and a half year's rental income during the prosperous 1870s, solely to improve the public health of his county.<sup>365</sup> Yet the largest proportion of this £58,000 was not given during the prosperity of the 1870s but later, during the agricultural depression. While it is true that £13,000 was given towards the hospital in 1876, a further £2000 was given in 1881, the £20,000 towards the Fletcher Home in 1890 and the £20,000 towards the Nurses' Home in 1899.<sup>366</sup>

Yet his support for public health did not end with these large grants. They were supplemented with annual subscriptions, including £120 per annum to the Hospital.<sup>367</sup> He was for many years an annual subscriber to the Norwich Institution for the Indigent Blind and in 1893 was made a life governor. He gave £200 towards the rebuilding of the institution in 1889 and also £500 to the Eye Infirmary of which he was president.<sup>368</sup> He gave £2100 over a course of years to the Kelling Sanatorium. He contributed to further convalescent homes in Hunstanton, Lowestoft and Cromer, a blind school and the West Norfolk and Lynn Hospital.<sup>369</sup> Clearly the authors of Leicester's obituary were vindicated in claiming that he, 'through the whole of his long life kept the relief of the sick and suffering steadily before him'.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.64

<sup>363</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>364</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>365</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>366</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>367</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/2, Donations, Subscriptions, Loans, Investments

<sup>368</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>369</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl, Holkham MSS., F/2E/2, Donations, Subscriptions, Loans, Investments

<sup>370</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

Leicester's involvement with these medical institutions was not limited to the provision of funds. In 1846 he was made president of the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital and 'took a lead in promoting new building'.<sup>371</sup> When it was decided in 1876 that the 'resources of the Hospital were inadequate to meet the annual expenditure', a meeting was held at which Leicester ensured that his friend the Prince of Wales was in attendance and able to provide good coverage and weighty support to its resolutions.<sup>372</sup> The large quantity of correspondence concerning the Hospital within the estate records are also evidence of the time and effort Leicester confided in the cause.<sup>373</sup> As a result of both Leicester's funds and labours, the *Eastern Daily Press* implied that his legacy would be anchored in his advocacy of public health: '[his] name will be associated with the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital as long as that great pile stands'.<sup>374</sup>

Wade Martins claims that Leicester's charitable activities 'suggest that the earl was a man who did not get involved in too many schemes, but who remained wealthy enough throughout the period to support generously anything in which he was really interested'.<sup>375</sup> However, contrary to Wade Martins' claim, closer inspection of Leicester's donations reveal that he was interested in and supported a variety of distinct organisations, both locally and nationally.

In a list of donations given 'in lieu of annual subscriptions' we find Leicester regularly patronising churches and their restoration, for example in 1862 he gave £100 toward the restoration of Gt Massingham Church and in 1864 he gave £20 for the restoration of Bintry Church.<sup>376</sup> (He was also a patron of the residences of clergymen in the county, for example Billingford Rectory at a value of £300 per annum and Holkham Vicarage at a value of £330 per annum.)<sup>377</sup> He gave sums to general charities such as the London Society for the Relief of Distress, which he gave £25 over three years and £25 to the Agricultural Benevolent Society in 1864.<sup>378</sup> He supported schools such as Billingford School (£30 in 1843) and Bawdeswell & Foxley School (£20 in 1852), as well as organisations that promoted greater learning, as varied as the Royal College of Chemistry, the Archaeological Institute, the Ipswich Museum, the

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<sup>371</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.65

<sup>372</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>373</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/27, Norfolk and Norwich Hospital

<sup>374</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>375</sup> Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, p.65

<sup>376</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/2, Donations, Subscriptions, Loans, Investments

<sup>377</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>378</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/2, Donations, Subscriptions, Loans, Investments

Horticultural Society, the Zoological Society and Fakenham District Library.<sup>379</sup> While the above donations all occurred before the agricultural depression, they continued at a similar rate and frequency until at least 1898 where the records end.

The register of Leicester's annual subscriptions includes 11 schools, 29 charities and 25 miscellaneous subscriptions, all of which were in a similar vein to those recipients mentioned above and include many community-fostering societies such as cricket clubs.<sup>380</sup> These annual subscriptions were in addition to the already noted subscriptions to the two Norfolk based hospitals, and to which should be added the London Hospital, Charing Cross Hospital and Saint George's Hospital.<sup>381</sup> While Wade Martin's is wrong to claim that Leicester's charity was not wide-ranging, she may be vindicated in arguing that public health schemes received the lion's share of it.

Was the scale of Leicester's charity maintained, increased or decreased throughout the agricultural depression and beyond? By consulting the estate accounts it would be exceedingly difficult to answer this question as the disbursement figures for donations and subscriptions were only included in the accounts until the mid-1880s, when the estate office changed from a 'ledger' to an 'estate accounts' record book. In the years that we are able to ascertain figures for, the scale of charity is largely inconsistent. For example in 1871, £1589 was spent on donations and subscriptions; for 1876 this figure went down to £997; for 1881 it was £2250 and in 1885 it was £953.<sup>382</sup> Given the continually frequent appearance of individual donations in other records up to 1898, it is likely that the scale of Leicester's donations and subscriptions was at least maintained. This, when taken with the large grants he gave to public health schemes (which in not being mentioned in the estate records, presumably came from Leicester's private wealth), suggests that in actuality his charity was increased during the period of agricultural depression. It is highly likely that the success of Leicester's investments placed him in a financial position where he was able to make such generous charitable donations.

Aristocratic patronage was largely directed by the interests of the individual aristocrat. Since Leicester was particularly interested in public health, hospitals and health institutions received the larger part of his benefaction. Their patronage was normally localised, with the recipient organisations usually being based on or near the estate where they could service its inhabitants. Otherwise they were based in the locality or within the county and only

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<sup>379</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/2, Donations, Subscriptions, Loans, Investments

<sup>380</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/2, Donations, Subscriptions, Loans, Investments

<sup>381</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/2, Donations, Subscriptions, Loans, Investments

<sup>382</sup> Holkham MSS., A/149, A/154, A/159, A/163, Estate Accounts 1871, 1879, 1881, 1885

occasionally were they on a national scale. As Lord Lieutenant of Norfolk, Leicester was aware of his obligations to the county as well as to his estate. Even by the early twentieth century, when the gradual political developments of the previous century had expanded role of the state in the public life and made politics more centralised and more democratic, the aristocracy's traditional, paternal, charitable roles had still not dissolved. In an age before the beginning of the welfare state, their patronage of local and national organisations, institutions and charities was vital to the wellbeing of the nation.

We must also note the aristocracy's leadership of their locality. At the time of the Queen's diamond jubilee, it was they who lead the proceedings to commemorate the event in the localities and promoted the idea of charity as a fitting memorial to a famously moral Queen. Despite the expansion in the scale of the state during the nineteenth century, the consensus on the state's role had not yet extended to the relief of the poor from extreme poverty. The aristocracy were still relied upon to encompass this role in the localities. It was the contributions of the aristocracy in the nineteenth century and earlier that provided the basis for state concerns such as education and health when the welfare state was initiated, even if it was the inadequacy of the aristocracy's provision of welfare in the localities which prompted the state to act.

The aristocracy were put under intense pressure by the agricultural depression when trying to carry out this role in the late nineteenth century. Leicester was shrewd enough to invest his way out of the worst effects of the depression and it was his supplementary income which enabled him to dispose of large tracts of wealth for the benefit of public health. While these large donations most likely came from Leicester's own personal wealth, he also ensured that the estate continued its obligations to charities, societies and organisations through donations and subscriptions, even when its rental income had declined so decisively.

## IV

Leicester's obituary in the *Eastern Daily Press* is saturated with praising acknowledgement of his virtuous character, competent estate management and many good works. The deferential tone of the writing alone is cause for a study of Leicester and his paternalism. Its authors claim that 'he held a foremost position among the local nobility by reason of his lofty public spirit and his magnificent charities. He was the type of all that is most desirable in a landed gentleman.'<sup>383</sup> He apparently exercised toward his estate 'and other parishes bordering on the park a sort of patriarchal relationship', through which 'he fulfilled all

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<sup>383</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

the duties of an English country gentleman of the highest and best class'.<sup>384</sup> Ultimately the obituary defines him as 'a man of unpretensions... devoted to public and private duty'.<sup>385</sup>

Yet the obituary is also important in that, despite its very flattering portrait of the aristocrat, none of the above phrases can be said to be wholly untruthful. In light of his unpretentious character, his public spirit and charity, the patriarchal relationships he held with his dependents and his sense of duty, it becomes easy to understand how he built himself a reputation for being 'all that is most desirable in a landed gentleman'. It is testament to the challenges facing the aristocracy in the late nineteenth century that despite displaying such seemingly paternal characteristics and building for himself such a fine reputation, Leicester's attempts to adapt to the new era were damaging to the long term endurance of aristocratic paternalism.

Leicester's example is representative of a large number of aristocrats who also attempted to survive the depression, with their wealth intact, by investing surplus wealth into non-agricultural ventures that provided ample dividend returns. For Leicester and many of his contemporaries, this was the only way in which they attempted to adapt to the changes occurring around them. While such action would enable them to survive and even prosper during the agricultural depression, it adversely affected aristocratic paternalism. As part of the wider gradual changes occurring throughout the nineteenth century, land was already losing its ability to confer status and as it began to lose its ability to confer wealth on the aristocracy, they looked elsewhere for these functions. In turn they began to lose interest in land, they felt less obliged to improve their estates or concerned about the inhabitants and as a result their paternalism deteriorated.

By looking elsewhere, they found non-agricultural investments to confer them with wealth, but nothing that could confer them with sort of status that land had hitherto. Furthermore these non-agricultural investments were largely passive, which meant the aristocrat could not become involved in the management of ventures. They therefore had no new jurisdiction in which to practice their paternalism. Only with regard to the railway ventures, were aristocrats able to have some involvement and hence the railway investments could confer status. Local railway investment and involvement was also a positive and entrepreneurial response to the agricultural depression.

On the whole, the wealth garnered through non-agricultural investments was not reinvested back into the landed estates. There were obvious economic reasons for not reinvesting heavily into their estates, principally that rental incomes and land values were

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<sup>384</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

<sup>385</sup> Holkham MSS., F/2E/22-24, Obituaries of the second earl

falling, which meant that agriculture was no longer a prosperous venture. It seems the largest proportions of the wealth generated by Leicester's non-agricultural ventures were reinvested back into more of the same concerns in order to generate even greater wealth. That said some of this surplus wealth was clearly spent on benevolent patronage and charitable donations. Leicester found public health schemes to be a particularly worthy beneficiary of a sizeable proportion of the wealth he had amassed through his shrewd investments. In this sense, while paternalism may have been negatively affected by non-agricultural investments and the failure of landowners to reinvest this wealth into their estates, Leicester provides an example of an aristocrat who used his increasingly bountiful wealth for traditionally paternalist preoccupations like philanthropy and benevolence. By continuing to patronise organisations and institutions for the benefit of the locality, it is possible that Leicester may have enabled paternalism to survive for longer and prolonged its ultimate decline.

In terms of Hunt and Pam's criteria, Leicester's was a 'managerial' response to the depression. In accord with his sense of duty and desire to maintain his patriarchal relationships with his tenants, he reduced rents on the estate and maintained long term estate improvement expenditure. Elements of Leicester's investments, particularly in local railways, were 'entrepreneurial' in that they improved estate infrastructure and potentially opened new markets for his tenants' produce. However, Leicester's response to the depression was predominantly self-interested, in that he was amassing personal wealth to supplement his rental income while his tenants, without innovative leadership, were left to struggle with the depression almost alone.

Leicester was representative of the aristocracy in that he was following wider trends of aristocratic investment. Yet was his experience the most common way for an aristocrat to adapt to the conditions of agricultural depression? Were passive colonial investments the only ones which could give the aristocracy large and secure returns? Or were any other aristocrats investing in ventures which enabled them to practice their paternalism? The ensuing chapter will attempt to answer these questions.

### **Chapter 3 – ‘One of the finest flowers of the Victorian nobility’: William Cavendish, seventh duke of Devonshire and his industrial ventures in Furness**

Upon inheriting the dukedom and its estates in 1858, William Cavendish, the seventh duke of Devonshire’s total accumulated debts stood at £1million.<sup>386</sup> Virtually all of it was inherited debt. In 1834, alongside inheriting the Burlington title and estates, he had inherited £250,000 worth of debt from his grandfather, the first earl of Burlington, who had made extremely ambitious purchases of land throughout his lifetime.<sup>387</sup> The rest he inherited in 1858 from his cousin and predecessor, the sixth duke of Devonshire, who had lived exceptionally extravagantly and had ‘epitomized the Regency world of self-indulgence’.<sup>388</sup>

Devonshire, a first Smith’s prizeman in Mathematics at Cambridge, immediately set about attempting to reduce his debts by embarking on a policy of strict frugality in the management of his estates and by investing surplus wealth into industrial enterprises in Barrow-in-Furness.<sup>389</sup> At first his strategy was remarkably successful, particularly due to the impressive returns from the Barrow industries and he built for himself a reputation of being the prime example of an ‘industrious, abstemious, virtuous, public-spirited, mid-Victorian aristocrat’.<sup>390</sup> Yet after Barrow’s industries suffered a massive crash, he died in 1891 leaving his son and successor with accumulated total debts worth £2million.

On a superficial level the story displays some of the difficult personal circumstances that the aristocracy were forced to respond to, alongside the wider political, social and economic challenges facing them. Yet on another level Devonshire’s example highlights the risks the aristocracy took in attempting to adapt to the new epoch.

In Devonshire’s case these personal circumstances were his encumbrances and the necessity of reducing them. These circumstances have important ramifications upon a study of paternalism during the agricultural depression. What affect did Devonshire’s attempts at

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<sup>386</sup> F. M. L. Thompson, ‘Cavendish, William, seventh duke of Devonshire (1808-1891), landowner and industrialist’, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.york.ac.uk/view/article/4950> (accessed on 29 September 2012)

<sup>387</sup> Thompson, ‘Cavendish, William, seventh duke of Devonshire (1808-1891), landowner and industrialist’,

<sup>388</sup> David Cannadine, ‘The Landowner as Millionaire: The Finances of the Dukes of Devonshire, c.1800-c.1926,’ *Agricultural Historical Review*, 25 (1977), p.83

<sup>389</sup> Thompson, ‘Cavendish, William, seventh duke of Devonshire (1808-1891), landowner and industrialist’,

<sup>390</sup> Thompson, ‘Cavendish, William, seventh duke of Devonshire (1808-1891), landowner and industrialist’,

greater frugality in the management of his estates have on his ability to display paternalism? Was Devonshire really influenced by paternalism or was he just concerned with reducing his debts? Why did Devonshire invest in industry in the Furness area rather than following the trend among the wider aristocracy in making less risky and more passive investments? Was Devonshire actively involved in these industries or merely an aloof investor? Did he display a paternal sense of duty in his involvement with Barrow industry? How did he respond when Barrow's industries suffered such a massive crash?

Like Leicester, and unlike Chaplin, Devonshire had 'no political talent or ambition'.<sup>391</sup> He was also, like Leicester in his later life, socially reclusive, avoiding 'the frenetic whirl of high society' and 'reserving his public life for more serious and uplifting pursuits'.<sup>392</sup> John Pearson claims that Devonshire was never concerned with birth and tradition or pomp and circumstance and that 'by nature and by habit he was profoundly middle-class' and in this he was again similar to Leicester.<sup>393</sup> He was also religiously devoted and in his early adult life he was 'happiest when reading Wesley's sermons' with his wife Blanche.<sup>394</sup> As a result Devonshire was desolated by her death at such a young age in 1840. F. M. L. Thompson claims that following Blanche's death Devonshire 'threw himself into the serious and useful work of the personal management of his estates which was to occupy the rest of his life'.<sup>395</sup>

Devonshire particularly concerned himself with his Burlington property in Lancashire, to which he had grown up as heir and had owned for 24 years before inheriting the dukedom of Devonshire. In 1843, together with the Duke of Buccleuch, he played a leading part in launching the Furness railway, which 'was designed to facilitate the transport of their slate and iron ore to the coast at the village of Barrow'.<sup>396</sup>

Upon realising the level of debt he had inherited in 1858, Devonshire quickly developed a twofold strategy for reducing it. Firstly he attempted to reduce the cost of the

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<sup>391</sup> Thompson, 'Cavendish, William, seventh duke of Devonshire (1808-1891), landowner and industrialist',

<sup>392</sup> Thompson, 'Cavendish, William, seventh duke of Devonshire (1808-1891), landowner and industrialist', Cannadine, 'The Landowner as Millionaire: The Finances of the Dukes of Devonshire, c.1800-c.1926', p.83

<sup>393</sup> John Pearson, *The Serpent and the Stag*, (Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, New York, 1984), p.209

<sup>394</sup> Thompson, 'Cavendish, William, seventh duke of Devonshire (1808-1891), landowner and industrialist',

<sup>395</sup> Thompson, 'Cavendish, William, seventh duke of Devonshire (1808-1891), landowner and industrialist',

<sup>396</sup> Thompson, 'Cavendish, William, seventh duke of Devonshire (1808-1891), landowner and industrialist',

running of his estates, by endorsing a policy of strict frugality amongst his various agents. However, as will be seen he was largely unsuccessful in this, especially when the agricultural depression reduced his rental income and his paternal sense of duty prevented him from reducing estate investment levels or patronage expenditure. Secondly he embarked upon a long term investment campaign in industry in Furness. Thompson claims that the Furness ventures were nothing less than ‘the creation, virtually from scratch, of a whole new industrial district, and the duke found himself... drawn into the leadership of this process’.<sup>397</sup> His investments stretched to nearly all of Barrow’s industries, including the Furness Railway Company, the Haematite Steel Company, Barrow Docks, a Shipbuilding Company and a Flax and Jute Mill. ‘He never adopted a rentier attitude’ towards these possessions; ‘far from simply pocketing his mineral royalties and railway dividends he regarded it as a matter of self-interest and moral duty to use them to finance the further development of the region’.<sup>398</sup> In the early 1870s, the peak years of Barrow’s industrial success, Devonshire had attained for himself a dividend income that almost matched the income from his colossal estates, as well as greater status and a reputation among his contemporaries for being “‘one of the finest flowers of the Victorian nobility’”.<sup>399</sup> This was perhaps because those around him believed that he had successfully shown a way in which the aristocracy could adapt their roles to the new age.

Yet Barrow’s prosperity was to be short lived as it was hit particularly hard by a slump in the British economy and the ending of the ‘Bessemer boom’ in the steel industry. Devonshire did not desert Barrow in her time of need and continued to invest enormous amounts of capital into the industries, almost at a total loss, in an effort to buoy up the town and prevent the effects of devastating unemployment and economic distress. As a result, ‘the great entrepreneurial saviour of the family fortunes had been transformed into the source of embarrassments much more severe than those caused by the sixth duke’.<sup>400</sup>

David Cannadine has presented Devonshire as a business-minded aristocrat, with a profoundly middle class sensibility, who, other than investing capital, tended to remain aloof

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<sup>397</sup> Thompson, ‘Cavendish, William, seventh duke of Devonshire (1808-1891), landowner and industrialist,’

<sup>398</sup> Thompson, ‘Cavendish, William, seventh duke of Devonshire (1808-1891), landowner and industrialist,’

<sup>399</sup> Cannadine, ‘The Landowner as Millionaire: The Finances of the Dukes of Devonshire, c.1800-c.1926,’ pp.83-84

<sup>400</sup> Thompson, ‘Cavendish, William, seventh duke of Devonshire (1808-1891), landowner and industrialist,’

of the routine concerns of his estate and industrial interests.<sup>401</sup> J. D. Marshall has gone one step further in arguing that Devonshire did not practice or display paternalism at all.<sup>402</sup> This chapter will agree that Devonshire was of a different character to most aristocrats in that he was reclusive, academic, business-minded and influenced by middle class virtues. Yet it will be the aim of this chapter to reassert the importance of paternalism as an influence upon Devonshire with regard to both the management of his estates and his industrial concerns in Barrow. As will be seen, Devonshire's paternalism is particularly important when attempting to explain why he continued to invest in Barrow industry when he knew it would lead to such severe personal financial embarrassment.

The chapter will be divided into three sections. The first section will be devoted to the management of Devonshire's enormous and widely scattered estates. It will detail the management structure and attempt to describe the level of Devonshire's personal involvement. It will argue that, in line with the aristocracy at large, Devonshire's response to the agricultural depression was 'managerial', in that he dropped rents and maintained expenditure. Devonshire also increased patronage expenditure, which is highly suggestive of his paternal influences, especially when viewed alongside his desire for greater economies to be made on his estates. The second section will argue that Devonshire's paternalism was most obviously evident in his saving Barrow from economic ruin following its crash in the mid 1870s, as well as discuss Devonshire's level of involvement, besides investment, in his industrial ventures. The chapter will conclude that Devonshire's involvement in Barrow industry is evidence of the aristocracy attempting to adapt their roles and paternalism to the challenges facing them. By failing and draining the family of such enormous wealth, Devonshire's Barrow experiment was ultimately damaging to paternalism and the status of the family, as his successors were forced to sell off land and embark upon much stricter retrenchment policies.

## I

On 14 November 1885, Mr Hattersley, a Chatsworth tenant, wrote to the Devonshire with a list of over 40 tenants' signatures, who had 'unanimously agreed... in consequence of the very depressed state of agriculture in all its branches and... the very low prices in Stock and

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<sup>401</sup> Cannadine, 'The Landowner as Millionaire: The Finances of the Dukes of Devonshire, c.1800-c.1926,' pp.83-84

<sup>402</sup> J. D. Marshall, *Furness and the Industrial Revolution: An Economic History of Furness (1711-1900) and the Town of Barrow (1757-1897) With An Epilogue*, (James Milner Ltd for the Barrow-In-Furness Library and Museum Committee, Barrow-In-Furness, 1958), p.351

Produce', to ask for a 'substantial return' to enable them to meet the next rent audit.<sup>403</sup> Hattersley added that they felt that 'the ten per cent is not sufficient these hard times', indicating that rents had already been reduced.<sup>404</sup> Before replying to Hattersley, Devonshire had his agents draw up lists detailing his expenditure on each of the 40 tenants' farms for improvements such as new buildings, repairs to existing buildings and draining, over the seven years between 1879 and 1885.<sup>405</sup>

Devonshire then wrote back to Hattersley on 24 November 1885 and was careful to send a copy to every tenant who had signed the memorial:

The memorial signed by yourself and forty five other Tenants on my Chatsworth Estate has received my earnest consideration.

The continued agricultural depression I am well aware must be a source of much anxiety to my Tenants, and I hope I need not say that they have my sincere sympathy in these trying times.

I have felt it to be my duty and it has been a pleasure to me to give practical proof of this sympathy by the expenditure of large sums on the improvement of their holdings, and I find that during the last 7 years I have expended £13,500 or 34 per cent annually of the gross rentals of the farms of those who have signed the memorial... I also find that the rents on my Chatsworth Estate have not been increased except in a few special cases during the last 27 years, and I believe the holdings are reasonably rented.

Under these circumstances I cannot consider myself called upon to alter my decision as to the amount of return to be given at the coming rent audit.

It has always been a satisfaction to me to believe with regard to my Tenants that there was a mutual feeling of entire trust between us, and it would be a great grief to me were it otherwise, and should these trying times continue, I shall think it my duty again to consider the question of giving further assistance.<sup>406</sup>

Despite not granting the rent reductions his tenants had sought, Devonshire's response is still immersed in paternalist rhetoric. Words and phrases like "duty", "sympathy" and "mutual feeling of entire trust", display with some clarity the paternal sentiments that influenced Devonshire.

Previous historians, such as David Cannadine and Lindsay Proudfoot, have tended to present the seventh duke of Devonshire as an academic, business-like, 'prudent, sober, [and] moderate man', who found the 'responsibilities of his great position burdensome'.<sup>407</sup> True

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<sup>403</sup> Chatsworth MSS., L/93/147 – Tenants Memorial for Rent Reductions

<sup>404</sup> Chatsworth MSS., L/93/147 – Tenants Memorial for Rent Reductions

<sup>405</sup> Chatsworth MSS., L/93/147 – Tenants Memorial for Rent Reductions

<sup>406</sup> Chatsworth MSS., L/93/147 – Tenants Memorial for Rent Reductions

<sup>407</sup> Cannadine, 'The Landowner as Millionaire: The Finances of the Dukes of Devonshire, c.1800-c.1926,'

though these characteristics perhaps were, they have also underplayed the influence of paternalism upon him and presented him as somewhat of a reluctant paternalist. Proudfoot highlights a contrast between the seventh duke and his predecessor. She portrays the sixth duke as a paternal landlord, who ran his Irish estates 'in a way designed to ensure harmonious landlord-tenant relations rather than to maximise net income' and wished to "stand well in the country as a liberal employer of labour".<sup>408</sup> Against the sixth duke's paternalism, she presents the seventh duke as 'an austere man of evangelical persuasion', with a sombre and business-like tone and who couldn't be persuaded by sentiment.

The evidence presented here will attempt to reassess the influence of paternalism on the seventh duke's management of his landed estates. It will contend that paternalism was a greater influence upon the duke than has been previously been noted and that its influence upon the dukedom did not disintegrate upon the death of the sixth duke. While the seventh duke was certainly influenced by his academic background and business acumen, this only served to make his paternalism more cautious. Like his predecessors, Devonshire was always principally influenced by a paternal sense of duty towards the inhabitants of his estates and a desire to maintain or increase his social and political status, both nationally and in the localities.

This thesis is somewhat complicated by the circumstances that are individual to Devonshire's narrative. Not only was Devonshire faced with the problems entailed by being a landowner during the agricultural depression, namely the difficulties in attempting to alleviate the plight of his tenants, but his dukedom was also marred by the difficulties in having to free his family from the enormous level of debt left by his predecessor. To some degree he was trapped when trying to address both issues, as his resolutions to them were somewhat contradictory and competitive. While saving his tenants from the worst effects of depression meant maintaining estate expenditure and accepting a reduction in his rental income, removing the dukedom of its debts would require strict frugality and retrenchment in estate management.

Upon inheriting the dukedom in 1858, Devonshire was shocked and overwhelmed by the burden of having to sort out his predecessor's financial disorder. He wrote in his diary on 26 January 1858:

The income is large, but by far the greater part of it is absorbed by the payment of interest, annuities, and the expense of Chatsworth, leaving but a comparatively insignificant surplus, and much of this will at present be required for legacy and succession duties. This is a worse

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<sup>408</sup> Lindsay Proudfoot, 'The Management of a Great Estate: Patronage, Income and Expenditure on the Duke of Devonshire's Irish property c.1816 to c.1891,' *Irish Economic & Social History*, 13 (1986), p.48

condition of matters than I had expected, although from knowing the duke's ignorance of business, I did not expect to find them very flourishing.<sup>409</sup>

Perhaps evident of how overwhelmed he was by his inherited debts, he initially resolved to sell his Irish property (60,000 acres), as he was well aware that retrenchment alone would not make great inroads to his accumulated encumbrances.<sup>410</sup> Devonshire calculated that from a gross revenue of £200,000, his disposable income stood at a mere £50,000 approximately, because of the deductions for estate administration and maintenance, interest payments, annuities and other fixed charges. This £50,000 wasn't sufficient every year because of legacy and succession duties and other irregular burdens such as election expenses. He concluded that "my impression on the whole... is that my position is at present very insecure".<sup>411</sup> Yet, Devonshire was dissuaded from such drastic measures by the duke of Bedford. Bedford advised him that selling his Irish property would firstly diminish the social and political standing of the House of Cavendish and secondly he claimed that "a large estate, with such a rental as yours is soon brought round to an improved condition, as I have found in my own case".<sup>412</sup> As a result, extensive sales of land were not carried out by the Devonshire family until after the seventh duke had died and although the estate fluctuated in size with the continual small scale purchases and sales of land, we may maintain that it remained around 200,000 acres until the turn of the century.<sup>413</sup>

Devonshire instead resolved to pursue a policy of strict frugality and retrenchment in his estates' management, writing to Mr Currey, his agent, "great economies are everywhere necessary".<sup>414</sup> However, evidence to be presented here suggests that despite Devonshire's wish for retrenchment, this was never carried out at the expense of paternalism. As will be seen, greater frugality in estate management was more of an ambition than a reality under Devonshire, because he could never justify drastically cutting estate expenditure. Seeing the plight of his tenants during the agricultural depression prevented him from reducing expenditure and raising, or even maintaining, rents. One area where realistic and effective cuts

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<sup>409</sup> Cannadine, 'The Landowner as Millionaire: The Finances of the Dukes of Devonshire, c.1800-c.1926,' pp.83-84

<sup>410</sup> Cannadine, 'The Landowner as Millionaire: The Finances of the Dukes of Devonshire, c.1800-c.1926,' p.84

<sup>411</sup> Cannadine, 'The Landowner as Millionaire: The Finances of the Dukes of Devonshire, c.1800-c.1926,' p.84

<sup>412</sup> Cannadine, 'The Landowner as Millionaire: The Finances of the Dukes of Devonshire, c.1800-c.1926,' p.84

<sup>413</sup> Chatsworth MSS., L/10/54 – Letters from Giles Martin

<sup>414</sup> Pearson, *The Serpent and the Stag*, p.207

could have been made was in benevolent patronage expenditure but because of Devonshire's paternal influences, this was always avoided. His sense of duty and his desire to retain his family's status in the localities in which they owned estates, caused him to largely ignore his initial policy of frugality. Essentially he put the plight of his tenants before his own financial difficulties and paternalism provides an important part of the explanation for such self-sacrifice.

How then were the enormous Devonshire estates administered? Proudfoot claims the estates were managed by a 'highly stratified functional hierarchy'.<sup>415</sup> The senior figure at the top of this hierarchy, who was directly answerable to the Duke for the overall running of all the British and Irish estates, was the London-based auditor. Immediately responsible to him were the resident agents, stationed in the many different estates across Great Britain and Ireland and according to Proudfoot, 'direct communication between the duke and his... [resident agents] was relatively infrequent'.<sup>416</sup> Resident agents were responsible for routine administration, such as collecting rents, valuing property, overseeing improvements and enforcing lease covenants, but were 'expected to conduct business strictly in accordance with the broad principles of management agreed by the duke and his auditor and applied... throughout the English and Irish estates'.<sup>417</sup> Beneath the resident agent were often sub agents, although their number was dependent on the size of the estate in question.

Before the early nineteenth century, auditors had been 'substantial legal figures and landowners in their own right', but in 1827 Benjamin Currey was appointed as the first of three generations of his family to hold the post.<sup>418</sup> Unlike his predecessors, Currey was 'a member of the upper middle class. His appointment epitomised the new professionalism that was brought to the management of the Devonshire's estates, as 'the duke... sought to improve managerial efficiency'.<sup>419</sup> Members of the Currey family also filled the post of Lismore agent (resident agent in Ireland), between 1817 and 1885. This is somewhat unsurprising when we consider that over the course of the nineteenth century, the Currey family established themselves almost as an institution that was as dynastic as their family of employers. One must assume that by emphasising their shared history and tradition with the Devonshire and wider Cavendish family, they would have achieved greater power and influence than the typical land agent of a typical estate. Indeed, Devonshire's diary entries indicate that the two families were closer than a normal professional relationship would allow for. In 1848 Devonshire, then the

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<sup>415</sup> Proudfoot, 'The Management of a Great Estate...', p.45

<sup>416</sup> Proudfoot, 'The Management of a Great Estate...', p.37

<sup>417</sup> Proudfoot, 'The Management of a Great Estate...', p.37

<sup>418</sup> Proudfoot, 'The Management of a Great Estate...', p.35

<sup>419</sup> Proudfoot, 'The Management of a Great Estate...', p.35

second earl of Burlington, wrote: 'greatly grieved by the news of poor [Benjamin] Currey's death... He was a high minded and honourable man and I shall deeply feel his loss. The [sixth] Duke will feel it still more severely.'<sup>420</sup>

The institutionalisation of the Currey family into the dukedom's estate offices contributes to the argument presented throughout this thesis, that paternalism was facilitated on large estates by the dynasticity of families in all levels of the estate hierarchy. Not only was the ownership of an estate passed down through the generations of a family, so too were most of the tenancies of farms and the positions of responsibility for the estates' administration. This heightened the sense of shared experience on an estate and enabled a greater general acceptance of the hierarchical status quo. In becoming so well established, the Currey family will have secured greater influence, more responsibilities and more freedom in carrying out their work. They also likely built a firm understanding of the obligations expected of their employers by the estates' inhabitants. It is plausible therefore that the Currey's inherited some of their employers' sense of duty and that paternalism was to some degree being codified into the roles of the agent. As with the professional backgrounds of some of the agents on both Chaplin and Leicester's estates, one wonders whether paternalism was becoming more of a middle class preoccupation.

J. S. Donnelly claims that on Devonshire's Irish estates, 'rent increases were infrequent and relatively low'.<sup>421</sup> Lindsay Proudfoot goes further to claim that the very low levels of increase in the rent roll between 1816 and 1891 were even less than Donnelly initially proposed and that the rent roll 'displayed remarkable stability'.<sup>422</sup> Indeed in the abovementioned 1885 letter to his Chatsworth tenants, Devonshire was at pains to remind them that rents on the estate had 'not been increased except in a few special cases during the last 27 years'.<sup>423</sup>

It is true that in the letter recorded at the beginning of this section, Devonshire refused to grant his struggling tenants further rent reductions. His paternalism was certainly cautious. He felt justified in refusing their request because he had already given them a 10% reduction and spent 34% of the gross rentals on improvements to their farms. Yet he did concede that should conditions worsen, he would view it as his duty to consider again the question of 'giving further assistance'.<sup>424</sup> Further evidence suggests rents were reviewed and reduced after this episode in 1885. In a letter from Martin to the Duke, dated 17 May 1889, he writes 'it is necessary to know whether your Grace will kindly make the same allowance as the

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<sup>420</sup> Chatsworth MSS., seventh Duke of Devonshire's diaries, 14.03.1848

<sup>421</sup> Proudfoot, 'The Management of a Great Estate...', p.33

<sup>422</sup> Proudfoot, 'The Management of a Great Estate...', pp.39-40

<sup>423</sup> Chatsworth MSS., L/93/147 – Tenants Memorial for Rent Reductions

<sup>424</sup> Chatsworth MSS., L/93/147 – Tenants Memorial for Rent Reductions

last time viz. 15 P C [per cent] to the larger Tenants – the price of stock is considerably higher than last year but I am sorry to say a great number of the Tenants had a very little to sell and I doubt whether they ever required relief more than at the present time'.<sup>425</sup> This suggests that at some point between 1885 and 1888, rent reductions for some Chatsworth tenants were raised from 10% to 15%. It is very likely that all corners of the estate received rent reductions of some form, because we know that Devonshire's rental income was significantly reduced.

Despite trying to achieve greater frugality in estate management, Devonshire was only initially able to make significant cuts to expenditure. This was because the most sizable of the initial cuts were made to extraordinary expenditure, predominantly the expensive work at Lismore castle begun by his predecessor but abruptly stopped by the incoming seventh duke. Because of the irreducible nature of much of the remaining estate expenditure, 'the duke can be said to have been fortunate in having had this opportunity for cost-cutting'.<sup>426</sup> By stopping all extraordinary expenditure and by cutting the net cost of running the estate farm and woodland enterprises by nearly a third, total expenditure in Ireland fell from over £34,000 (63.3% of income) in 1858 to £19,000 (36.5% of income) in 1859.<sup>427</sup> As a result remittances grew to around £30,000 in 1861-62, when at over 53% of income they represented the largest proportion ever remitted.<sup>428</sup>

However, this was all short-lived. The agricultural depression and the progressive decline in prices following 1882, meant that rent reductions were much more permanent while expenditure remained relatively high.<sup>429</sup> The largest and most irreducible component of total annual expenditure on the Irish estates was by far the aggregate management cost, which under Devonshire averaged £16,115 or 32% of income.<sup>430</sup> Perhaps more potentially reducible was expenditure on improvements and it may have even seemed justifiable when rents were also being reduced. Proudfoot claims that cuts of this sort, as with cuts to patronage expenditure, were only theoretically possible and difficult to achieve in practice, because it was felt that the 6<sup>th</sup> Duke's generosity had 'gone a long way to ensuring harmonious landlord-tenant relations, and for this reason alone would have been difficult to shirk'.<sup>431</sup> However this wrongly implies that Devonshire actually wished to shirk his traditional paternal duty in an attempt to achieve greater frugality. Undoubtedly one might argue that Devonshire

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<sup>425</sup> Chatsworth MSS., L/10/54 – Letters from Giles Martin

<sup>426</sup> Proudfoot, 'The Management of a Great Estate...', p.51

<sup>427</sup> Proudfoot, 'The Management of a Great Estate...', p.51

<sup>428</sup> Proudfoot, 'The Management of a Great Estate...', p.51

<sup>429</sup> Proudfoot, 'The Management of a Great Estate...', p.51

<sup>430</sup> Proudfoot, 'The Management of a Great Estate...', pp.45 & 51

<sup>431</sup> Proudfoot, 'The Management of a Great Estate...', p.51

maintained improvement expenditure for fearing that any harm to landlord-tenant relations would precipitate potentially greater monetary costs. Yet this is unlikely, as it does not account for why patronage expenditure was increased under the seventh duke, from that of the 'lavish' and 'generous' sixth duke (which will be dealt with in greater detail shortly). Clearly Devonshire was guided by both a paternal sense of responsibility to his tenants and a desire that by encouraging harmonious landlord-tenant relations, the social and political status of the House of Cavendish, could be maintained and improved.

Having in his possession such a huge acreage spread across so great an area and a 'highly stratified functional hierarchy' of estate administrators, has caused some historians to present Devonshire as aloof and rather uninvolved with his estates' management. While direct communication between him and his Irish estate office may have been scarce, evidence within the Chatsworth records indicates that Devonshire maintained a high level of interest in the routine administration of his English estates, particularly in Derbyshire and Yorkshire. Agents, like Martin, clearly felt obliged to keep Devonshire well informed of the condition of his tenants, improvements to be made, duties to be performed and events as they occurred. In a letter dated 5 April 1889, Martin writes: 'My Lord Duke... The high price of stock will help the Tenants who are breeders but some of the larger ones are in great fear there will be no profit this year as they will have to purchase at such a great price.'<sup>432</sup> In another dated 19 January 1889, Martin advises that the duke should contribute £50 to a footpath at Bolton Abbey (in Yorkshire), because it 'will be a great convenience and comfort to many of Your Grace's Tenants'.<sup>433</sup> In March of the same year Martin could not see 'how we could longer defer building a New House for Shaw at Monsal Dale – the old one is completely worn out and beyond repair' and sought Devonshire's approval to go ahead with the building at a cost of £620.<sup>434</sup>

Devonshire displayed a similar level of involvement with the dispensation of patronage. On

22<sup>nd</sup> January 1889, Martin wrote to Devonshire: 'I have made enquiries regarding the concert the Revd C H Fisher is promoting. I find it is to be a good one and Your Grace may safely become a patron.' The letter goes on 'the womens' club is held at a low beer house in the village and is reputed to me as not being worthy of support'.<sup>435</sup> A month later he writes again: 'I find the reading room at Appletrewick is in the hands of very respectable people therefore I

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<sup>432</sup> Chatsworth MSS., L/10/54 – Letters from Giles Martin

<sup>433</sup> Chatsworth MSS., L/10/54 – Letters from Giles Martin

<sup>434</sup> Chatsworth MSS., L/10/54 – Letters from Giles Martin

<sup>435</sup> Chatsworth MSS., L/10/54 – Letters from Giles Martin

have sent a Donation of £1 in accordance with Your Grace's letter'.<sup>436</sup> Devonshire was cautious in dispensing his patronage. Indeed paternalism was not the indiscriminate provision of welfare; as the Victorian aristocracy preferred to profess the virtues of self-help. Instead, paternalism was selective. The recipient causes and charities often reflected the aristocrat's own interests and opinions. Devonshire, as a highly educated and devoutly religious man, preferred institutions like reading rooms aimed at enabling the working classes to better themselves via education or churches. As a paternalist, he would have been wary of any organisations that could potentially divide rural society by promoting class agitation, hence ensuring that the organisations he supported were run by respectable people or clergymen. As we shall later see, Devonshire also held a particular aversion to drunkenness, which partly explains his agent not finding the womens' club worthy of support.

Even a brief glance at estate accounts will give a variety of examples of the charities and organisations which successfully garnered Devonshire's support. The Chatsworth 1861 accounts reveal that a total of £205.19.1 was paid to a variety of beneficiaries including small sums paid to five separate poor men, one of whom had lost his cow, £21 to Sheffield Infirmary, £25 to Revd J Aldred towards the erection of an infant school at Dore, £20 to the Bakewell Band and £2 for the Darley Provident Society.<sup>437</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly we find the totals for donations and subscriptions in later years to have increased on the Chatsworth Estate. In 1884 the donations total was £556.4.9, while in 1886 it was £574.4.5.<sup>438</sup> In over 20 years the money spent on donations on the Chatsworth estate more than doubled. Doubtless, charitable expenditure increased alongside the prosperity of Devonshire's industrial enterprises and agricultural land as it went through its 'golden years'. Yet what is important to note is that during the ensuing financial crises in both Devonshire's agricultural and industrial enterprises, charitable expenditure remained high. Here, an understanding of duty dictated the necessity to maintain relief expenditure in harsh economic conditions, in spite of the duke's own financial difficulties.

While Proudfoot argues that Devonshire was less paternal than his predecessor, her evidence shows that expenditure on patronage also rose in Ireland under the seventh duke.<sup>439</sup> Patronage expenditure, which Proudfoot describes as donations and subscriptions to churches, chapels and charities, grew from an average of £1884 per year (or 4.4% of income) under the sixth duke to £2390 per year (or 4.7% of income) under the seventh duke. This suggests that

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<sup>436</sup> Chatsworth MSS., L/10/54 – Letters from Giles Martin

<sup>437</sup> Chatsworth MSS., Chatsworth Accountbook 1861

<sup>438</sup> Chatsworth MSS., Chatsworth Accountbooks 1884 & 1886

<sup>439</sup> Proudfoot, 'The Management of a Great Estate...', pp.49-51

the increase in patronage expenditure was general and wide-ranging, encompassing most or all of his estates across Great Britain and Ireland.

Devonshire's response to the agricultural depression was largely a 'managerial' one. Although he was certainly cautious with regard to his financial position and when making decisions that would directly affect it, evidence here presented shows that he still carried out the duties that were expected of a landlord to ease the burden on his tenants. He reduced rents and maintained expenditure across his estates and did this despite originally striving for frugality in the management of his estates. Devonshire had his own severe financial problems associated with the debt he inherited from his predecessor and his plan for reducing his debt was twofold. Firstly he attempted to embark upon a policy of retrenchment across his estates. This section has showed that this policy largely failed. Devonshire's own sense of duty to his tenants and his desire to retain his local and national status was too great to allow him to proceed with the extensive retrenchment that was necessary to making any difference to his debt. Moreover, Devonshire was not, as he has been previously portrayed, a 'reluctant' paternalist. He was actively involved in most aspects of the management of his estates and the dispensation of benevolence and patronage. The second part of Devonshire's plan to reduce his debts was to invest heavily in industry in Barrow-in-Furness, in the hope that the returns would be great enough to pay off his debts. The ensuing section will focus on this activity and note whether it was successful.

## II

At its peak in 1874, Devonshire's current income had grown to a vast £310,000, which made him 'probably the richest man in the land'.<sup>440</sup> Of this, £141,000 came from his net estate rental, whilst £169,000 came from dividends.<sup>441</sup> 90% of Devonshire's dividend income came from his Barrow-in-Furness ventures.<sup>442</sup> The huge return Devonshire received from the Barrow industries was justified. He had continued to invest heavily in the fledgling town and its industries since before inheriting the dukedom and had involved himself in most aspects of providing for the town's swift growth. As a result Barrow had gone from a small village of 150

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<sup>440</sup> Cannadine, 'The Landowner as Millionaire: The Finances of the Dukes of Devonshire, c.1800-c.1926,' pp.84-85, Thompson, 'Cavendish, William, seventh duke of Devonshire (1808-1891), landowner and industrialist,'

<sup>441</sup> Cannadine, 'The Landowner as Millionaire: The Finances of the Dukes of Devonshire, c.1800-c.1926,' p.94

<sup>442</sup> Cannadine, 'The Landowner as Millionaire: The Finances of the Dukes of Devonshire, c.1800-c.1926,' p.94

inhabitants in 1846 to an industrial hub town of more than 40,000 in 1874 and over 57,000 in 1891.<sup>443</sup> For all its successes, Devonshire's involvement in the Barrow industries did not principally facilitate the reduction of his debt. Although the amount of current income apportioned to service his debts fell from 40% in 1861 to its lowest position of 26% in 1874, his total indebtedness remained relatively static until the late sixties.<sup>444</sup> This was due to the severity of the debts he inherited from his predecessor, his reinvestment of such large portions of his income back into the Barrow enterprises and the necessity for fresh borrowing these investments continued to create.<sup>445</sup> If the industrial prosperity Barrow had achieved in 1874 had continued, then there is little doubt Devonshire would have not only paid off his debts but amassed a fortune to secure the House of Cavendish immense status and influence for many generations thereafter.

However, the prosperity enjoyed by Barrow was to be momentary. As British industry fell into a slump along with agriculture in the mid-1870s, Barrow was hit particularly hard for four different reasons. Firstly, the many Barrow works undertaken carried with them unbearable overheads, because they had mostly been erected at maximum cost 'under conditions of boom and labour shortage'.<sup>446</sup> Secondly, the market for Barrow haematite iron ore began to give out as the transport of foreign haematite was cheapened and new methods allowed for the use of inferior native ores.<sup>447</sup> Thirdly, the enormous market in America for Barrow's main export, Bessemer rail, completely collapsed.<sup>448</sup> And finally, Barrow docks had been erected on a scale that even under the most favourable conditions it could not justify.<sup>449</sup>

Not all of the implications of these misfortunes were at first fully appreciated and their affects did not set in simultaneously. 1880 to 1883 saw a mild local boom, but by 1886 'panic had gripped Barrow's leading industrialists'.<sup>450</sup> Yet as early as 1874, virtually all the internal sources of capital, drawn from Furness ore and railway revenue, had dried up and Barrow's

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<sup>443</sup> Cannadine, 'The Landowner as Millionaire: The Finances of the Dukes of Devonshire, c.1800-c.1926,' p.85, Marshall, *Furness and the Industrial Revolution*, p.45

<sup>444</sup> Cannadine, 'The Landowner as Millionaire: The Finances of the Dukes of Devonshire, c.1800-c.1926,' pp.84-85

<sup>445</sup> Thompson, 'Cavendish, William, seventh duke of Devonshire (1808-1891), landowner and industrialist,'

<sup>446</sup> Sidney Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' *Economic History Review*, 8:2 (1955), p.216

<sup>447</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' p.216

<sup>448</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' p.216

<sup>449</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' p.216

<sup>450</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' pp.216-217

many half-finished enterprises, employing thousands of immigrant workers, were in danger of complete collapse. 'Almost overnight the frightening responsibility of keeping the top-heavy structure going was thrown on the ageing Duke of Devonshire.'<sup>451</sup> It will here be argued that his investment and involvement was to be of more importance to Barrow during its decline than during its rise.

The first of Barrow's industries to fail was the Shipyard Company, whose survival in 1875 was in severe danger. Not only did Devonshire buy £200,000 of new shares, he also extended his existing holdings in the company and that of his family, totalling the Devonshire contribution to over £300,000.<sup>452</sup> Yet in 1877 Devonshire wrote in his diary: 'it will clearly be necessary for me to find a great deal of money to prevent a smash'.<sup>453</sup> A year later all shares were written down from £25 to £10 and nearly £270,000 new share capital was created, of which Devonshire took £200,000 instantly and the rest by 1883 after buying out other shareholders.<sup>454</sup> Thankfully the company averted complete collapse when, in 1887, a syndicate agreed to take control and turn the yard from 'the risky and competitive building of merchant ships to the sheltered and cartelized production of men-of-war'.<sup>455</sup>

The Flax and Jute Mill, formed only in 1874, faced similar financial problems and relied again on Devonshire's funds to buoy it up. In 1877, Devonshire had to contribute £150,000 in 'B' (deferred) shares.<sup>456</sup> By 1880 Devonshire considered this initial capital to be 'lost' and bought shares from smaller holders at a significantly reduced price.<sup>457</sup> When in 1882, powers were taken to raise £150,000 in £1 shares, Devonshire bought £87,000 of them at once and was credited with a further 32,000 for a loan which the company was unable to repay.<sup>458</sup> It was finally wound up in 1893, following Devonshire's death.<sup>459</sup>

Pollard claims that in spite of his role as the main financial lifeline to Barrow's crumbling industries, 'it also fell largely to Devonshire to consider at the same time the complex of interrelated industries as a whole'.<sup>460</sup> In 1875 Devonshire attempted a sale of the Furness Railway to free up capital for the financial support of other firms, but not enough

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<sup>451</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' p.217

<sup>452</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' p.217

<sup>453</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' p.217

<sup>454</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' p.217

<sup>455</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' p.217

<sup>456</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' p.218

<sup>457</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' p.218

<sup>458</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' p.218

<sup>459</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' p.218

<sup>460</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' p.218

interest could be garnered.<sup>461</sup> In 1876 an effort was made to end the general indebtedness to the banks. When it ultimately failed and the London and Westminster Bank refused to extend any further credit, Devonshire capital became Barrow's only lifeline.<sup>462</sup>

The story of Devonshire's involvement in trying to save Barrow from the worst extremes of an economic crash is one that has already been well narrated by historians including David Cannadine and Sidney Pollard. While they have successfully accounted for how he tried to keep Barrow afloat by flooding her industries with capital and plunging himself even further into debt, they have failed to account for why he did so. Why then didn't Devonshire pull out of Barrow's industries when the depression hit?

J. D. Marshall has accusingly claimed that 'in purely business terms he [Devonshire] undoubtedly gained far more than he lost, even though large sums of money appeared on both sides of the account books'.<sup>463</sup> It is true that Devonshire made significant financial gains from royalties for the Park Mine's use of his land.<sup>464</sup> Yet it is unfathomable how Marshall could claim Devonshire gained more than he lost considering how much wealth he invested and lost during Barrow's industrial decline, as mentioned above. As a result, he bequeathed over £2million of debt to his successor. Economic expediency clearly cannot be held accountable for Devonshire's actions during Barrow's decline. As Pollard informs us, Devonshire was not even a majority shareholder in any of the Barrow companies before the collapse and had the potential to gain much more from the enterprises than he actually did. His family only owned 26.1% of the Flax and Jute Mill in 1871 and 29.3% of the Shipbuilding Company and 12.5% of the Barrow Ocean Steamship Company in 1872.<sup>465</sup> It was only buoying up the companies during Barrow's decline that made him a majority shareholder in them, owning 95.9% of the Shipbuilding Co. and 98.1% of the Flax and Jute Mill in 1886. Yet by this time they had significantly reduced in value and were virtually worthless to him. Only the Haematite Steel Company was still comparatively successful and faintly prosperous and here Devonshire owned only 33.7% in 1886.<sup>466</sup>

We cannot realistically blame Devonshire's poor financial decisions on unsound advice he received from his agents and others, as his son Lord Hartington would do upon succeeding

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<sup>461</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' p.218

<sup>462</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' pp.218-219

<sup>463</sup> Marshall, *Furness and the Industrial Revolution*, p.396

<sup>464</sup> Marshall, *Furness and the Industrial Revolution*, p.396

<sup>465</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' p.216

<sup>466</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' p.218

his father to the dukedom.<sup>467</sup> Devonshire's diaries repeatedly mention the advice he received to drastically reduce his expenditure in Barrow and often to pull out altogether.<sup>468</sup> Besides, a prizewinning Cambridge mathematician and a man who had hitherto built a reputation for entrepreneurship, should hardly require advice in order to realise his decision to continually prop up Barrow's failing industries would be disastrous to his family's financial position.

A convincing argument surrounding Devonshire's lack of foresight may be put forward. It is true that landlords and captains of industry in the time of agricultural and industrial depression were unaware of how long it would last before their enterprises picked up and became prosperous again. In this sense, perhaps Devonshire invested in the hope that business would pick up and he would reap the benefits. Yet such an argument could only account for continued investment at the beginning of such a depression and not the investments that Devonshire continued to make throughout the 1870s and 1880s. Devonshire's diary entries at this time were almost always gloomy, with statements like 'it will clearly be necessary for me to find a great deal of money to prevent a smash' appearing very frequently.<sup>469</sup> He clearly understood that by pouring capital into the failing industries, he was merely preventing a total crash and accepted that he was highly unlikely to see decent returns on his investments again during his own lifetime.<sup>470</sup> And yet he continued to invest.

It is the contention here that Devonshire's motivation for continuing to invest to save Barrow's industries from complete collapse, despite severely damaging his family's financial position, was paternalism. Indeed, Pollard implies that 'paternal feelings' were a cause and claims that 'it could not be fully appreciated at the time how much his sense of responsibility and his resources contributed to the survival of Barrow'.<sup>471</sup> Paternalism was in itself an inherent sense of duty or responsibility and it is difficult to see how any other motivation held more influence on Devonshire's actions. His continued investment in Barrow provided him with an opportunity to have a profound effect on the lives of thousands of workers and inhabitants of the town by keeping them employed and trying to prevent the worst effects of the depression from falling upon their shoulders. Devonshire viewed the town's inhabitants in much the same way that he viewed the inhabitants of his own landed estates, as Pollard claims

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<sup>467</sup> Cannadine, 'The Landowner as Millionaire: The Finances of the Dukes of Devonshire, c.1800-c.1926,' p.89

<sup>468</sup> Chatsworth MSS., seventh Duke of Devonshire's diaries

<sup>469</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' p.217

<sup>470</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' pp.216-221

<sup>471</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' pp.217, 221

'his approach to their problems did not greatly differ from that of many of his landowning forebears'.<sup>472</sup>

It is well known that the aristocracy strived to achieve greater status, both locally and nationally. Paternalism was influenced by this desire for status and could often provide the means for obtaining it. His involvement in Barrow had initially conferred on Devonshire great status, hence the contemporary claim that he was "'one of the finest flowers of the Victorian nobility'".<sup>473</sup> In this sense perhaps Devonshire was trying to secure his reputation and legacy on his noble endeavours to establish Barrow as a British industrial hub with the potential to further the economy of the nation as a whole. And yet as Thompson claims, in his old age 'the great entrepreneurial saviour of the family fortunes had been transformed into the source of embarrassments much more severe than those caused by the sixth duke'.<sup>474</sup> However Devonshire was likely the only person of those associated with Barrow who was capable of securing credit for the capital required to prop up the failing industries. If he had refused to help Barrow during its darkest days then his status, reputation and legacy could have been far more damaged than any personal financial embarrassment could have caused.

It is interesting that a duke of Devonshire, as the patriarch of one of the most wealthy and well established landed families within the British aristocracy, should choose to concern himself and invest heavily in industry, when the much more common experience during the nineteenth century was for captains of industry to invest in agriculture in order to become 'landed'. To increase one's status and influence is the most feasible explanation behind the latter trend and as a sign of the changes that were occurring particularly in the late nineteenth century, this could also account for the former example. Clearly Devonshire had to find or create an additional source of income in order to solve his debt problems, but discounting the obvious potential for industrial development in the Furness area, why did Devonshire choose to invest so heavily in industry at Barrow and not in something else? Why didn't he follow Leicester and the many other aristocrats' example and passively invest in colonial railways, banks and mines? Or why didn't he follow the Duke of Westminster's example and build himself a property empire?

Firstly, Devonshire held a close affinity to the Furness area. Not only did he spend most of his life residing at Holkher Hall in the nearby Cartmel region of Lancashire, but he had also become a principal landowner in the area at the age of 26, when in 1834 he inherited the

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<sup>472</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' p.221

<sup>473</sup> Cannadine, 'The Landowner as Millionaire: The Finances of the Dukes of Devonshire, c.1800-c.1926,' p.83&84

<sup>474</sup> Thompson, 'Cavendish, William, seventh duke of Devonshire (1808-1891), landowner and industrialist,'

Burlington title and estates.<sup>475</sup> Financial expediency was also important. Devonshire's dividend income of over £169,000 in its peak year of 1874, displays how profitable Barrow's industries could be and Devonshire obviously hoped this situation would improve even further. Devonshire was also a reclusive but academic man with a deep interest in science and engineering. His keen involvement in not only the finances of Barrow's industries but also their day-to-day running gave him much pleasure, especially considering his distaste for politics and high society. And finally status must be considered a pivotal reason for his initial decision to invest in Barrow. While Leicester's passive investments and Westminster's property interests certainly helped them to increase their wealth, such activity didn't necessarily improve their status, as, other than their investment, there was little opportunity for them to become involved in the ventures. As a result their skills and experience, and their paternalism, became redundant. Devonshire, on the other hand, invested in industrial concerns, to which he could also invest his time, effort, skills, experience and paternalism and in becoming so involved with the 'creation, virtually from scratch, of a whole new industrial district', he could attain greater status.<sup>476</sup>

Furthermore, Pollard has suggested that Devonshire's approach to Barrow 'did not greatly differ from that of many of his landowning forebears'.<sup>477</sup> Therefore his involvement with Barrow enabled the traditional rural paternalism displayed on agricultural estates to be adapted to an industrial arena, and this gave Devonshire 'a constant and extraordinarily ambitious role to play in Victorian society'.<sup>478</sup> As John Pearson claims, Devonshire felt that the aristocracy needed to be 'useful' in order to survive – 'and what better way of being useful than in making money?'<sup>479</sup> By doing so, aristocrats could 'create prosperity and fresh employment...[and]... in enriching themselves,... [they] would also enrich all classes of society and thus provide a true "community of interests" to unite the country'.<sup>480</sup>

Yet other historians have been critical of the level of involvement Devonshire displayed with his Barrow enterprises, presenting him as aloof, uninvolved and unconcerned by the routine management of his interests and considerate of only his general financial position. Cannadine has claimed that the rise of Barrow was directed by Robert Hannay, H. W.

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<sup>475</sup> Thompson, 'Cavendish, William, seventh duke of Devonshire (1808-1891), landowner and industrialist,'

<sup>476</sup> Thompson, 'Cavendish, William, seventh duke of Devonshire (1808-1891), landowner and industrialist,'

<sup>477</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' p.221

<sup>478</sup> Pearson, *The Serpent and the Stag*, p.207

<sup>479</sup> Pearson, *The Serpent and the Stag*, p.209

<sup>480</sup> Pearson, *The Serpent and the Stag*, p.209

Schneider, Sir James Ramsden and the Curreys, 'with the seventh duke himself hovering in the background'.<sup>481</sup> However, Professor Pollard counters this argument by claiming that Devonshire 'was much more than a figurehead' and instead was involved in the 'active management' of his industrial concerns.<sup>482</sup> Local historian J. D. Marshall goes even further than Cannadine by arguing that not only was Devonshire 'in the habit of entrusting the administration of the towns on his estates to capable agents', but that he also 'did not believe in or practise paternalism, as that word is usually applied'.<sup>483</sup> He goes on: 'it was only his ever-growing investments in Barrow industries that frequently brought him into that town'.<sup>484</sup>

It will be argued here that despite his use of agents and 'underlings', Devonshire was heavily involved in Barrow's industrial rise, as well as its decline, and in his involvement he clearly practiced the paternalism one would expect from an aristocrat of his stature.

Pollard summarises Devonshire's involvement with Barrow by claiming that 'shrewd and enlightened attempts to maximize profits went hand in hand with paternal feelings for his dependents, his shareholders and the inhabitants of the new town'.<sup>485</sup> In turn, Marshall claims that Devonshire was esteemed by Barrow workmen because he appeared to show some interest in them and that this interest was an expression of his 'sense of responsibility for the town and its troubles'.<sup>486</sup> And yet he also claims that Barrow workmen were 'labouring on a corner of the Cavendish estates with far less consideration and security than farming tenants enjoyed' and that 'the social and industrial relationships of the period ordained that he was to show far less personal concern for his steelworkers than for his tenant farmers'.<sup>487</sup> Though it is true that his tenants' security was greater than that of the Barrow working classes, evidence from Devonshire's diaries contradicts the idea that the people of Barrow received any less of his consideration than any other inhabitants of his estates.

A rather comprehensive example of Devonshire's involvement in his industrial ventures and concern for the welfare of the workers of the Furness area is evident when plotting the history of his slate quarries from his diary entries. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the slate-quarrying industry in Furness 'ranked next in importance to the

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<sup>481</sup> Cannadine, 'The Landowner as Millionaire: The Finances of the Dukes of Devonshire, c.1800-c.1926,' p.85

<sup>482</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' p.214

<sup>483</sup> Marshall, *Furness and the Industrial Revolution*, p.351

<sup>484</sup> Marshall, *Furness and the Industrial Revolution*, pp.351-52

<sup>485</sup> Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire,' p.214

<sup>486</sup> Marshall, *Furness and the Industrial Revolution*, p.396

<sup>487</sup> Marshall, *Furness and the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 325, 397

haematite ore and iron trades of the district'.<sup>488</sup> Indeed, 'more men were employed in slate-getting than in mining iron ore or in working at iron furnaces, and the former occupation became a comparatively well-paid one... It [also] had more influence upon the movement of people within the district than did ironmaking, in the sense that it led to new settlement near the quarries.'<sup>489</sup> With Barrow's population rising from that of a small village of 150 inhabitants in 1846 to a bustling town of more than 40,000 in 1874, this rapid town building acted as a 'major stimulus to local quarrying, which remained an important occupation in High Furness through much of the nineteenth century'.<sup>490</sup>

Despite being such a vital industry, Devonshire's Kirkby-in-Furness slate quarries (located approximately 10 miles from Barrow) were problematic and management and work-related issues often required his personal intervention.

In February 1845 Devonshire wrote 'the men have turned out, not at first for wages but it has settled on this... [it is] hoped by a slight advance they will resume work but the inferior quarries I am afraid will not be able to pay it'.<sup>491</sup> Within a week he notes 'the men are all at work again but at a large increase in wages. No doubt it is mainly owing to the Furness Railway which is in progress and at which high wages can be earned.'<sup>492</sup> Devonshire didn't always give in to the demands of strikers, indeed a year later he 'firmly resisted' another strike.<sup>493</sup> Yet his diaries do show that he displayed a constant concern for his workforce and in negotiating with them it is clear he attempted to understand and resolve their grievances to the best of his ability.

Not only were his quarrymen frequently striking, but Devonshire also found there to be an issue with drunkenness and a general lack of order among the men. Under a previous and rather incompetent manager, Mr Jopling, Devonshire noted that there were 'too many overlookers, [and] that the men are suffered to waste their time'.<sup>494</sup> After sacking Jopling he noted 'I think there has been a great neglect in allowing the merchants to work as they pleased and that mischief has been done from the want of control'.<sup>495</sup> As Jopling's replacement Devonshire hired Mr Coward. Yet within two years of hiring Coward, Devonshire was 'much

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<sup>488</sup> Marshall, *Furness and the Industrial Revolution*, p.42

<sup>489</sup> Marshall, *Furness and the Industrial Revolution*, p.42

<sup>490</sup> Cannadine, 'The Landowner as Millionaire: The Finances of the Dukes of Devonshire, c.1800-c.1926,' p.85, Marshall, *Furness and the Industrial Revolution*, p.45

<sup>491</sup> Chatsworth MSS., seventh Duke of Devonshire's diaries, 28.02.1845

<sup>492</sup> Chatsworth MSS., seventh Duke of Devonshire's diaries, 06.03.1845

<sup>493</sup> Chatsworth MSS., seventh Duke of Devonshire's diaries, 06.02.1846

<sup>494</sup> Chatsworth MSS., seventh Duke of Devonshire's diaries, 05.07.1838

<sup>495</sup> Chatsworth MSS., seventh Duke of Devonshire's diaries, 23.09.1844

vexed at hearing... that Coward drinks occasionally and I fear encourages drinking among the men. He must give this up if he is to continue to manage the quarries.'<sup>496</sup> A year later Captain Eddy, another adviser, was 'extremely dissatisfied with Coward and complains greatly of his obstinacy and timidity... he thinks a total change of system must be adopted by Christmas'.<sup>497</sup>

After finding Coward 'utterly unequal to his work', Devonshire had him removed.<sup>498</sup> His replacement, Captain Eddy, seems to have been much more capable and Devonshire quickly found his arrangements 'all very satisfactory and the men easily managed'.<sup>499</sup> There continued to be a 'good deal of trouble with the men arising from their drunken habits but Eddy appears to be gradually putting it down by a system of fines'.<sup>500</sup> Indeed, Eddy was so successful that unlike his predecessors, he stayed in the employ of Devonshire until his retirement in the early 1860s. Devonshire then appointed Eddy's son, the 'steady and intelligent' James Eddy, 'to succeed his father generally as Mineral Agent'. This again highlights the preference of the aristocracy for families to dynastically hold positions within their estate or business structures, particularly considering James Eddy was 'not equal to his father', but was still appointed to replace him.<sup>501</sup> Dynastic appointments put emphasis on shared tradition and multi-generational loyalty which could facilitate acceptance of the community's hierarchy and promote deference.

Devonshire was 'vexed' to hear of the drinking habits of his workmen under Coward and was glad to hear that under Captain Eddy, these habits were being broken. Here a level of self-interest clearly accounts for some of Devonshire's concern. No business can be effectively run to make profit when the workforce is habitually drunk. However, given Devonshire's strict religiosity and his earlier noted aversion to beer houses, his sense of duty to improve the lives of those under his jurisdiction was equally accountable for his concern.

Paternalism was not only expressed as control. Devonshire's concern for control in the workplace was amalgamated with a genuine level of concern and empathy for his workforce. With slate quarrying in a slump, in 1842, he wrote 'I do not think the [Poor Law] commissioners will give their consent to large numbers of applications from Kirkby Ireleth where many quarrymen are out of work'.<sup>502</sup> The issue was 'a very anxious concern' for

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<sup>496</sup> Chatsworth MSS., seventh Duke of Devonshire's diaries, 18.08.1845

<sup>497</sup> Chatsworth MSS., seventh Duke of Devonshire's diaries, 26.11.1846

<sup>498</sup> Chatsworth MSS., seventh Duke of Devonshire's diaries, 04.02.1847, 10.02.1847, 04.03.1847

<sup>499</sup> Chatsworth MSS., seventh Duke of Devonshire's diaries, 04.03.1847

<sup>500</sup> Chatsworth MSS., seventh Duke of Devonshire's diaries, 20.07.1847

<sup>501</sup> Chatsworth MSS., seventh Duke of Devonshire's diaries, 23.07.1861

<sup>502</sup> Chatsworth MSS., seventh Duke of Devonshire's diaries, 10.02.1842

Devonshire, although it is not clear whether he intervened on their behalf.<sup>503</sup> On New Year's Day 1846 he wrote that he was to give 'a dinner to all men employed' in his quarries.<sup>504</sup> Although this may seem like a trivial offering from an employer, in reality, with the duke aware of his own prestige and esteem, personal contact with his workforce would have gone a long way to ensuring their continued loyalty and deference.

Devonshire was also responsible for providing his workforces with housing. In 1861 he writes 'we looked at Crowband and at the site near Longlands proposed for some new cottages which Mr Eddy is anxious for'.<sup>505</sup> Again, in 1870, he writes 'we propose to build a good many new cottages and a new school is contemplated to which it will be necessary for me to contribute largely'.<sup>506</sup> While in 1885 Eddy was 'very anxious I [Devonshire] should build some cottages and if money was more plentiful it would no doubt [be] very well to do so'.<sup>507</sup> This highlights an important irony in Devonshire's involvement with the Furness area and its industry. In his initial involvement, Devonshire was attempting to adapt his traditional paternalism to the new challenges facing the late nineteenth century aristocracy. Later, his altruistic attempts to try to save the industries from complete collapse were a definitive expression of paternalism and yet by nearly bankrupting himself Devonshire was prevented from displaying his 'paternal feelings' for the industrial workers and their families, because he no longer had the funds to make concerted efforts to improve their quality of life. His altruism was the definitive expression of paternalism and yet ultimately contributed to its demise.

With such a rapidly growing population, housing provision was vital to the success of Barrow. As Devonshire wrote 'the various new works are getting on but more slowly than was intended, principally owing to the want of cottages... Ramsden says a thousand new ones would be occupied at once'.<sup>508</sup> Indeed in early 1872, Devonshire was afraid that overcrowding in Barrow was having a bad affect on the public health, causing smallpox to be 'alarmingly prevalent'.<sup>509</sup> Devonshire saw the provision of extra housing as an 'urgent' concern and took leadership in ensuring that more were built. Not only did he provide funds and land for houses, but also encouraged those companies of which he was a shareholder to build more.<sup>510</sup> After advising the Steel Company that the provision of more cottages was 'urgent', he writes that

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<sup>503</sup> Chatsworth MSS., seventh Duke of Devonshire's diaries, 10.02.1842

<sup>504</sup> Chatsworth MSS., seventh Duke of Devonshire's diaries, 01.01.1846

<sup>505</sup> Chatsworth MSS., seventh Duke of Devonshire's diaries, 08.02.1861

<sup>506</sup> Chatsworth MSS., seventh Duke of Devonshire's diaries, 16.03.1870

<sup>507</sup> Chatsworth MSS., seventh Duke of Devonshire's diaries, 26.02.1885

<sup>508</sup> Chatsworth MSS., seventh Duke of Devonshire's diaries, 04.01.1871

<sup>509</sup> Chatsworth MSS., seventh Duke of Devonshire's diaries, 02.01.1872

<sup>510</sup> Chatsworth MSS., seventh Duke of Devonshire's diaries, 11.06.1873, 20.10.1873, 22.05.1872

they 'will build 100 costing about £160 each but many more will be required... we hope building societies and other parties may be disposed to build on a considerable scale'.<sup>511</sup> And yet, it would be reasonable to presume that if no additional help was found, Devonshire would have been obliged to lay down more funds and land for this purpose. This was certainly the case when in the late 1870s, when Devonshire saved the many Barrow industries from complete collapse.

Devonshire's involvement in Furness' industry was not necessarily a response to the agricultural depression, as he began his investment well before the depression set in. It was rather a response to personal financial difficulties he was facing. Yet it may be seen as evidence of the aristocracy attempting to adapt their traditional behaviour to their new situation in the late nineteenth century. Devonshire's example is particularly interesting because his traditional landlord paternalism was adapted to suit an industrial environment. In being landed and yet trying to achieve greater status through industrial exploits, Devonshire went against the grain of the common experience during the nineteenth century of industrial wealth being invested in land. This was likely a sign of a changing epoch, in which land was losing its ability to confer status while industry, which had traditionally been derided by the aristocracy, was enabling its leaders to attain greater prestige. While such dedicated involvement in industry by an aristocrat was certainly rare and made Devonshire somewhat unique, the aristocracy had begun to involve itself in industry, particularly the railway industry, albeit rather piecemeal. The most important reason behind Devonshire's decision to pursue industrial concerns, rather than anything else, was industry's ability to confer status and provide the aristocrat with a format in which he could become involved and his paternalism could be exercised. The influence of paternalism upon Devonshire's behaviour was most apparent in his altruistic campaign to prop up Barrow's failing industries at the expense of worsening his own already difficult financial position. Yet in turn this altruism was disastrous for the future legacy of paternalism, because in deepening Devonshire's own financial problems it restricted his ability to display his 'paternal feelings' for his dependents.

### III

Considering the financial peaks and troughs Devonshire endured during his long life and the level of altruism he displayed in saving Barrow from a complete economic disaster, it is surprising that Devonshire, unlike his predecessor and successor, has not been the subject of any major or extensive biography. His life history instead exists in a fragmented nature, amongst the occasional pages of a handful of articles and chapters by various historians. This is

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<sup>511</sup> Chatsworth MSS., seventh Duke of Devonshire's diaries, 22.05.1872

exceptionally perplexing when the enormity of primary source material is considered. Devonshire was a prolific diary keeper, with very regular entries beginning on the 22 January 1838 and ending on the 3 August 1890. All but a handful of them have been preserved and are available to researchers in the archives at Chatsworth House.

The present chapter has not intended to serve as the aforementioned, long overdue biography. Rather, evidence about Devonshire, his life, his estates and their management and the details concerning his industrial enterprises in Furness, have been used as part of a wider study concerning the nature of paternalism in late nineteenth-century England.

One of the aims of the chapter has been to redress the one sided nature of the recent portrayals of Devonshire, as an austere and aloof man, with middle class values and primarily concerned with business interests over any romantic notions of chivalric duty, tradition or paternalism. While this chapter has granted that Devonshire was socially reclusive, religiously devout and a capable and intelligent businessman, it has also highlighted his paternalism, where other authors have downplayed it. No doubt Devonshire's paternalism was frequently filtered through his agents, yet a large quantity of evidence here presented shows Devonshire to have taken direct action on a number of day-to-day concerns. He was actively involved in the management of both his agricultural and industrial concerns and displayed his paternal influences in his various efforts to improve the lives of his dependents. On his estates he eased the burden of depression on his tenants, whilst taking an interest in their grievances. He also increased the levels of patronage on his estates and took interest in where and how benevolence would be dispensed. Equally, in his Furness industrial concerns, Devonshire concerned himself with the quality of life for the many workers there. His concern for the provision of their amenities was mainly confined to housing, yet evidence suggests he was also involved in schooling and public health.

What is most interesting about Devonshire's story is not that it was such a profound fall from grace, but that the fall was rather perplexingly self inflicted. It has been argued here that the altruism Devonshire displayed in attempting to save Barrow's industry is decisive evidence of the influence by paternalism upon him. Yet it ironically ultimately led to the family's paternalism being damaged. As Devonshire's finances became increasingly embarrassed, his diaries contain evidence of a desire to carry out his duty to improve the lives of the many inhabitants of the Furness district, but he lacked the sufficient finances to enable him to do so. After his death, his successors were forced to embark on policies of retrenchment on the estates that were much stricter than those that he attempted to carry out. They were also required to sell off the Irish estates and hence diminished the social and

political standing of the House of Cavendish.<sup>512</sup> That said the existence of Barrow as an industrial town to this day is evidence of the legacy of paternalism.

Devonshire's personal circumstances make his example somewhat unrepresentative of the aristocracy at large. Firstly the enormous level of debt he inherited from his predecessors, provided the incentive for him to improve his financial position decades before the agricultural depression had caused his and the rest of the aristocracy's financial supremacy to be at risk. Secondly, because of Devonshire's enormous wealth and the land available to him to use as security for the vast loans required to prop Barrow up, it is difficult to see how any other aristocrat could have invested so heavily in Barrow or involved himself so much in the fortunes of its people. At least no other aristocrat could have done so while maintaining their estates intact. Yet Devonshire's narrative is still an important one, as undoubtedly the aristocracy at large were watching the story unfold very closely. Devonshire displayed an example of how the aristocracy could adapt to the challenges that faced them in this period. And when it proved disastrous to his social and financial position, he displayed the risks involved in attempting to adapt one's paternalism and in involving oneself too heavily in industry. Undoubtedly the on looking aristocrats, like Leicester, who had invested their surplus wealth more wisely into stocks and shares were glad of their decision; potentially unaware that they had put the endurance of their paternalism, and in turn their power, status and ascendancy, in jeopardy.

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<sup>512</sup> Cannadine, 'The Landowner as Millionaire: The Finances of the Dukes of Devonshire, c.1800-c.1926,' p.84

## Conclusion

Although it has been agreed that various political, social and economic factors were at play, this thesis has attempted to assert the primacy of the agricultural depression as the most important initial cause of the decline of the British aristocracy's power and ascendancy. As Haggard claimed, the landowning class suffered the effects of the depression worst of all, because their paternal sense of duty necessitated that they act to relieve the effects of depression on their tenants.<sup>513</sup> In doing so they accepted a reduction in their rental income. As a result, landowners needed to either retrench or adapt and diversify their interests in order to maintain their wealth. As this thesis has shown they largely chose the latter option. Yet they differed in their views on how they should diversify. Hunt and Pam have claimed that the aristocracy's estates required them to come up with new schemes that would promote local economic growth and enable the whole estate to prosper.<sup>514</sup> This thesis has shown that this happened only very rarely. While some aristocrats failed to diversify at all and significantly weakened their economic and social position; the most common experience was for landowners to supplement their fallen estate income with the returns of passive investments in non-agricultural enterprises. There were examples of landowners who became actively involved in their investment concerns, however these were very rare and Devonshire's example shows how risky such activity was.

The economic effects of the depression also had important social implications upon all rural classes. As the rural economy shrank, class consciousness and agitation became more common and as a result rural society was at greater risk of division. This activity, when coupled with the aristocracy's decreasing interest in their localities, meant that rural society was gradually fragmenting. Although this probably occurred at a slower speed than Alistair Mutch has claimed.<sup>515</sup> This thesis has attempted to show that this fragmentation of rural society was much more of an underlying, subtle current than Mutch has suggested; and its effects would not be fully realised until decades later. The depression also had profound effects on the aristocracy's ability to maintain their status and ascendancy, largely because it diminished their paternalism. In adapting to the depression, the aristocracy at large became increasingly reliant on invisible income, which to an extent negated the importance of land. Land became, for them, a means of keeping up appearances, while in reality they were losing their enthusiasm

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<sup>513</sup> H. Rider Haggard, *Rural England, Vol. 2*, (Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1902), p.543

<sup>514</sup> E. H. Hunt and S. J. Pam, 'Responding to Agricultural Depression, 1873-96: managerial success, entrepreneurial failure?', *Agricultural Historical Review*, 50:2 (2002),

<sup>515</sup> Alistair Mutch, 'Farmers' Organisations and Agricultural Depression in Lancashire, 1890-1900,' *Agricultural Historical Review*, 31 (1983)

for it and their attentiveness to the needs of the inhabitants of their estates. Paternalism, as means of maintaining and bolstering an aristocrat's local power, status and ascendancy, gradually became neglected along with the land and its people. As a result, the very gradual changes going on throughout the nineteenth century that were slowly curbing the aristocracy's ascendancy, such as the increasing size of the state and the democratization of politics, were further exacerbated because the aristocracy's provincial powerbases were also deteriorating.

Although attempts were made by aristocrats to adapt their paternalism into new spheres of influence, they were very rare and Devonshire's very public example probably cautioned other aristocrats away from making such attempts. Chaplin tried to adapt rural paternalism into politics by representing and championing the agricultural interest in parliament. However, since parliament was filled with aristocrats and squires who had protected themselves from the depression with supplementary incomes, Chaplin was practically ignored.

Each of the three aristocrats whose narratives have been presented in this thesis had personal circumstances which have served to complicate the main narrative in interesting ways. Their individual stories and personalities have similarities and differences. Both Chaplin and Devonshire were in poor financial positions before the agricultural depression had even begun and this influenced their actions in different ways. Chaplin pursued a political career based on representing the agricultural interest in an effort to persuade government to help landlords and tenant farmers by reintroducing protection. As a result of his political ambitions, as well as his social and sporting activities, Chaplin was distracted from the careful management his estates required. He failed to reduce his personal expenditure sufficiently and as a result his mortgagees took his estates away from him. Alternatively, Devonshire set about trying to improve his financial position by carefully managing his estates and imploring his agents to make efficiency savings wherever possible. He also embarked upon an industrial investment campaign in Barrow which had, by the mid 1870s, become very prosperous. Yet crashes occurred almost simultaneously in both agriculture and industry. His frugal estate management had to be ceased in order to protect his tenants from the full burden of depression and likewise his paternalism inspired him to safeguard Barrow from the worst distresses of the industrial crash. Although he was able to retain his estates, he died, like Chaplin, with his financial position in tatters.

Of the three, only Leicester can be said to have been successful in surviving the agricultural depression in a strong financial position, which is testament to the power economics held in deciding the fortunes of the British aristocracy.

As a squire, Chaplin was lower in rank than his noble counterparts, yet in his lavish expenditure, expensive tastes, political preoccupations and busy social and sporting lives; he was somewhat more aristocratic than either Leicester or Devonshire. The two aristocrats, who were both profoundly middle class in their characters, did not meet the stereotype of the Victorian aristocrat hitherto presented. Moreover, they were also both rather reclusive and in devoting themselves to their estates, investments and industrial concerns they showed themselves to be diligent and conscientious enough to deserve their fine reputations.

There are themes which have been general to all three chapters which require some elucidation. Firstly, because paternalism was at its core an unspecific but inherent sense of duty, it was largely open to interpretation by the individual aristocrat who subscribed to it. This meant that to a certain degree, aristocrats would decide for themselves what their duties were and to whom. Their duties were specified to a certain degree, in that most would continue to carry out those duties of their predecessor. Yet in terms of their benevolence, they were largely able to determine for themselves which causes would receive their benefaction. Often this was related to their interests. Leicester, a man who regularly suffered with infirmity, patronised public health schemes extensively. In the case of Devonshire, who was academic and religiously devout, churches and educative institutions received the larger part of his benefaction.

As an extension of Matthew Cragoe's argument, this thesis has also asserted, throughout its chapters, the importance of the dynasticity of the families on the estate.<sup>516</sup> Not only did tenant-farmers inherit their parents' tenancies, but in some cases land agents would inherit their fathers' jobs. Paternal landowners would favour the establishment of families on their estates because it enabled the estate's inhabitants to form a collective identity based on shared tradition, heritage and ancestry. This collective identity would also encompass, and in turn bolster, the position of the landowner at the top of the estate hierarchy. In this sense, it would facilitate the deference that was both an essential cause and consequence of paternalism.

This thesis has raised the question of the agents' involvement in paternalism on the estates of England. Deciphering the specifics of the agents' role has been difficult because so much of their work was done verbally. Also there was no codification of what the agents' education, background or even job responsibilities were, which means that the importance of the agent varied from estate to estate. In some examples, particularly that of the Currey family, who were upper middle class professionals and very involved in the routine

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<sup>516</sup> Matthew Cragoe, *An Anglican aristocracy: the moral economy of the landed estate in Carmarthenshire, 1832-1895*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996), pp.33-34

management of Devonshire's estates, it has been suggested that paternalism was being institutionalised into the role of the agent and hence was transcending from the aristocracy to the middle classes. Yet this idea of paternalism becoming a middle class virtue is somewhat tested by the example of Leicester's agents who were increasingly coming from administrative backgrounds and thus had less involvement in the management of the estates and less interaction with the estates inhabitants. Land agents have largely been understudied by historians of this period and it is hoped that by bringing to light the roles of the agents of different estates, this thesis will encourage future historiography on the topic. Only with a wider range of evidence could any firmly conclusive points be made about the influence of aristocratic paternalism upon the agents' roles.

As noted earlier, this thesis has attempted to present Mutch's idea of the fragmentation of rural society, as occurring much more gradually than he has accounted for. It is worth noting here that the author of this thesis does not believe that paternalism entirely diminished in this period. The agricultural depression began a series of events which placed paternalism and its future in crisis. It did survive this period, but in a diminished condition. Paternalism therefore did and perhaps still does have a legacy within British rural society. Indeed Keith Grieves has shown that paternalism was an important influence upon the enlistment of British troops in rural areas during the Great War.<sup>517</sup> Furthermore, Howard Newby et al have shown that paternalism has infiltrated the middle class dominated rural society of the twentieth century.<sup>518</sup> They claim that tenant farmers and smaller landowners have inherited the paternalism or the 'traditional authority roles', from the landed elites of the nineteenth century.<sup>519</sup>

It is hoped that by reasserting the importance of paternalism in the rural life of late nineteenth-century England, this thesis will encourage further investigation of paternalism in different spheres of influence within this period or in landed estates in the twentieth century. While this thesis has focused on large estates during the late nineteenth century, in the hope that this is where paternalism would be most evident, wider investigations of paternalism on smaller estates could be beneficial to our understanding of rural England in this period. Furthermore, while this thesis has focused predominantly on aristocratic paternalism in agriculture, the historiography could benefit from further study into industrial paternalism in this period. Comparisons could then be made between rural and industrial paternalism, which

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<sup>517</sup> Grieves, K., "'Lowther's Lambs': Rural Paternalism and Voluntary Recruitment in the First World War," *Rural History*, 4:1, (1993)

<sup>518</sup> Howard Newby et al, *Paternalism, Property and Power: Class and Control in Rural England*, (Hutchinson & Co, London, 1978), pp.15-41

<sup>519</sup> Newby et al, *Paternalism, Property and Power: Class and Control in Rural England*, p.26

could elucidate greater understanding of the decline of the landed interest and the ascendance of the industrial middle classes. This narrative could even be enhanced by discussions of Quaker paternalism and the 'chocolate conscience' of the factory owners and philanthropists in the Rowntree and Cadbury families.<sup>520</sup>

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<sup>520</sup> Gillian Wagner, *The Chocolate Conscience*, (Chatto & Windus, London, 1987)

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