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Power at the Power House: Agency and Authority on the Chatsworth Estate, 1811-1877

By:

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Abstract

Power is a central concept in the language of country house studies. Commonly referred to as ‘power houses’, the primary function of properties such as Chatsworth in Derbyshire is understood as the consolidation and reproduction of aristocratic power. In this narrative of upper-class supremacy, the communities that lived on these estates are conceptually divided in binary terms of upstairs and downstairs, master and servant, landlord and tenant, the powerful and the powerless. This thesis problematises the concept of absolute power on the country estate by drawing on the work of sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens, to ask how power might be approached in more nuanced terms. By defining power as an individual’s capacity to effect change, in however small a way, it accesses new perspectives and suggests how fresh relevance can be drawn from archival material.

This thesis finds that far from being insular and isolated, Chatsworth was a microcosm of English society in which daily interactions played out across a diverse community. It therefore speaks to wider issues of class and gender tensions, and individual agency within institutional structures in nineteenth-century Britain. This thesis understands the symbolic power of the landowning family as part of the sociocultural context, rather than the substance, of social relations on the country estate. It is interested in the experiences of servants, staff and tenants not as facilitators of an upper-class lifestyle, but as individuals with their own social and material aspirations and agency. The chapters examine all areas of the estate, from the village to the household, in order to chart a holistic narrative of this dynamic country house community and its residents during a time of significant local and national change.

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Abbreviations

NA National Archives

NLI National Library of Ireland

OED *Oxford English Dictionary*

DC The Devonshire Collections, Chatsworth

UCL University College London's Special Collections

UNL University of Nottingham Library

Power at the Power House: Agency and Authority on the Chatsworth Estate, 1811-1877

Lauren Butler

Introduction

I am prepared to prove there is very considerable improvement in our Villages within the last few years, which I am sure will progress if the people are properly managed, and not over interfered with.¹

In 1841, William Cavendish, the 6th Duke of Devonshire received advice about the management of tenants at his Chatsworth estate in Derbyshire. Despite extensive improvements to the villages, some individuals had been accused of immoral and illegal activities. This letter about the behaviour in ‘our’ villages did not come from a family member or upper-class friend of the Duke, but from head gardener Joseph Paxton. The letter’s contents, source and linguistic features raise interesting questions about the country house community and its social dynamics in the nineteenth century. Why was misconduct occurring in a model village designed to showcase the highest standards of workers’ housing? What was feared to be at risk through ‘over-interference’ in the lives of tenants by such a powerful landlord? Why was a head gardener offering advice about estate management? How was a servant able to perform such flagrant social intimacy with his master by suggesting shared ownership of the villages, using the possessive determiner ‘our’ not just once in this letter, but three times? These questions are particularly pertinent in the context of the social and political changes occurring

¹ Letter from Joseph Paxton to the 6th Duke of Devonshire, November 1841, P/126, DC.

in Britain at this time, changes which are not thought to have affected the country house until later in the century.

Joseph Paxton's letter concerning the management of tenants' behaviour in the villages at Chatsworth was written when popular disaffection was still a pressing concern for the political élite. Chartists were active as nearby as Sheffield, fifteen miles away, where several conspirators had been arrested for planning an armed rising in 1840.² The stables at Chatsworth were armed with three hundred guns and bayonets in case the estate became a target of protest.³ While many in Britain fought for further reform, the growing middle class who had benefited from the 1832 Reform Act enjoyed a new political influence. Joseph Paxton, born the youngest son of a farm labourer, was among the newly-enfranchised, and would go on to become MP for Coventry in 1854.

The large-scale changes that shaped nineteenth-century Britain have been studied extensively in a national and urban context. Historians interested in the social impact of transformative developments like rapid industrialisation have naturally chosen to focus on the urban epicentres of industry, and the class dynamics which governed factories, workhouses and crowded tenement housing.⁴ These places have appeared far removed from small rural communities like Chatsworth, in which life is said to have continued much as before, defined by 'countless traditional activities, all carefully prescribed by age-old practice'.⁵ Country houses are sometimes featured in larger studies of social change in the nineteenth century,

² The Sheffield riots were reported in many newspapers. The *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* in Dublin surmised that the Sheffield riots would be followed by an 'Outbreak in London', and were intended to be the signal 'for a general rising to be the setting on fire of London in different parts'. 'Anticipated Outbreak in London', *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 17 January 1820.

³ Letter from Joseph Paxton to chief agent Benjamin Currey, August 1839, P/84/1, DC.

⁴ Significant studies of class, labour and industrialisation in nineteenth-century Britain include: D. S. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present* (New York, 2005); P. O'Brien and R. Quinault (eds), *The Industrial Revolution and British Society* (Cambridge, 1993); S. O. Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1992); P. Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation, An Economic History of Britain 1700-1914* (London, 1983); E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963).

⁵ J. Pearson, *Stags and Serpents: The Story of the House of Cavendish and the Dukes of Devonshire* (London, 1983), p. 265.

particularly when the focus is the declining political influence of the aristocracy.⁶ However, few studies that concentrate specifically on the social history of the country house situate it within this broader context of national transformation.⁷

In order to unpick the wider social undertones of Joseph Paxton's 1841 letter to the Duke of Devonshire, and many other documents in the rich Devonshire Collections archive at Chatsworth, it is necessary to challenge the fundamental assumptions about power that underpin our approach to understanding country house communities. This thesis approaches the symbolic power of the landowning family as part of the sociocultural context, not the substance, of social relations on the country estate. Far from being the isolated home of a 'tiny social minority', this thesis suggests that the Chatsworth community was a microcosm of nineteenth-century British society.⁸ Through this approach it is possible to ask new questions about the agency and authority of non-élite individuals. The co-dependence and cross-class interaction which played out on a small geographical scale among a broad cross-section of society is unique to the setting of the country estate and makes it worthy of further study. Magda Fahmi writes that domestic service 'transgressed the physical segregation of the classes', and on the country estate this was amplified.⁹ This thesis asks how non-élite individuals within this complex community situated themselves socially and culturally, not only as facilitators of an aristocratic lifestyle but as conscious agents in their own right. It makes an original contribution to knowledge by drawing on a rich archive, in which non-élite voices are unusually well-represented, in order to re-evaluate how power was exercised and experienced in country

⁶ See, for example, D. Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London, 1990).

⁷ Nigel Cavanagh has recently written about protest and paternalism in the planned colliery village of Elsecar, owned by the Earls Fitzwilliam at Wentworth Woodhouse, but this was still an industrial community. N. Cavanagh, 'Cottages and the Country House: Power, Paternalism and Protest in Elsecar', *Industrial Archaeology Review* (vol. 40, 2018), pp. 18-24.

⁸ West, 'Social Space', p. 104.

⁹ M. Fahmi, "'Ruffled" Mistresses and "Discontented" Maids: Respectability and the Case of Domestic Service, 1880-1914', *Labour/Le Travail* (vol. 39, 1997), p. 70.

houses. With this perspective, this thesis also aims to resituate the country house community in its broader sociocultural context.

The time period for this study is 1811 to 1877, but as much of the thesis is concerned with long-term impact, some observations are made outside of these parameters. The year 1811 is when the 6th Duke of Devonshire inherited the Chatsworth estate. Although the choice of a start date based on the life of the landowner somewhat goes against the nature of this study, it is an appropriate place to begin because at times of significant change such as this, surveys and audits tended to be taken for administrative purposes. The state of the community in 1811 is therefore well-documented. It is also important to recognise that although this thesis is not primarily concerned with the perspective of the 6th Duke of Devonshire, he remains a key figure in this study. He oversaw several significant changes at Chatsworth, including the reconstruction of the North Wing and the village of Edensor, and the transformation of the gardens. The study continues beyond his death in 1858, into the time of his nephew the 7th Duke, to consider the impacts of these changes in the subsequent two decades. The year 1877 saw the death of tenant Ann Wilson, one of the last witnesses to the transformation of the house, garden and villages. Although her death did not trigger the changes that the death of a Duke did, it coincided with a turning point in the history of the country house. Ann died during one of several poor harvest years which contributed to the Great Depression of British Agriculture and the ‘troubled decade’ of the 1880s which signalled the beginning of the end for many country estates.¹⁰ The period 1811-1877 was the golden age before this decline, when change at Chatsworth was less inhibited by financial strain. It therefore offers fertile ground for exploring the dynamics of power, agency and authority that define the nineteenth-century country estate as a unique community, but also one which was intimately connected to wider societal change.

¹⁰ See D. Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London, 2005), p. 25.

Power on the Country Estate

Power is one of the key concepts through which sociologists, philosophers and historians have made sense of historical change and continuity.¹¹ Power has also featured as a key concept in the field of country house studies, indeed properties like Chatsworth are often referred to as ‘power houses’. The ways in which power has been expressed and contested through architecture by competing aristocrats has been of particular interest to country house historians.¹² However, the power that is understood to have been exercised within the country house community, among the servants, tenants and workers which constituted the majority of the country estate population, has often been understood in far simpler terms based on a classic distinction between the elite ‘upstairs’ and the staff ‘downstairs’.¹³ In these books the power of landowners over these communities is usually treated as absolute. Even if this assumption is not stated explicitly, it is implicit in the language through which the social history of the country house has been constructed.

Landowning families are commonly referred to as *the* family. This small but significant linguistic tendency ignores the existence of the tens or hundreds of other families which also lived in and around a country house, and by extension overwrites the structures of domestic

¹¹ Key studies on the nature of power include, but are certainly not limited to: P. Joyce, *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State Since 1800* (Cambridge, 2013); P. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, 1991); A. Honneth, *The Critique of Power* (Cambridge, 1991); M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York, 1979); P.L. Berger and T. Luckmann *The Social Construction of Reality* (London, 1967); M. Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A. M. Henderson and T. Parsons (New York, 1947).

¹² See in particular: M. Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven and London, 1978).

¹³ It is worth noting that many of the books on country houses, and on their servants in particular, are aimed at a wide readership, and aim to appeal to the interests and expectations of a general audience. See: P. Sambrook, *A Country House at Work* (Swindon, 2013); S. Evans, *Life Below Stairs in the Victorian and Edwardian Country House* (London, 2011); P. Horn, *Life in the Victorian Country House* (Oxford, 2010); P. Sambrook, *The Country House Servant* (Stroud, 2002); J. Gerard, *Country House Life: Family and Servants, 1815-1914* (Oxford, 1994); M. Girouard, *The Victorian Country House* (London, 1979); M. Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven and London, 1978).

authority that existed within these separate family units. The agency of these non-élite individuals and families is further obscured when they are subsumed into the aristocratic family. Pamela Horn observes that aristocratic families and their servants were sometimes considered ‘all members of a large family’, but such beliefs appear to have been held exclusively by employers.¹⁴ Staff, according to Horn, were more often inclined to see the country estate as a ‘principality’, ruled by ‘an almost feudal indisputable power’.¹⁵

Although these two models, the family-like community and the state-like community, are framed by Horn as opposites, neither questions the absolute power of the landowning family. This interpretation of local power is further reinforced with language that homogenise servants and staff, such as the term ‘armies’.¹⁶ In the family-like, state-like and military-like country house communities described in the historiography, the head of the household is set apart from the rest of the people, as a paternal father figure, an autocratic ruler or a strategic commander respectively.¹⁷ The unequal power relationship between non-élite individuals and the landowning family, whether tyrannical or benevolent, is assumed to have been the most significant social relation on the country estate. According to Jessica Gerard, this unequal relationship was underpinned by ‘shared collective goals of maintaining the establishment for the family, its guests, and its descendants’.¹⁸ However, it is naïve to assume that all individuals in the community were selflessly devoted, as Gerard implies, to a family which was not their own. F.M.L. Thompson has questioned the credibility of the landowner-centric narrative in the context of village culture, arguing that the majority of patrician landowners were ‘remote

¹⁴ Horn, *Life in the Victorian Country House*, p. 32

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁶ This phrase can be found recently, for example, in R. Wilson and A. Mackley, *Creating Paradise: The Building of the English Country House 1660-1880* (London and New York, 2000), p. 360; S. Evans, *Life Below Stairs in the Victorian and Edwardian Country House* (London, 2011); M. Purcell, *The Country House Library* (New Haven, 2017), p. 258.

¹⁷ The vast majority of landowners were male. For female landowners, see: B. McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape: 1700-1830* (New York, 2018).

¹⁸ Gerard, *Country House Life*, p. 4.

figures' in the lives of their tenants.¹⁹ This observation is an important one, which points to the need for a reassessment of social relations more widely on country estates and within the aristocratic household.

The problem at the heart of the top-down landowner-centric narrative, which is common to both the academic language of the country house and material consumed by the general public, is that it over-emphasizes the bearing of the landowner's symbolic power on daily experiences of life on the estate. As Pierre Bourdieu argues, power relations are not actively and consciously imposed, but result from a 'logical conformity' to *doxa*. Originating from the Greek verb *δοκεῖν*, 'to appear' or 'to accept', *doxa* refers to a set of social and cultural conditions which are so engrained in the common experience that they appear self-evident.²⁰ Bourdieu states that symbolic power reproduces power because it 'make[s] people see and believe' the 'mental structures' that are imposed on them.²¹ The fabric of Chatsworth is imbued with the symbolic power of the Cavendish family, from its imposing size, to its extravagant gold windows, to the family emblems and colour palette which publicise, unequivocally, to whom the estate belongs. The power of the Cavendish family was (and is) evident to any person presented with the visual evidence of Chatsworth, even if they never personally interacted with the landowner. This individual would therefore experience an imagined social relation – their perceived subordination to the landowner – without having experienced a real social interaction. Following Bourdieu, symbolic power was reproduced at Chatsworth by a logical acceptance that the power of the landowning family was self-evident, rather than as part of an active process of social interaction.

¹⁹ F. M. L. Thompson, 'Landowners and the Rural Community' in G. E. Mingay (ed.), *The Victorian Countryside: Vol. 2* (London, 1982), pp.472-473.

²⁰ P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. R. Nice (Cambridge, 1984), p. 471.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 208, 480.

In the language of country house studies, there has been little differentiation between the unconscious *doxa* of the estate, and the real daily social interactions that occurred on it. Non-élite individuals are therefore seen to have been dominated by their employer or landlord in almost every aspect of their lives. This uncritical conflation of symbolic power with real power is problematic because it engenders a wider narrative in which the agency of non-élite individuals is erased, and with it the relevance of the country house to wider society. The common narrative of the omniscient landowning family is both the cause and effect of the widespread perception that country houses are ‘repositories of massive demonstrations of inequalities, with a cultural relevance to a tiny social minority’.²² When the symbolic power of the landowning family is reframed as a backdrop to the social life of a community, rather than its substance, new questions can be asked about how people were able to negotiate and understand their individual status.

The worldviews of non-élite individuals on the country estate have been understood as inaccessible due to a scarcity of sources, or altogether unworthy of study. The marginalisation of servants, staff and tenants does not just originate from within the field of country house studies, the main historical focus of which has primarily been élite culture, but can also be attributed to the preconceptions of social historians. As Laura Schwartz writes of domestic servants, social historians have seen little reason to study a group of people which appeared to ‘identify with the interests of wealthy and paternalistic employers rather than their own class’.²³ For individuals living and working on a ducal estate, this disconnect from the working class appears even more obvious.

²² S. West, ‘Social Space and the English Country House’ in S. Tarlow and S. West (eds.), *The Familiar Past? Archaeologies of Later Historical Britain* (London and New York, 1999), p. 104.

²³ L. Schwartz, “‘What we think we needed is a union of domestics such as the miners have’: the Domestic Workers’ Union of Great Britain and Ireland 1908-1914’, *Twentieth Century British History* (vol. 20, 2013), p. 174.

The first issue, of a lack of access to the perspectives of non-élite individuals, can be addressed through substantive microstudies in rich archives. As Roger Wells argues, the most valuable insights into rural communities are ‘revealed only by painstaking analysis of ample documentation on a local and regional basis’.²⁴ The case study for this thesis, Chatsworth, holds a large and hitherto unexploited archive containing a large amount of material written by and about servants, staff and tenants. Some of the most significant documents include the letters of a widowed estate tenant, the correspondence of gardeners, and documents relating to the dismissal of a housekeeper, which respectively form the basis of chapters two, three and four. These rich documents provide exciting new insights into the Chatsworth community in the nineteenth century, but they are not intended to represent a universal experience of life on the country estate. Rather, they are used to explore some of the fundamental facets of daily life that have been hitherto obscured through an overstatement of the power of the landowner.

The second issue, of the relevance of daily life in the country house community to social historians, can be addressed by reframing the social dynamics of the country estate in a way that acknowledges *doxa*, but does not overstate the day-to-day impact of the landowner’s power. Following sociologists such as Anthony Giddens, John French and Bertram Raven, this thesis recognises that power on the country estate was accessible in different ways to different people. French and Raven identify five bases of power, of which the ‘legitimate’ power of individuals holding recognised status is only one.²⁵ This is what is meant in this thesis by ‘authority’. The other bases of power – coercion, reward, expert and referent – can theoretically be accessed by anyone. Anthony Giddens argues that although the extent of a person’s power is contingent on their resources, it is accessible to some degree to every person whether or not they are recognised as having authority. Giddens defines power as an individual’s

²⁴ R. Wells, ‘Social Conflict and Protest in the English Countryside in the Early Nineteenth Century: A Rejoinder’, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, (vol. 8, 1981), p. 527.

²⁵ J. R. P. French and B. Raven, ‘The Bases of Social Power’ in D. Cartwright (ed.), *Studies in Social Power* (Ann Arbor, 1959), pp. 259-269.

‘transformative capacity’, or their ability to bring about change through action.²⁶ Power can thus be accessed even by those in positions of extreme subordination. In *The Fashioned Self*, Joanne Finkelstein draws on this definition of power to explain how inmates at Auschwitz, described by Primo Levi, found that there was ‘power to be gained by deliberately fashioning one’s appearance’.²⁷ Jane Hamlett and Lesley Hoskins reached a similar conclusion about the control that inmates had over clothing in county lunatic asylums.²⁸ Power in this sense can be described as ‘agency’.

Agency is a murky concept which necessitates precaution, since its basic definition, as the ability of an individual to act, is broad. Megan Clare Webber warns that such a definition is useless if all variety of mundane actions are indiscriminately treated as expressions of agency.²⁹ In order to be robust and useful, agency must be historicized, appropriate to the place and time in question, and not overstated. Following Giddens, therefore, agency is understood in this thesis not simply as the ability of an individual to act, but their ability to act within a sociocultural context, or *doxa*. In the example used by Finkelstein, the agency of inmates at Auschwitz was exercised in resistance to the structures that oppressed them, but agency can also be identified in deliberate acts of conformity, and in the space in-between. As James C. Scott argues, ‘most of the political life of subordinate groups is to be found neither in the overt collective defiance of power holders nor in complete hegemonic compliance, but in the vast territory between these two polar opposites’.³⁰ The messy interplay between individual agency and legitimate authority is more complex and interesting than the static power structure which has thus far defined understandings of the country house community.

²⁶ A. Giddens, *The Nation State and Violence: Volume Two of A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 7.

²⁷ J. Finkelstein, *The Fashioned Self* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 136.

²⁸ J. Hamlett and L. Hoskins, ‘Comfort in Small Things? Clothing, Control and Agency in County Lunatic Asylums in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century England’, *Journal of Victorian Culture* (vol. 18, 2013), pp. 93-114.

²⁹ M. C. Webber, ‘Troubling Agency: Agency and Charity in Early Nineteenth-Century London’, *Historical Research*, (vol. 91, 2017), p. 116.

³⁰ J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, 1985), p. 136.

The re-analysis of the fundamental nature of power on the country estate offered in this thesis is particularly urgent today, as the field of country house studies is seeing a resurgence of academic interest, and the global appetite for country houses in popular culture and the heritage industry continues to grow at a rapid rate. Television shows and heritage exhibitions inspired by the ‘Downton Abbey effect’ have gravitated towards employer-servant relationship as a key narrative, to the detriment of a more holistic view of country house communities and the broad variety of relationships within them. In these narratives the agency of the servant is rarely explored or valued positively. Katherine Byrne, for example, explores the ideological problems associated with the Downton Abbey world in which ‘the individual exists to serve others and is an indispensable part of the running of the whole machine’.³¹ Servants who exercise agency, for example by questioning the validity of their employers’ power, are painted as the villains, or are eventually compelled to change their view. Byrne asks to what extent this sanitised representation of the aristocratic household speaks more to the values of the middle class in the present than it does to a working-class past. Similar arguments have been made by Jennifer Nesbitt and Laurajane Smith.³² There is more opportunity than ever before for researchers to meet these problems associated with fictional representations of country houses by asking new questions of real historical communities and households.

Private archives are increasingly being made accessible to academics, as evidenced by recent collaborative projects such as the National Trust’s Trusted Source and Challenging Histories programmes, the University of Leicester’s ‘Colonial Countryside’ project and UCL’s ‘The East India Company at Home’.³³ These projects have been important reassessments of the

³¹ K. Byrne, ‘Adapting Heritage: Class and Conservatism in Downton Abbey’, *Rethinking History* (vol. 18, 2004), p.315.

³² See J. P. Nesbitt, ‘The Absent Presence of Virginia Woolf: Queering Downton Abbey’, *The Journal of Popular Culture* (vol. 49, 2016), pp. 250-270; L. Smith, ‘Deference and Humility: The Social Values of the Country House’, in L. Gibson and J. Pendlebury (eds.), *Valuing Historic Environments* (Farnham, 2009), pp. 33-50.

³³ See: R. Sandell, R. Lennon and M. Smith (eds.), *Prejudice and Pride: LGBTQ Heritage and its Contemporary Implications* (Leicester, 2018); M. Finn and K. Smith (eds.), *The East India Company at Home* (London, 2018).

relevance of the country house to themes such as slavery, sexuality and feminism. This thesis speaks to this increasingly socially-engaged direction of country house studies and country house interpretation by re-establishing the agency of subordinate individuals on the country estate, and by highlighting the broad range of social relations that existed beyond that of master and servant. However, it also builds on a broader body of scholarship linking the history of country houses, domestic service and social relations in nineteenth-century Britain that has focused particularly on questions of social hierarchies, structures and class.

Structure on the Country Estate

Country house communities encompassed a wide cross-section of society in a relatively small geographic area. The 1881 census for the parish of Edensor, for example, records individuals as disparate as the 7th Duke of Devonshire, in residence at Chatsworth, and three Irish farm labourers sheltering in a nearby outbuilding.³⁴ The structures which subdivided and organised this broad group of people have been of interest to historians of the country house. According to David Cannadine, there are three ‘basic and enduring models’ through which British people have made sense of their unequal social realities through time.³⁵ These are: the tiered structure of hierarchy, the three ‘working’, ‘middle’ and ‘upper’ classes, and a binary ‘us versus them’ dichotomy. The country house community has been understood in terms of all three of these models, sometimes simultaneously. Jessica Gerard, for example, writes, ‘these larger [country house] staffs adopted the landed classes’ own rigid hierarchy and caste distinctions, creating a formal, social structure “below stairs” in their own quarters which inhibited friendships

³⁴ The three Irish farm labourers are recorded in the 1881 census return of England, Derbyshire, Chatsworth and Edensor, RG12/2774, digital image Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> [last accessed October 2016].

³⁵ D. Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (New Haven: Yale, 1998), p. 20.

between servants of different ranks and departments'.³⁶ This single sentence draws on all three concepts of class difference, 'rigid' hierarchy, and a binary 'upstairs/downstairs' spatial divide. Cannadine employs the three models to investigate how, 'across a long time span, and from a broad geographical perspective', Britons saw and understood their society.³⁷ Country house historians, conversely, have used these concepts of social difference not to place these communities in a broader national context, but to show how they functioned in isolation from wider society, as 'closed worlds' of their own.³⁸

Few concepts are more associated with the country house than hierarchy, the first of the models identified by Cannadine. The formal delineations of hierarchy that gave each person a clearly-defined role were essential in ensuring the effective management of staff in the absence of close supervision. This was especially important where households were part of a wider network of properties owned by a landowner who was not in continual residence. However, the prevalence of the term as an all-encompassing summary of the social dynamics of the nineteenth-century country house merits some scrutiny. In its most visual manifestation, with uniforms denoting status, numbered job titles, and strict demarcations of role, the concept of a country house hierarchy is specific to a late-Victorian and Edwardian form of household management. Historians have tended to look back at the nineteenth-century country house through the lens of this period, with its abundance of staff photographs and oral history interviews.

The perceived rigidity of domestic service in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and the systems used to rank servants in order of responsibility, have invited comparisons to the military. John Pearson, for example, writes of Chatsworth,

³⁶ J. Gerard, *Country House Life: Family and Servants, 1815-1914* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 221-222.

³⁷ Cannadine, *Class*, p. 19.

³⁸ P. Horn, *Life in the Victorian Country House* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 46-47.

A hundred years ago [the 1880s] this rural palace functioned only with the discipline and manpower of a full-scale man-of-war.³⁹

The synonymy of the hierarchy of the country household with the hierarchy of the military, found in the common phrase ‘armies of servants’, is problematic for a number of reasons.⁴⁰ Firstly, the association between country house staff and the military masculinizes the language of household management, concealing the authority of women. Secondly, it overestimates the size of the household staff. In the period that John Pearson refers to, there were only around a dozen live-in, full-time staff at Chatsworth. The remainder of the ‘[men] -of-war’ consisted of charwomen and labourers who lived in their own homes and retained a higher degree of independence. It is likely that Pearson is referring, rather, to the handful of occasions each year when the family and guests came to stay with their itinerant servants, thereby reinforcing the perception that life on the country estate ceased with the departure of the landowning family.

The military hierarchy is one of the few institutions with which the country house has been compared, but there are more useful comparisons to be drawn. When hierarchy is taken in a general sense, of the ranking of people in order of responsibility and authority, the country house functioned in the same way as the majority of other workplaces in Britain at the time. Factories saw hierarchies of foremen, skilled workers and unskilled workers.⁴¹ Richard Rodger argues that in other major areas of employment such as cabinet making, food processing and publishing, the master-journeyman-apprentice hierarchy was ‘stubbornly resistant’ to change.⁴²

³⁹ J. Pearson, *Stags and Serpents: The Story of the House of Cavendish and the Dukes of Devonshire* (London, 1983), p. 4.

⁴⁰ This phrase can be found recently, for example, in R. Wilson and A. Mackley, *Creating Paradise: The Building of the English Country House 1660-1880* (London and New York, 2000), p. 360; S. Evans, *Life Below Stairs in the Victorian and Edwardian Country House* (London, 2011); M. Purcell, *The Country House Library* (New Haven, 2017), p. 258

⁴¹ See P. Joyce, *Work, society and politics : the culture of the factory in later Victorian England* (London, 1980) and, for the gendered aspects of this issue: K. Canning, *Languages of labor and gender: female factory work in Germany, 1850-1914* (Ithaca, N.Y. and London, 1996);.

⁴² R. Rodger, ‘Mid-Victorian Employers’ Attitudes’, *Social History* (vol. 11, 1986), p. 78.

The majority of households, too, were organised around patriarchal hierarchies. These institution, workplace and household-specific hierarchies can be traced further to the ideological hierarchies of race and nationality which were used to justify and maintain Britain's hold over the Empire. The 'intricate below-stairs snobberies' of the country house hierarchy, then, should be understood not as a relic from the past, or specific to the culture of the country house. In a general sense, hierarchy is a 'basic and enduring' model of inter-personal organisation that has universal application. In its more specific meaning, manifested in uniforms, numbered job titles and deferential behaviours, it is a household management system that was inspired by a wider national culture of social demarcation. The concept of hierarchy, as it has been hitherto applied, is therefore an insufficient concept to characterise the particular social relations of the country house, let alone the wider estate.

The three-class system, the second model described by Cannadine, is a concept that has been debated by historians of domestic service. Domestic servants have typically been described as 'classless', but feminist historians have argued that they should be represented in histories of the working class.⁴³ Carolyn Steedman attributes the exclusion of domestic servants from definitions of the working class to the Marxist emphasis on productive labour over reproductive labour.⁴⁴ Country house servants have been further discounted from this debate, generally considered 'unrepresentative' of the vast majority of servants. Edward Higgs' argument that the households of the titled classes 'were not representative of the generality of Victorian households', and therefore not useful in studies of domestic service, has echoed through the historiography.⁴⁵ F. M. L. Thompson also wrote that country house staff 'had a

⁴³ See L. Schwartz, "What we think we needed is a union of domestics"; V. H. May, *Unprotected Labour: Household Workers, Politics, and Middle-Class Reform in New York, 1870-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); L. Schwartz, 'Rediscovering the workplace', *History Workshop Journal*, (vol. 74, 2012), pp. 270-77.

⁴⁴ C. Steedman, *Master and Servant: Love and Labour in the English Industrial Age* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 21-22.

⁴⁵ E. Higgs, 'Domestic Servants and Households in Victorian England', *Social History* (vol. 8, 1983), p. 203.

distinctive culture’ and ‘nothing in common with the vast majority of servants’.⁴⁶ When class is mentioned in the context of the country house, it is almost exclusively in reference to the upper classes, even when it concerns the servants. John Pearson, for example, describes an ‘honoured aristocracy of butlers, cook, and housekeepers ruling over a deferential work force’.⁴⁷ However, some historians have described the staff as ‘working class’. Jessica Gerard, for example, states that the country house ‘contained an upper-class family and mainly working-class servants’.⁴⁸ The concept of a significant middle-class representation in the country house is largely alien to the historiography. Only recently with the publication of works about land agents, for example by Steven King, Geoff Monks and Carol Beardmore, has the existence and influence of middle-class individuals been recognised on the country estate, although usually in isolation and not as a coordinated subsection of the community.⁴⁹

The historiographical absence of a middle ground between the upper classes and their working-class servants may be attributed to the pervasiveness of a binary social division, the third model discussed by Cannadine, in understandings of the country estate. This binary grouping of the country estate is perceived to be both social and spatial. Mark Girouard in particular emphasises the architectural boundaries dividing the ‘upstairs’ and ‘downstairs’ worlds, and thereby ‘the family’ and ‘the servants’.⁵⁰ The divide between master and servant is mirrored elsewhere on the estate in the divide between landowner and tenant. The three structures identified by Cannadine and employed by country house historians are valid

⁴⁶ F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain 1830-1900* (Harvard, 1988), p. 249.

⁴⁷ Pearson, *Stags and Serpents*, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Gerard, *Country House Life*, p. 4.

⁴⁹ See S. Matthews, ‘Landlord, Agent and Tenant in Later Nineteenth-Century Cheshire’, *Transactions / Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, (vol. 156, 2007), pp. 193-218; C. Beardmore, S. King and G. Monks (eds.), *The Land Agent in Britain: Past, Present and Future* (Newcastle, 2016); G. Monks, ‘The Duke of Portland and his Agent: The Education Act of 1870’, *Family & Community History*, (vol. 19, 2016), pp. 95-105; C. Beardmore, ‘The Rural Estate Through the Eyes of the Land Agent: A Community in Macrocosm c 1812-1844’, *Family & Community History*, (vol. 19, 2016), pp. 17-33; L. A. Rees, C. Reilly and A. Tindley (eds.), *The Land Agent: 1700-1920* (Edinburgh, 2018).

⁵⁰ Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, p. 276.

observations of the formal delineations by which country estates were organised. However, they are usually applied without acknowledging the agency that individuals could exercise within them. This can again be traced back to the fundamental assumption that the power of the landowner was absolute.

With the assumption that only the landowning family had access to power on the country estate, it follows that these structures were imposed only for the benefit of the landowning family and the reproduction of their power. The place of staff in this narrative was as facilitators of this glamorous lifestyle, rather than as autonomous individuals with their own interests, ideas and social lives. However, the assumption that everybody in the community was selflessly committed to serving the establishment is essentially disempowering, because it does not give full recognition to the agency of individuals. A farm tenant who did not work directly for the estate, for example, may have been more focused on the maintenance of their own establishment. Of course, their family's financial security was contingent on the wider health of the estate, but it seems very unlikely that much of their day was spent worrying about their duty to 'maintain[ing] and further[ing] the long-term needs of the dynasty'.⁵¹ Most tenants had their own families to think of. Again, the power of the landowner should be put into perspective as part of the unconscious *doxa* in which people exercised agency.

In order to understand how agency was exercised within structures on the country estate, it is useful to turn to studies of domestic authority by historians such as Naomi Tadmor, Karen Harvey, Jane Hamlett and Lucy Delap. Each of these historians has promoted a holistic approach to studies of households which focuses not on specific types of relationships, but on how they are situated, in Hamlett's words, in a 'structural whole'.⁵² Lucy Delap, Ben Griffin

⁵¹ Gerard, *Country House Life*, p. 4.

⁵² J. Hamlett, "'Tiresome Trips Downstairs": Middle-Class Domestic Space and Family Relationships in England, 1850-1910' in L. Delap, B. Griffin, A. Wills (eds.), *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain since 1800* (Basingstoke, 2009), p. 113.

and Abigail Wills argue in the introduction to *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain since 1800*, that this holistic approach can be achieved through a focus on the domestic authority which underscored interpersonal relationships across the household.⁵³ Domestic authority is also a key concept in Karen Harvey's *The Little Republic*.⁵⁴ Harvey challenges the narrative of the feminised domestic sphere by showing that eighteenth-century men were not remote figures in the management of the household who saw their homes as a haven from the political world. Rather, good household 'oeconomy' was a form of political engagement that was essential to the establishment of 'a secure manly and social status'.⁵⁵ The significance of household management as a political activity is potentially amplified in the homes of powerful politicians like the Dukes of Devonshire.

Harvey's arguments build on the 'separate spheres' debate ignited by Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's 1987 book *Family Fortunes*, which focused on the gendered division of public and private spaces.⁵⁶ While Harvey's main argument is against the idea of the home as a 'feminine' space, other historians have disputed the idea of the home as a 'private' space. Research into middle-class women's social activism has demonstrated that their domestic roles were compatible with political engagement in issues such as social reform, so long as they were able to claim that 'such activity remained within the elastic and permeable boundaries of their 'sphere''.⁵⁷ Such discussions often took place in the home, at the dining table and in the drawing room. As well as the public realm permeating into the private sphere, historians have argued that domestic activity had significant implications in the public sphere. Delap, Griffin and Wells argue that the politics of the home were central to the wider culture of British politics,

⁵³ Delap *et al.*, *Domestic Authority*, pp. 1-26.

⁵⁴ K. Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2012).

⁵⁵ Harvey, *The Little Republic*, p. 189.

⁵⁶ L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London, 1987).

⁵⁷ S. Morgan, 'Between Public and Private: Gender, Domesticity and Authority in the Long Nineteenth Century', *The Historical Journal* (vol. 54, 2011), p. 1198.

both as a concept in political rhetoric and in the physical restraints that it placed on women's political agency.⁵⁸

These studies emphasise the importance of the household as a social, political and economic unit rather than focusing on any individual or relationship in isolation. The parameters of this unit are usually defined by the concept of 'family', a term which was interrogated by Naomi Tadmor in a 1996 article and in her book *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England*.⁵⁹ In this book, Tadmor uses linguistic analysis to argue that heads of the household considered their 'family' to be everyone residing in their household, including servants, apprentices and distant relatives. Rather than dividing the household into the 'upstairs' and 'downstairs' spheres, Tadmor offered a concept by which the entire household could be understood as a single social unit. However, the book does not attempt to argue whether servants and other peripheral household members felt themselves to be part of the families they served. Due to the nature of the sources that Tadmor uses (men's diaries, conduct treatises and novels), the perspectives of the servants themselves are not revealed. Although Tadmor's argument was ground-breaking when it was published, more recent work on 'domestic authority' is more useful than the idea of the 'household family' for understanding the household as a structural whole – also for country estates like Chatsworth. This perspective instead allows us to trace how relationships of authority were experienced by every individual in the household. The concept of familial belonging is subjective and, in Tadmor's study, top-down. A male head of the household may have considered his maidservant an extended family member, but she may have felt a stronger familial connection to her natural family.

⁵⁸ Delap *et al.*, *Domestic Authority*, pp. 1-26.

⁵⁹ N. Tadmor, 'The Concept of the Household-Family in Eighteenth-Century England', *Past & Present*, (no. 151, 1996), pp. 111-140; N. Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge, 2004).

The language of domestic authority and the family does not transfer seamlessly to country estates, whose communities consisted of multiple different households, and the boundary between public and private was even more blurred. However, the ways in which individual agency is understood to have been exercised within the ‘structural whole’ of the household are immediately relevant to the aims of this thesis.

Sources and Methodology

This research project was defined and driven by exploratory research in the Devonshire Collections archive at Chatsworth. This approach was taken because of the collaborative nature of the project. This thesis is one of three PhD theses written as part of a Collaborative Doctoral Award Project entitled ‘From Servants to Staff: The Whole Community at Chatsworth, 1700-1950’. As part of this project, I was granted access to the archives on one or two days per week for three years. The archive is extensive, filling the old servants’ hall, the laundry and several other rooms at Chatsworth, and unlike many other archives it has never suffered a disaster by fire or flood. The only losses have been due to intentional censorship, primarily of uncomfortable personal details in the Cavendish family’s personal papers by successive descendants. The 6th Duke of Devonshire, for example, censored both his mother’s papers and his own. The scale of this censorship and destruction, however, was thankfully not nearly as extensive as at other country houses like Wentworth Woodhouse, where tons of documents were hauled by tractor onto bonfires in the 1970s.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ C. Bailey, *Black Diamonds: The Rise and Fall of an English Dynasty* (London, 2007), p. xxii.

There have also been other isolated incidents which have affected what has survived. The nineteenth-century garden account books, for example, are thought to have been lost in the early 1960s with the destruction of Barbrook House, the residence of Joseph Paxton. Some small collections have also suffered the effects of time and damp. On the whole, however, it is remarkably large and complete for an archive of its type. In addition to records pertaining to Chatsworth, it contains the entire or partial archives of other properties owned by the Cavendish family, including Hardwick Hall, Devonshire House and Bolton Abbey. Although I have not conducted a comparative study across different properties, these sources have encouraged me to view Chatsworth in the context of a network of properties across England and Ireland.

The Devonshire Collections archive has been drawn on frequently for studies of art, archaeology, architecture, and biographies of family members, for example Amanda Foreman's well-known book about Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire.⁶¹ The AHRC-funded research project 'From Servants to Staff, the Whole Community at Chatsworth 1700-1950', of which this thesis forms a part, is the first dedicated survey of the social history of the estate. Before this project was developed, the nature and extent of sources relating to tenants, servants and the wider community was relatively unknown. Pamela Sambrook's survey of the impact of domestic technology in country houses, for example, erroneously states that 'there survive [at Chatsworth] no systematic wage books earlier than 1900'.⁶² Sambrook also analyses the changing roles of laundry maids at Chatsworth between 1881 and 1911 based on their enumeration in census returns. However, this analysis is rendered wholly inaccurate by the unconscious exclusion of the casual laundry assistants who are well-documented in the household vouchers for this period.⁶³

⁶¹ A. Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire* (New York, 2001).

⁶² P. Sambrook, 'The Servants' Friend? Country House Servants' Engagement with New Technology' in P. S. Barnwell and M. Palmer (eds), *Country House Technology* (Donnington, 2012), p. 89.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-90.

Household Vouchers, 1881 to 1911, DC.

In most studies of domestic service and of rural life, a lack of sources is cited as the primary methodological barrier. In her seminal book *Master and Servant*, for example, Carolyn Steedman writes that eighteenth-century servants were ‘culturally noisy, [but] demographically elusive’.⁶⁴ The nineteenth-century servant was also culturally noisy, but in a different sense. While Steedman refers to the ‘astonishingly disrespectful’ verses that the early modern servants wrote about their employers, the nineteenth-century servant tended to be the subject of satire.⁶⁵ The caricaturisation of the butler in particular has persisted through to the twenty-first century, with his exaggerated drunkenness, haughtiness and deference recognisable to two centuries of audiences.

Nineteenth-century servants are certainly not ‘demographically elusive’ either, thanks to the census, although as Higgs has stated, it is sometimes difficult to untangle the paid domestic servants from the women who were recorded as ‘housekeepers’ in their own households, or those of their families.⁶⁶ In contrast to the eighteenth-century servant described in *Master and Servant*, the nineteenth-century servant is both culturally and demographically noisy. However, it is usually not their own voice that can be heard. Steedman writes that the early-modern servants who chided and ridiculed their employers were, prior to the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, ‘legal bodies with legal personae, in a way that their nineteenth-century counterparts were not’.⁶⁷ Without the security of poor law settlement, later servants had more to lose from voicing their opinions than their predecessors. Similar observations can be made of rural villagers. Michael Winstanley commented in *The Victorian Countryside* that ‘even those men and women who had the ability to leave us their impressions rarely considered

⁶⁴ C. Steedman, *Master and Servant*, p. 14.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁶⁶ E. Higgs, ‘Domestic Service and Household production’ in A. John (ed.), *Unequal Opportunities: Women’s Employment in England 1800-1918* (Oxford, 1986), p. 258.

⁶⁷ C. Steedman, *Master and Servant*, p. 13.

their simple lives worthy of recording for posterity'.⁶⁸ In the course of my research it soon became clear that the number of rich textual sources written by and about servants, workers and tenants was unusually large at Chatsworth, and that among them were groups of documents which offered rare perspectives. I therefore decided to focus primarily on these letters, diaries, witness statements and notes, making use of the more commonplace account books and other administrative sources for essential context.

This thesis makes use of a wide variety of documents, but in particular it draws on: the letters of Ann Wilson, a widowed tenant living in Edensor, and her family; the letters of Sarah and Joseph Paxton; the notebook of a gardener, James White; and witness statements, letters notes and memoirs relating to the dismissal of a housekeeper, Elizabeth Bickell.⁶⁹ Apart from the majority of the documents related to Elizabeth Bickell, these sources were all donated to the archive at some point after the period in which they were written. The Wilson family letters belonged to Elizabeth Wilson, the recipient of the majority of them, who lived away from Chatsworth for the majority of her life and died in Chesterfield. Her letters passed to her brother Alfred, then to his granddaughter Sheila, who donated them to Chatsworth in the 1990s. The papers of Sarah and Joseph Paxton were donated by their granddaughter, Violet Markham, who used them to write the book *Paxton and the Bachelor Duke*, published in 1935.⁷⁰ This collection alone contains 1,845 documents. Several hundred of them are letters written between Sarah and Joseph Paxton discussing people and events on the estate. James White wrote his notebook while working at Chatsworth between 1837 and 1842, but continued to write in it long after he had moved to work elsewhere, until at least 1858. It was therefore given to the archive at least two decades after James worked at Chatsworth.

⁶⁸ M. Winstanley, 'Voices from the Past: Rural Kent at the Close of an Era' in G.E.Mingay (ed.), *The Victorian Countryside, Volume 2* (London, 1981), p. 626.

⁶⁹ These are catalogued in the Devonshire Collections as: DF33/5, the P/ series, CH14/7/3 and DF4/1/8/1 respectively.

⁷⁰ V. Markham, *Paxton and the Bachelor Duke* (London, 1935).

In addition to correspondence, diaries and notes, the archive contains good runs of account books and other administrative documents. There is a complete set of rental accounts for the nineteenth century estate villages and other tenanted properties in the local area. The census is available for Chatsworth and the parish of Edensor, and similar surveys of tenants and staff were taken internally at various points of change such as when a Duke died. Unfortunately the household accounts, garden accounts and vouchers from all departments are less complete. The household accounts contain gaps between 1846 and 1908, and the vouchers are missing from 1812 to 1860, while the garden accounts have been lost altogether. These absences contributed to my decision to focus primarily on the textual sources relating to the specific individuals named above, using accounts where possible to situate them in a wider local narrative.

Although this thesis benefitted from a rich archive in which thousands of non-élite individuals are represented, some in their own words, it is nonetheless important to scrutinise the processes of conscious and unconscious mediation which influenced the creation of the majority of these documents. Even account books, which might appear neutral or formulaic, reveal underlying cultural biases which can obscure an individual's identity. The rental accounts, for example, are suggestive of the unequal status which women held in the community at Chatsworth and more generally in this period. Many women are referred to solely by their marital status, as 'Widow [surname]', or '[late husband]'s widow'. Sometimes the linguistic choices made are open to a range of interpretations. A foreign-born coachman, for example, is recorded in the account books as 'Peter the Russian'.⁷¹ This may be a sign that he was marginalised in the community, that the accountant could not spell his Russian name (which varies in other sources from Ustinowicz to Wisternoff), or that Peter identified strongly with his national identity and chose to be defined by it.

⁷¹ Household accounts for Chatsworth, 1827-1841, C/165, DC.

Donated sources, like the Wilson and Paxton family letters, and the notebook of James White, are different to documents which have always been part of the archive. Besides being written by servants and tenants themselves, they were almost certainly written without the knowledge that they would be acquired by Chatsworth. Some of them may therefore be said to offer a less-filtered view of life on the estate than documents written with future readership in mind, like many of the Cavendish family papers were. Recently-discovered documents which have historically received little attention, such as those relating to the dismissal of housekeeper Elizabeth Bickell, are also interesting because they may have slipped the net when higher-profile diaries and letters were censored of uncomfortable material by successive generations of family members.

In order to draw out the themes of authority, agency and power that this study addresses, I have used a methodological approach which is appropriate to the varied archival source material. The local context which forms the backdrop of my case studies is illustrated in several chapters through the use of graphs, which present quantitative data from account books, surveys and the census. To create and analyse these graphs, I compiled databases of information which were thematised by source type. In one database I transcribed the census returns for Edensor and Chatsworth between 1841 and 1901. In another I recorded numerical information from rental accounts, including the number of householders, rental income and arrears for each estate village, from the years 1821 to 1877. Other sources I transcribed into databases for quantitative analysis included household accounts, vouchers, joist books, building accounts and parish records. By cross-referencing these administrative sources, I was able to piece together a broad picture of the community in which my key individuals operated.

The authors of the documents which are central to the case studies in this thesis rarely made explicit reference to the themes of power, authority and agency. It has been my aim in this methodology to reveal the dynamics underlying their writings without overstating or

making assumptions about their intentions. In order to achieve this approach, I have undertaken a close reading of the sources which is informed by applied linguistic methodologies. Scholars of sociolinguistics have long been interested in the relationship between language and identity, and interpersonal communication has increasingly been seen to play an active role in personal identity building.⁷² As part of this close reading, in some chapters I have made use of corpus techniques, situating individual documents within my complete corpus of transcripts. In chapter four I have also used corpus linguistics to analyse the investigation of Elizabeth Bickell in the context of criminal investigations at the time, by making use of the Old Bailey Transcripts corpus available online.

I have predominantly used corpus linguistics to analyse high frequency key words and their connotations, both those intended by the writer and those informed by wider cultural practices. In this approach I have taken inspiration from Ken Hyland's work on the performance of identity through language. Hyland argues that personal proclivities for the use of certain words 'contribute[s] to an independent creativity shaped by shared practices'.⁷³ Documents like letters therefore reflect not only an individual's style and outlook, or the dynamics of a specific relationship, but also the nature of the local community and wider society in which the writer lived. Applied linguistics is not a key methodological focus in every chapter. Instead, the examples I have used demonstrate how this interdisciplinary approach has the potential to allow historians to access secondary meanings in archival documents.

⁷² K. Hyland, 'Community and Individuality: Performing Identity in Applied Linguistics', *Written Communication* (vol. 27, 2010), p. 159.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

Chapter Overview

This thesis comprises four chapters. Each chapter speaks to the themes of authority, agency and power by focusing in on different individuals and areas on the estate. Chapter one, entitled ‘Change and Continuity at Nineteenth-Century Chatsworth’, has two main purposes. The first is to establish who lived and worked at Chatsworth, highlighting continuities and changes in the demography of the whole community between 1811 and 1877. Secondly, it asks what and who influenced these changes. The chapter argues that the agency of non-élite individuals should be considered integral to the changing demography of the household, and that employment trends were not only dictated by the preferences of the landowner but also by the personal choices made by workers. It then focuses on the 6th and 7th Dukes of Devonshire and the extent to which they were actively engaged in the management of Chatsworth. This leads to a discussion of the circle of individuals who helped the Dukes to mediate the demands of estate management. It asks what power and authority people such as Joseph Paxton had, as masters over their subordinates, servants to the Dukes, and ambitious individuals with their own priorities beyond those of the estate.

The second chapter, ‘Model Villagers’, focuses in on the estate village of Edensor and the social impact of its transformation in the late 1830s. It looks first at the national and local influences behind the reconstruction of Edensor as a ‘model village’, before turning to a case study of the Wilson family. The contemporary and historiographical interpretations of life in an estate village which open the chapter are challenged through a close reading of the Wilson family’s fifty-one surviving letters. In particular, the chapter challenges the common perception that estate villagers exchanged their independence for increased comfort, both financial and material. Bridging the fields of rural history and gender studies, it asks how the increased

domestic labour generated by the new cottages may have limited the agency, and comfort, of its female residents. Through a close reading of this rare collection of letters it also asks to what extent the power of the Cavendish family featured as a real presence in the daily lives of tenants.

Chapter three focuses on Chatsworth's famous gardens and park. The first half looks at structures of power in the gardens and the tension between the gardeners' identity as professionals and their status as servants. It then focuses on Sarah Paxton, whose unofficial management of the gardens and estate during Joseph Paxton's frequent absences has gone largely unrecognised. The managerial tone of many of Sarah's letters demonstrates the importance of looking beyond the hierarchies of gender, power and labour implied in sources such as account books. Sarah was an unpaid woman in a community dominated by professional men, but her letters show that she was active in its surveillance and management. This chapter explores how Sarah reconciled the demands and power of her position in the public gardens with her domestic identity as middle-class wife and mother. Finally, the chapter looks at how the space of the park and gardens, and the movement of the gardeners within and beyond it, challenges the physical segregation seen to define experiences of country house service.

Chapter four moves from the gardens to the interior space of the household. With a focus on individual and communal consumption, it follows a recent interest in country house consumption spearheaded by Jon Stobart.⁷⁴ This important work has seen a shift from servants being understood as objects of elite consumption and, more often, as facilitators of elite consumption, to active managers of household consumption. This chapter builds on this research by looking at servants as agents of consumption for their own individual purposes. It focuses on the case study of Elizabeth Bickell as an example of a servant who allegedly abused

⁷⁴ See J. Stobart, 'Gentlemen and shopkeepers: supplying the country house in eighteenth-century England', *The Economic History Review* (vol. 64, 2011), pp. 885-904; J. Stobart and M. Rothery, *Consumption and the Country House* (Oxford, 2016); J. Stobart and A. Hann (eds.), *The Country House: Material Culture and Consumption* (Swindon, 2016).

her authority as housekeeper in order to emulate the conspicuous consumption of the aristocracy. It asks what role consumption played in the exercise of agency and negotiation of power and identity at Chatsworth, while exploring how consumption was policed within the self-regulated moral culture of the estate. It also examines how domestic service could be used by women for the purpose of social mobility and an alternative to marriage.

The argument implicit in each of these chapters is that the Chatsworth community had a dynamic social life that, if not entirely indifferent to the Cavendish family, was not defined by selfless devotion to the upholding the aristocratic establishment. Only by dismissing the notion that the (often absent) landowning family was the only powerful influence in the lives of tenants, servants and labourers, is it possible to arrive at a comprehensive social history of the country house.

Chapter One

Change and Continuity at Nineteenth-Century Chatsworth

The story of the country estate is, in many ways, a story of change. Country houses were built to produce and reproduce the power of their owners, and were often built at moments of financial or political triumph. As Girouard states, the size of a country house was not just an indicator of wealth, but an index of the owner's ambitions.¹⁴⁴ Chatsworth as it appears today was begun in the time of the 4th Earl of Devonshire, a Protestant Whig politician during the reign of Roman Catholic James II. The Earl was one of the 'immortal seven' who laid the groundwork for the Glorious Revolution of 1688, for which he was well-rewarded. In 1688 the Earl decided to extend the building works beyond the original plan, 'no doubt encouraged by the improvements in the family fortunes'.¹⁴⁵ By the time the new Chatsworth was completed in 1707, the Earl had been made the 1st Duke of Devonshire for his part in assuring William and Mary's ascension to the throne. A large carved pediment on the western front of the house, the side facing visitors as they enter the estate, displays the family's coat of arms encircled by the motto of the Order of the Garter and topped with the ducal coronet. The redesign of the house was therefore intimately linked to the changing political status of the Cavendish family, and indeed of Britain.

Country houses were also showcases of cultural change, built in the most fashionable styles, and thereafter renewed regularly to reflect new tastes in furnishings, art and garden

¹⁴⁴ M. Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven and London, 1978), p. 3.

¹⁴⁵ J. Barnatt and T. Williamson, *Chatsworth: A Landscape History* (Bollington, 2005), p. 53.

design.¹⁴⁶ The buildings were further modernised through technology. As Marilyn Palmer states, the architecture and settings of country houses presented unique challenges to the provision of such basic requirements as water, light and heat.¹⁴⁷ The technology designed for country houses was therefore often at the forefront of innovation. Palmer's research asks, in part, how this cutting-edge technology impacted the lives of the servants, for better and for worse.

Scholars in the field of country house studies are giving increasingly more consideration to the daily experiences of servants.¹⁴⁸ However, servants, and the wider rural community of which they formed an integral part, are rarely considered to be agents or drivers of change, particularly in the nineteenth century. Changes that affected the household and estate community are almost invariably credited to the landowner alone. Pamela Horn, for example, writes,

Because of the authority landlords enjoyed, autocratic owners could lay down rules for their tenants which regulated such matters as personal morality, church attendance, the cultivation of gardens, and the cleanliness of cottages.¹⁴⁹

Statements such as this ignore multiple other factors, from wider cultural influences to, for example, the authority of land agents. Nor does Horn consider whether the tenants complied with these changes, either willingly or resentfully. Where she does acknowledge conflicts, between the household staff at the Earl of Rosebery's Dalmeny House and the Duchess of Marlborough's staff at Blenheim, they are not interpreted as expressions of social tension, but

¹⁴⁶ That is, if they were inhabited. For an interesting discussion of neglected country houses in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, see E. Purcell, 'A House in Decline? Boughton House, c.1709-1827', *Northamptonshire Past and Present* (vol. 70, 2017), pp. 43-55.

¹⁴⁷ M. Palmer, 'The Country House: Technology and Society', *Industrial Archaeology Review* (vol. 27, 2005), pp. 97-103.

¹⁴⁸ See, for example, J. Stobart and M. Rothery, *Consumption and the Country House* (Oxford, 2016) and A. Gray, 'Broccoli, Bunnies and Beef: Supplying the Edible Wants of the Victorian Country House' in J. Stobart and A. Hann (eds.), *The Country House: Material Culture and Consumption* (Swindon, 2016).

¹⁴⁹ P. Horn, *Life in the Victorian Country House* (Oxford, 2010), p. 7.

one as a ‘squabble’, and the other as a cause of inconvenience and ‘personal anxiety’ to the mistress.¹⁵⁰ This can again be traced back to the Marxist assumption of the classless status of servants and of reproductive labour. Conflicts that occurred in other workplaces, for example the factory floor, are more likely to be interpreted as political expressions informed by broader class dynamics.

Historians’ dismissal of servants as agents of change can be attributed to the fundamental concepts and language through which country houses are interpreted. Archaeologist Anne Yentsch has used the terms ‘the world-as-lived’ and ‘the world-as-thought’, to form a distinction between the real space of domestic buildings and the imagined space that ‘express[ed] social order’ within it.¹⁵¹ The concept inspired Susie West to ask how the design of the country house ‘shapes and is shaped by social relations and expectations’.¹⁵² Mark Girouard makes a similar distinction between the real and the imagined, analysing the social practices that inspired the built architecture of country houses.¹⁵³ West and Girouard, as an archaeologist and architectural historian, interpret the ‘real’ as the physical fabric of the building and the ‘imagined’ as the social relations that inspired it. However, as argued in the introduction a further distinction should be made between real social interaction and imagined social relations, or *doxa*. When the power of the landowner is understood as sociocultural context, not as an absolute, what ‘transformative capacity’ (to employ the term used by Giddens) did servants, workers and tenants have on the country estate? Furthermore, what reasons did these individuals have to promote and influence change around them, if not a simple duty to their master?

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁵¹ A. E. Yentsch, ‘Legends, Houses, Families and Myths: Relationships between Material Culture and American Ideology’ in M. C. Beaudry (ed.), *Documentary Archaeology in the New World* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 17.

¹⁵² S. West, ‘Social Space and the English Country House’ in S. Tarlow and S. West (eds.), *The Familiar Past? Archaeologies of Later Historical Britain* (London and New York, 1999), p. 121.

¹⁵³ M. Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*.

In answer to the question of how the agency of non-élite individuals was exercised within the unequal *doxa* of the country estate, this chapter puts the real managerial capacity of Chatsworth's owners, the 6th and 7th Dukes of Devonshire, in perspective, by exploring the other influences that drove demographic change and employment trends at Chatsworth. It argues that change did not result from the direct unmediated control of the landowner over his dependents, but that multiple factors and individuals were responsible. To explore the motivations driving individuals to exercise their transformative capacity, or agency, this thesis draws on another concept defined by Pierre Bourdieu, that of different forms of capital.¹⁵⁷

In addition to economic capital, Bourdieu identified the less tangible concepts of cultural and social capital. Simply put, cultural capital comprises the social assets of a person, such as their education, fashion sense and style of language, which are recognised as desirable and promote social mobility in a similar way to economic capital. Social capital refers to the 'actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition', in other words the status gained through advantageous social connections.¹⁵⁸ It is well-established that country houses were sites which embodied and reproduced the social and cultural capital of their owners.¹⁵⁹ This chapter sets up the crucial argument that servants, tenants and workers did not only see themselves as facilitators of the landowning family's accrual of capital, but that they were also concerned with their own social mobility. The motivation of individuals to accrue their own cultural capital, or to benefit from their association with Chatsworth by ensuring its continuing prestige, should be understood as a key motivator of change within the country estate.

¹⁵⁷ P. Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', in J. Richardson, *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (Westport, 1986), pp. 15-29.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁵⁹ See T. Williamson and L. Bellamy, *Property and Landscape: A Social History of Land Ownership and the English Countryside* (London, 1987), pp. 54-71.

First, this chapter draws on surveys, accounts and the census to analyse the changing demography of the household staff and its relationship to the wider estate. It then asks to what extent long-term changes in this relationship were brought about by the people themselves and by wider social influences. The second half of the chapter shifts to look at specific individuals, focusing on the authority of the 6th and 7th Dukes of Devonshire and how engaged they were, in reality, in the management of their households. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the chapter asks who exercised power over the Dukes, and why, in these matters of domestic and estate management.

Surveying the Staff

In order to fundamentally reassess power dynamics on the country estate, it is first necessary to establish who lived and worked there. As chapter two focuses on the estate villages and chapter three on the outdoor workers, this chapter will look primarily at the indoor servants, although their important relationship to the wider estate will also be considered. Some of the most useful sources for tracking the changing demography of the Chatsworth household are surveys, which were taken at several points in the century when a new duke inherited, or when changes were planned for other reasons. When the 6th Duke of Devonshire inherited his father's estates in 1811, he would have learned that in his English houses alone he employed nearly 100 servants.¹⁶³ In addition to Chatsworth he inherited Hardwick Hall, also in Derbyshire, Londesborough Hall and Bolton Abbey in Yorkshire, Chiswick in Middlesex, Devonshire House in London, and Lismore Castle in Ireland. On the death of the 5th Duke, surveys were taken at all of these households apart from Lismore, in order to ascertain where economies and

¹⁶³ 'Household Establishments for Mr Heatons Perusal & Consideration', 25 December 1811, L114/51, DC.

improvements could be made.¹⁶⁴

These surveys were carried out by the agents at each of the estates, and then sent to London 'For Mr Heatons [the London agent's] perusal [and] consideration'.¹⁶⁵ The survey found that there were 31 servants at Chatsworth, making it the second largest staff after Devonshire House in London, which had 40. The 1811 surveys of Devonshire House and Chatsworth offer snapshots of two very different houses, their functions alluded to by the roles and genders of the staff employed there. At Chatsworth, only a quarter of the servants were based indoors. These were the steward, the housekeeper, two housemaids, a stillroom maid, a porter and an upholsterer. The indoor servants were outnumbered by those based in the stables and park, who included four game keepers, five grooms and a park keeper. At Devonshire House, where there were no large outdoor spaces, almost three quarters of the servants were based indoors. This suggests that while the London house was designed for entertaining indoors, Chatsworth was used more as a base for outdoor pursuits, in particular riding, hunting and shooting. The lists also suggest which household was more modern in structure and management. Several of the servants at Devonshire House are numbered, suggesting that a hierarchy was imposed, a method of management that was not put into practice at Chatsworth until the late nineteenth century, when the numbers of indoor servants reached similarly high levels. The ratio of male to female servants is also very different. At the London residence, 32.5% of the staff were female, compared to 13.8% at Chatsworth. The lower percentage of female staff at Chatsworth suggests it was rarely occupied. There was no need to employ a large full-time domestic staff for a house that was only visited once or twice a year. There was, however, a need for security. Six watchmen were employed to ensure that poachers and thieves were kept away while the Cavendish family were away.

¹⁶⁴ The surveys survive for Devonshire House, Chatsworth, Chiswick and Hardwick only. It appears that surveys were also taken at Bolton Abbey and Londesborough but these have been lost.

¹⁶⁵ 'Household Establishments', L/114/51, DC.

Chatsworth in 1811 was a relatively empty house, then, compared to the full house in London. The handful of servants would have spent the majority of their time employed in the maintenance and upkeep of the house, in contrast to the footmen, butlers and valets based at Devonshire House who spent their time waiting on their employers. Although there was perhaps less constant activity in Chatsworth than in Devonshire House, the estate in which it was situated was a hub of activity. A party to celebrate the Duke's coming-of-age in 1811 was well-attended by people from the local area. For the house alone, the steward Thomas Knowlton ordered enough canvas to cover 1000 people in case of rain, and in the park, the lowest estimate was that 20,000 people had attended. There were also events that did not revolve around the Cavendish family, including Edensor Wakes in June, and events organised for male members of the Edensor Club at the inn by the entrance to the village. The household staff were an integral part of this social world.

The next survey to be taken of the staff at Chatsworth was in 1858, on the death of the 6th Duke, by the Chatsworth agent and head gardener Joseph Paxton. This recorded 22 servants: two housekeepers, six housemaids, one laundry maid, one dairy maid, one stillroom maid, a stewards room man, three porters, a librarian, an upholsterer, one stableman, one aviary man, two postilions, and a gamekeeper.¹⁶⁶ This new list of roles suggests that the function of the house had changed since 1811. Female servants now made up 50% of all listed, and 63% of the indoor staff. The management of the household had also changed. There is no steward listed, although there was still a 'stewards room man' to wait on the senior servants. The management of the house was shared by two female housekeepers of the same age, receiving the same salary. In the past, the housekeeper had only shared her role when she was ill and elderly. From 1846, the presence of two housekeepers suggests that female authority was becoming more established in the household staff. Just over a century before, the position had

¹⁶⁶ 'Servants at Chatsworth receiving wages', Joseph Paxton, 1858, DF4/8/3/3, DC.

been held by a male housekeeper. The increase in female staff may have been a result of the 1777 tax levied on male servants and a widespread feminisation of domestic service.¹⁶⁷ However, it is more likely that the greater number of female servants is an indication that the house was being used more frequently as a long-term residence, rather than a sporadically-used base for country sports and health retreats. The increase in indoor servants, from seven to sixteen, and the greater variety of jobs, suggests that their role had expanded beyond mere maintenance and upkeep. With a dedicated laundry maid to wash clothes and three additional house maids, more 'feminine' domestic work was being generated because the house was more frequently occupied.

It is perhaps surprising, considering the increase in indoor servants, that the overall number of servants is lower in the survey of 1858 than in 1811. There appear to have been fewer outdoor servants in 1858, with no watchmen, gardeners or grooms listed. While again it might suggest the shifting function of the house from outdoor to indoor activities, the information is misleading. Under the direction of head gardener Joseph Paxton, there were more gardeners at Chatsworth than ever before. It is also evident from the account books that there were several gamekeepers and grooms. It seems then, that the only servants included in the survey were the indoor servants and several key outdoor servants. Very senior servants such as the agents on the one hand, and lower outdoor servants such as the grooms on the other, were excluded. The complete absence of gardeners from the survey is indicative of the administrative segregation of the departments on the estate. While the full-time gardeners were listed in the household account wage books in the eighteenth century, they are absent from the surviving household accounts in the nineteenth century. Joseph Paxton began separate account books for the gardens from the 1820s, but unfortunately these have been lost.

¹⁶⁷ S. Hahn, 'Nowhere at Home?' in P. Sharpe (ed.), *Women, Gender and Labour Migration: Historical and Global Perspectives* (London, 2001), p. 110.

The separation of the garden department from the household, stables and park accounts for the absence of gardeners from the 1858 survey, and furthermore, partly accounts for the lower number of servants than in 1811. However, it does not explain the absence of several gamekeepers and stable workers that appear in other documents around the same time. A possible explanation is that the under gamekeepers, stable workers and under-gardeners were exempt from the servant tax after Gladstone's revision of the assessed taxes in 1854. Until the Revenue Act of 1869, when the legal definition of 'servant' was broadened, the tax on male servants applied at a reduced rate for boys under eighteen, under-gardeners and under-gamekeepers, and there were ways of avoiding paying it altogether. If the workers were paid a day rate instead of a yearly wage, it could be argued that they were labourers, and were not 'constantly employed' as servants.¹⁶⁸ Employers of servants found many loopholes to avoid paying the tax on servants. As one politician observed, boys were 'apt to stick at eighteen, the limit of exemption, and remain there for a quarter of a century'.¹⁶⁹ The Master and Servant Acts were also surprisingly inadequate in their definition of a servant. In 1839, domestic servants were defined simply as 'menials', who were servants that lived 'within the walls of the house'.¹⁷⁰ This did not take into account the variety of indoor and outdoor, senior and lower servants that were to be found in country houses. It was not until the revised Master and Servant Act of 1867 that the definition was broadened:

A servant may be a menial though he does not reside within the walls of his master's house. Thus, where a head gardener was hired for a year, at 100l. wages, to superintend hot-houses, pineries, &c., and a house was assigned him within his master's grounds, and he had the privilege of taking in apprentices for a year at 15l. premium, and had five under-gardeners to assist him, it was held that he was a menial servant.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ S. Dowell, *A History of Taxation and Taxes in England* (London, 1888), pp. 215-223.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

¹⁷⁰ E. Spike, *The Law of Master and Servant in regard to Domestic Servants and Clerks* (London, 1839), p.7.

¹⁷¹ E. Spike, *The Law of Master and Servant in regard to Clerks, Artizans, Domestic Servants, and Labourers in Husbandry* (3rd edition, London, 1872), p. 1.

With the law unclear about who was defined as a servant, it is possible that, if Paxton was not only listing the male servants for whom tax was paid, the individuals missing from the list are simply absent due to his own definition of who fell in the category of ‘servant’. Postilions, who appear on the survey, were liveried servants responsible for driving carriage horses, and would have interacted to some extent with the passengers. Grooms, not included in the survey, looked after the horses and generally remained at the stables. It is possible, then, that Paxton’s own definition of a ‘servant’ was based on their visibility, and the amount of interaction they had with their employer. This would explain the inclusion of the head gamekeeper, who may have been expected to interact with the Duke, but not his under keepers. The enumerator of the 1811 survey appears to have been similarly subjective in his approach. Surprising individuals such as ‘apothecary’, ‘physician’ and ‘chaplain’ are included in this list of ‘household establishments’, but crossed out. Two gamekeepers in charge of nearby lands at Baslow and Haddon, are also crossed out.

A new survey was taken in 1891, on the accession of the 8th Duke of Devonshire. This survey was added to in 1900, 1901 and 1907. These surveys were principally intended for keeping track of how many people were employed at each household in total, and the wages and additional allowances, for example free rent of a house, given to the senior servants in each department. At Chatsworth in 1907 there were 234 people employed.¹⁷² The huge increase in number from the 1811 and 1858 surveys, is because these later surveys include casual labourers, and all outdoor workers including gardeners. The servants are categorised in six departments: Office, Woods, Domain, Game and Fish, Household, and Gardens. This suggests a far greater administrative separation of people and spaces on the estate. While the breadth of

¹⁷² ‘His Grace the Duke of Devonshires Estates: List of Agents, Officials [etc]’, 1890s, added to in 1900 and 1907, FM/4, DC.

this survey is greater, there is less detail about the lower servants. The housekeeper and assistant housekeeper are the only female servants named.

The surveys of 1811, 1858 and 1891-1907 are interesting documents because they offer tantalising glimpses into the changing structure and relations of employment on the estate. The surveys show the separation of different departments, as the household grew and shifted in focus, roles became more specialised, and clearer distinctions between individuals and groups were enforced. They suggest that Chatsworth was influenced by changing social and legal perceptions of domestic labour. However, the surveys also illustrate why a variety of sources must be consulted in order to piece together an accurate picture of the Chatsworth household, and why even simple research questions, such as how many servants there were, can be difficult to answer. Each individual surveyor had his own idea of what constituted a ‘servant’ as opposed to a worker or employee, and these definitions were not always clarified by the law. The agents conducting the surveys rarely included themselves, perhaps judging that they were too senior to be listed with the other servants, or that their authority and presence were already implicit in the act of surveying the staff. Male servants may also have been excluded if tax was not being paid for them. Even though all of the surveys were undertaken for the same purpose, to enumerate the staff employed by a new duke on his inheritance, they each recorded different information. All of these factors mean that the surveys, which by definition should be one of the most thorough accounts of the demography of the estate workers, are inconsistent and misleading. The surveys serve as a reminder that administrative sources were not necessarily unbiased or formulaic.

A study of the household account books gives rise to similar issues. There are six decades’ worth of nineteenth-century account books missing from the archive, and those that do survive often omit important information, such as whether servants are paid board wages or other allowances. More detail can be found in the collections of vouchers, but these are missing

for almost the entirety of the 6th Duke's time, from the 1820s to 1861, and those that survive for the second half of the century generally only refer to the casual labourers who were paid daily rates. Letters and other textual sources such as diaries and witness statements can also give some 'snapshots' of the household at specific times, but also cannot, in isolation, offer a complete picture of the household.

Beyond the Devonshire Collections, the census returns are a much more consistent source than those found in the archive at Chatsworth, but still require some caution. The limitations of the nineteenth-century censuses for England and Wales have been addressed by historians such as Edward Higgs.¹⁷³ The problems specific to this chapter are: that they only occurred every ten years, that it is difficult to locate servants who did not live in the house or were away at the time, and that the household was significantly altered by the presence of the dukes on two census days. The travelling staff, who accompanied the dukes as they moved from house to house, are difficult to differentiate from the full-time staff on the census. Letters written by the dukes occasionally clarify which servants traveled with them, but they are not always named.

The Devonshire Collections archive offers a fragmented record of the changing demography of the Chatsworth household in the nineteenth century, even when combined with information from the census returns. The only groups of servants consistently recorded in some capacity in the surviving surveys, account books, vouchers and census returns are the indoor female servants, in particular the housekeeper, housemaids and laundry maids. In the nineteenth century, the maid was the most omnipresent servant. If any nineteenth-century household was staffed at the most basic level, from a lower middle-class merchant's house to a country mansion like Chatsworth, there was likely to be at least one maid. The following section will therefore cautiously trace the changing roles, positions and experiences of female

¹⁷³ See, for example, E. Higgs, *Making Sense of the Census Revisited* (London, 2005).

indoor staff through a diverse range of sources, in order to make wider observations about change and continuity on the estate, and the influences that drove it.

Change and Continuity in the Female Staff

In *Country House Life: Family and Servants 1815-1914*, Jessica Gerard proposes that there are four categories into which domestic servants can be placed.¹⁷⁴ These are: the lifecycle servant, who worked only until they could marry or find a more desirable occupation; the career servant, who made domestic service their life's occupation; the distressed gentlewoman, who was forced to earn a living as a governess or other upper servant; and the labourer, an unskilled worker. This model does not account for the servants whose status was ill-defined, such as the physician, but they are nonetheless useful for understanding the structure of the household and the experiences of the female workers. They have been particularly effective in drawing attention to the 'invisible' labourers, who are more difficult to locate than the other categories of servant, but who are nonetheless essential for understanding the role of the country house as a centre of employment for rural communities.

There are no surviving records of 'distressed gentlewomen' working at Chatsworth in the nineteenth century. Women who fell into this category typically tended to hold the respectable positions of lady's maids or governesses, but for eighty-one years Chatsworth did not have a mistress. The 6th Duke of Devonshire never married, and left his estate to his nephew, who was widowed. The 7th Duke's daughter Louisa Cavendish was a frequent female presence in the house, but after her marriage to Francis Egerton in 1861 she had her own

¹⁷⁴ J. Gerard, *Country House Life: Family and Servants, 1815-1914* (Oxford, 1994), p. 162.

household to manage.¹⁷⁵ Both male and female labourers, by contrast to distressed gentlewomen, were a constant presence in the house. Male labourers were brought in to do unskilled work in the house while the family were away, such as basic repainting, cleaning and repair work. The nature of this general labour did not change very much over time. In 1811 James Pleasance, a local man, was paid for general assistance, attending stoves and cutting up firewood.¹⁷⁶ In 1891, another local man, Samuel Downs, was paid for polishing furniture, recovering chairs, cleaning windows and ironwork, sweeping chimneys, and laying asphalt and edging stones in the gardens.¹⁷⁷ The only notable changes to the nature of this manual work came with new technologies. In 1909, B. Evans was among several men paid for ‘Attending to Heating & Domestic Hot Water Boilers, cleaning out drains, septic tanks, attending to Electric Bells, sweeping chimneys, carrying coal etc.’.¹⁷⁸ The capitalisation of the technologies listed here suggests that they held a certain level of prestige which may have required slightly more skilled and careful work, but in general the nature of the labourers’ work varied little from general maintenance and cleaning. Just as the work of male labourers in the house tended to involve the same kinds of task throughout the period, their wages remained unchanged - between two and five shillings for a day’s work. While male labourers are present in most account books and voucher series, casual female labourers are better subjects for comparison across the period, as they were usually recorded as ‘household assistants’, ‘charwomen’ or ‘laundry maids’, rather than being paid for a specific list of activities.

Even with the large gap in the household vouchers between 1811 and 1861, an idea of the number and wages of the female labourers can be ascertained. Their number ranged from eleven to fifteen, and their pay increased from between £0.1.0 and £0.1.6 per day in 1811, to between £0.1.6 and £0.2.4 per day in 1891. In 1811 the same women could assist either in the

¹⁷⁵ The diary of Lady Frederick (Lucy) Cavendish, November 1866, vol. 10, DC.

¹⁷⁶ Chatsworth Account Book, December 1811, L/91/8, DC.

¹⁷⁷ Household Vouchers, 1891, DC.

¹⁷⁸ Household Voucher no. 292, 1909-10, DC.

house or laundry, but by 1861 the roles were separated. The women were paid the higher daily rate for doing laundry work, as this work was comparatively more skilled and labour intensive. Outside of their labour at the big house, fragments of evidence about the lives of these women can be gathered from the census returns and parish records, as well as the vouchers themselves. The average age of the casual women workers in 1811 was 48, and all had recognisably local surnames, although this is not a guarantee that they were from the area. They may have been illiterate, as one of the women signed the voucher in 1811 on behalf of the others, and marked her name with an 'X'.¹⁷⁹ The fourteen women who can be identified in the census returns from 1861-1891 had similar characteristics to their predecessors from 1811. Their average ages ranged from 47 to 51, and most appear to have been poor. Two of them were receiving parish relief, six were widowed, four were the wives of estate labourers, and five had another employment in addition to working at Chatsworth. The majority were born on the estate, and out of fourteen, eleven of them lived in Pilsley.¹⁸⁰ The significance of this will be discussed more in the next chapter, but here it is important to note that Pilsley was the furthest and least visible estate village from Chatsworth and on average its tenants (most of whom were labourers) paid the lowest rents.

When looking at the casual labourers at Chatsworth between 1811 and 1891, it appears as though very little changed. The charwomen and laundry assistants were generally poor local village women, working to supplement their husbands' income, their other jobs, or their parish relief. They were older than the full-time maids working in the house (whose average ages ranged from 28 to 34), and the work at Chatsworth was flexible. Their individual working hours varied considerably, and in each year some women worked as few as one day per month, and

¹⁷⁹ Household vouchers, 1811, DC.

¹⁸⁰ Fourteen women could be identified from their names, ages and occupations in the 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911 census returns of England, Derbyshire, Chatsworth and Edensor, RG9/2540, RG10/3628, RG11/3448, RG12/2774, RG13/3264 and RG14/21192, digital image Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> [last accessed October 2016].

some as many as twenty-four days. The number of casual women workers did not see any notable change over the course of the nineteenth century, nor did their wages, which increased very slowly. However, when this data about the casual labourers is compared to the birthplaces and wages of the career and life-cycle servants that worked at Chatsworth full-time, it becomes clear that, while the circumstances of the female indoor labourers themselves stayed consistent, the context around them changed significantly and altered their experience of work in the house by association.

In 1811, a charwoman working six days per week could have made up to £23.9.6 in a year. The annual wages of the full-time maids, by comparison, were only £11. In addition to their wage the full-time maids received a sugar allowance of £3.0.0 per year, but this only brought their total wage to £14, which was 60% of what a full-time charwoman would have earned. When the 6th Duke took over he increased the wages of the maids to £15, and by 1826 the maids received £16.19.0 for their wages and sugar allowance combined, rising to £18.18.0 in 1846. In 1861, under the 7th Duke, the maids received £50 per year, and this rate continued until at least 1891. While the wages of the full-time maids rose significantly over the course of the nineteenth century, from £14 to £50, the equivalent annual wage of a female labourer working six days per week only rose from between £15.13.0 (for the lowest day rate) and £23.9.6 (for the highest day rate) in 1811, to between £23.9.6 and £35.19.11 in 1891.¹⁸¹ Over time, therefore, the casual women's pay was comparatively devalued. In 1811 the lowest-paid female labourer would have received £1.13.0 more for 313 days' labour than her salaried equivalent. In 1891, even the highest-paid labourer would have been paid just over £14 less.

The main reason for the increase in annual wages for the full-time maids is the addition of board wages. From 1800 until the mid-nineteenth century, the housekeeper bought

¹⁸¹ The equivalent annual wage of the female labourers has been calculated by multiplying the lowest and highest day rates by 313.

provisions for the staff while Chatsworth was unoccupied, and this expenditure was reimbursed to her every quarter. The maids' wages were supplemented with a fixed 'sugar allowance', but this rarely equated to more than £3 per year. In 1846, as part of an attempt to limit the spending power of the housekeeper after Elizabeth Bickell's dismissal, maids began to receive a full board wage as part of their annual wage. This paid for living expenses while the family were away. In 1891 the board wages were a substantial £0.12.0 per week, which over a year would have added up to £31.4.0. When the family were in residence, this board wage was withheld, because all accommodation and food were provided. However, according to the surviving vouchers, this did not impact greatly on the maids' total wages. In 1862, for example, Eliza Jones and several other maids were paid '£44.8.10 being a years Wages and Board Wages due this day, after deducting £4.9.0 for Board Wages during Your Grace's stay at Chatsworth'.¹⁸² Other years, they were paid the full £50.

The replacement of a sugar allowance with full board wages has interesting implications for the position and authority of the housekeeper, which will be discussed in chapter four. What is also interesting to consider is how board wages affected the agency of the full-time maids. With a greater personal income, and the freedom to decide how it was spent without asking for permission, the maids of 1846 onwards gained more financial independence than their predecessors. Board wages had been paid to the maids at Chatsworth in the eighteenth century, but they were replaced by a lower sugar allowance in 1800, probably due to the increased presence of the family.¹⁸³ Board wages continued to be paid to the maids at Devonshire House even when they were not paid at Chatsworth. This is probably because the maids based in London would have relied on merchants for food and provisions while the family were not in residence, and therefore their living costs would have been higher. At

¹⁸² Household vouchers, 1891, DC.

¹⁸³H. Wallace, 'Community, Conflict and Change at Chatsworth 1700-1811', Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Sheffield, 2019.

Chatsworth, the household and wider community were more self-sufficient at the beginning of the nineteenth century. As has been discussed, some servants, including the upholsterer, cultivated land in addition to their duties in the household. Vegetables were grown in the gardens, meat was acquired from the local farms, and many of the servants would have relied on their families nearby for other provisions. Board wages, therefore, may have been considered an unnecessary expense in a household that was well-supported by the gardens, the land and the servants' own families. Only eleven of the thirty-one servants at Chatsworth in 1811, all senior male servants, and all based outdoors, were paid board wages. This board wage can be understood to reflect both male authority and that male outdoor workers tended to live, and therefore eat, with their own families.

The introduction of generous board wages to the female indoor staff in 1846 was the result of events specific to the household, but it also marked an increasing 'professionalisation' of the household. According to census returns, the number of full-time indoor workers born within five miles of the house decreased over the course of the nineteenth century, as the average distance between Chatsworth and servants' birthplaces increased. This is demonstrated in the two graphs below.

Chart 1.1: A chart showing the ratio of local to non-local servants at Chatsworth. It shows the number of servants recorded on the census returns born within five miles of Chatsworth, and those born further away. It excludes servants in 1851 and 1861 (when the 6th and 7th Dukes were in residence on the night of the census) who were part of the traveling retinue of servants and not part of the fixed staff. The column for 1841 is only an approximation, since precise birthplaces were not recorded on the census for that year. Hannah Gregory and Mary Bown, who were born around 8 miles away at Matlock in Derbyshire, are counted as ‘non-local’, while the other servants are thought to have been born on the estate based on their surnames and through a process of cross-referencing parish records.

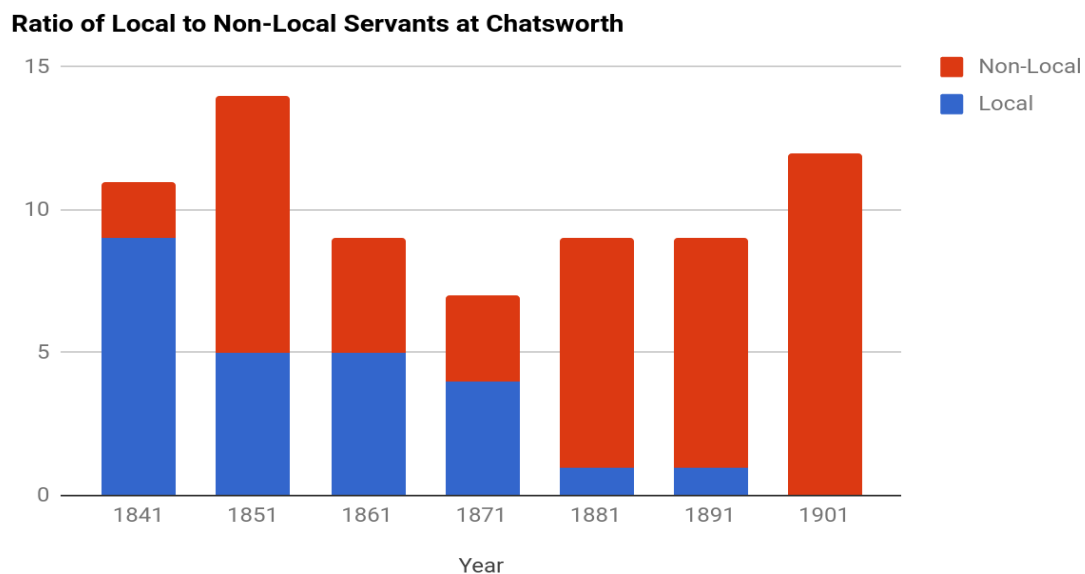
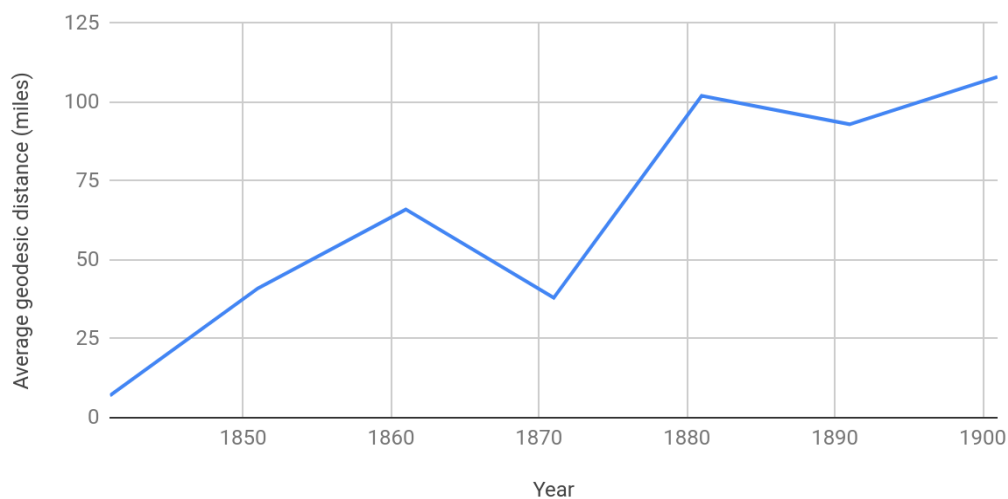


Chart 1.2: A chart showing the average distance between full-time indoor servants' birthplaces and Chatsworth. The geodesic distance is the distance 'as the crow flies' between two places. The average geodesic distance for 1841, for which the census only indicates the county of birth, is based on a median of the distance between Chatsworth and the furthest point on the Derbyshire border. The actual average is likely to have been even lower. Again, this graph excludes servants in 1851 and 1861 who were part of the traveling retinue accompanying the 6th and 7th Dukes.

Average Distance Between Full-time Indoor Servants' Birthplaces and Chatsworth



The decrease in local staff and the increase in distance between Chatsworth and the servants' birthplaces suggests that servants were selectively recruited for attributes other than their proximity to the house. Unfortunately, documents relating to recruitment have been lost, but servants were likely to have been employed for their skills, experience and education, as evidenced by character references from previous employers. The introduction of board wages, then, might have been an incentive for professional servants to take up employment at Chatsworth. It may also indicate that they were perceived to be more trusted, or able, to manage their own finances than in previous years. Servants employed at Chatsworth who came from a long distance (such as housemaids Mary Mcdiarmid from Scotland in 1861, Fanny Carpenter from Hampshire in 1881 and Amy Richards from Brighton in 1901), may have had more personal expenses. It would have been more costly to travel home for holidays, they may have written home more frequently than maids whose families lived on the estate, and they could not dine with relatives while the house was unoccupied.

The full-time female indoor servants worked at Chatsworth for shorter periods of time than the labourers. Live-in life-cycle servants such as Mary Furniss, a woman from the estate, left service at Chatsworth after getting married in 1871. The servants who were not from the estate were more likely to fall into the category of 'career servant', and usually worked in several different houses in order to progress in their roles. Mary Hastie, for example, began working at Chatsworth as a maid around 1826, then worked at the duke's houses in Brighton and London before moving back to Chatsworth for her promotion to housekeeper in 1846.¹⁸⁶ In 1871, 1881 and 1891, the percentage of live-in female servants who had been working in the house for longer than ten years was 29, 11 and 0 percent respectively. In the same years, 55, 55, and 53 percent of casual women had worked there for longer than ten years.¹⁸⁷ Two of

¹⁸⁶ Household Accounts, 1825-1846, C/165, DC.

¹⁸⁷ Census returns for 1861-1891 and household vouchers, DC.

them, Jane Booth and Mary Cowen, had worked as charwomen at Chatsworth for at least thirty years. Therefore, the individuals making up the full-time group of women workers in the house changed at a faster rate than the casual workers.

The effects of this shift on social dynamics in the household can only be guessed. A series of altercations between Lady Louisa Cavendish's lady's maid and the Chatsworth staff in 1866, which led to the lady's maid's dismissal, demonstrates that conflict sometimes arose between newcomers and the established staff.¹⁸⁸ Studies of other houses also suggest that changes in staff engendered tensions. Jessica Gerard, for example, writes that 'servants in great houses took their status system very seriously, with many disputes over precedence'.¹⁸⁹ In general, household servants born locally were more likely to occupy the status of a 'lower' servant in the second half of the nineteenth century. This is because servants from the local area generally fell into the category of 'labourer' or 'life-cycle servant' rather than 'career servant'. They selected their employment at Chatsworth (if they were able to) based on convenience of location rather than a personal ambition to climb up the career ladder. All of the female servants recorded in the census returns who were born on the estate were listed as 'maids' or 'domestic servants'. None of the women occupying the two most senior roles, the housekeepers and assistant housekeepers, were employed from the local area. After 1843, the death of the last housekeeper from Derbyshire, they came from places including Essex, Durham, Denbighshire, Darlington, Rutland and Perthshire. As well as the impact of regional and cultural differentiation in the household, it is interesting to consider how social relations were affected by ages and wages. In 1811, the casual staff were older and better-remunerated for their labour than the live-in maids. The power dynamics between the two groups of women may also have been affected by the fact that most came from the estate community, so many

¹⁸⁸ The diary of Lady Louisa Cavendish, November 1866, vol. 10, DC.

¹⁸⁹ Gerard, *Country House Life*, p. 225.

of the charwomen would have been in the same generational subsection of the community as the parents of the live-in maids. It is hard to imagine that the relationship between charwomen and live-in maids did not change as more young, experienced women entered the household to take up positions, and were considerably better paid for their skills and experience. The casual labourers would have had less common cultural ground with, and a less clearly-defined authority over, their new colleagues.

Agency in Change

The employment of maids in the household accounts and vouchers paint a picture of a country house community that saw a visible shift from a dependence on local workers to a selective recruitment of workers from outside Derbyshire. It was, according to this narrative, a community that became less insular and local, and more diverse and connected to wider society, as the nineteenth century went on. However, this trend does not describe every area of the estate. In the gardens, the opposite shift occurred. When activity in the gardens increased dramatically with the arrival of Joseph Paxton in 1826, the local community was unable to supply adequate numbers of skilled workers. The 1830s and 40s therefore saw an influx of non-local staff in the gardens, some of whom settled in the community. It was in the second half of the nineteenth century, when the children of Paxton's gardeners began to step into their fathers' roles, that gardening became established as a local, family occupation.

In 1841, over 60 per cent of Chatsworth's gardeners recorded in the census were living as lodgers.¹⁹⁰ By 1901 only 20 percent lodged, while 80 percent lived with their own families

¹⁹⁰ 1841 census returns for Edensor, Derbyshire. Digital image Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> [last accessed October 2017].

either as the head or as a relative.¹⁹¹ The settlement of gardeners from elsewhere into Baslow and the estate villages can be seen in the census from 1871 onwards, when their sons began to take on the same role. In the 1841 census, 60 per cent of gardeners were born outside of Derbyshire, but only 30 per cent were born elsewhere by 1891.¹⁹² Change in the demography of the Chatsworth estate community was not linear or concurrent. Nor were the influences behind demographic change attributable to one source. It is important to consider the complex range of different individuals and events which drove change.

¹⁹¹ 1901 census returns for Edensor, Derbyshire. Digital image Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> [last accessed October 2017].

¹⁹² 1841 and 1891 census returns for Edensor, Derbyshire. Digital image Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> [last accessed September 2017].

Chart 1.3: Graph showing living situations of gardeners at Chatsworth, as recorded in the census.

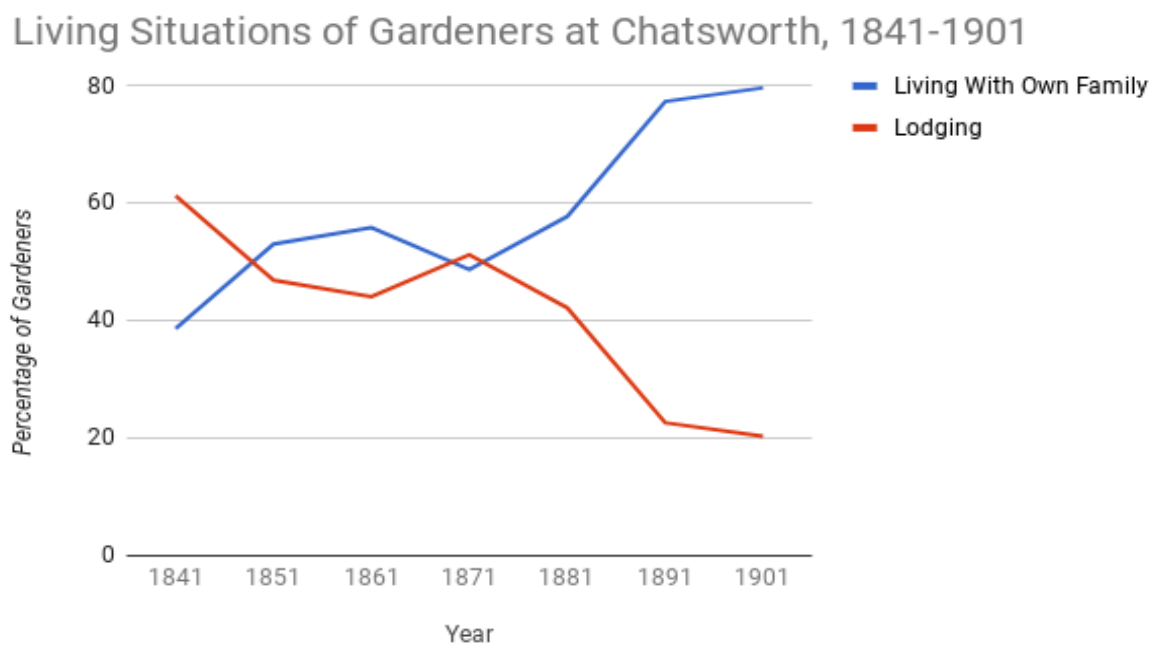
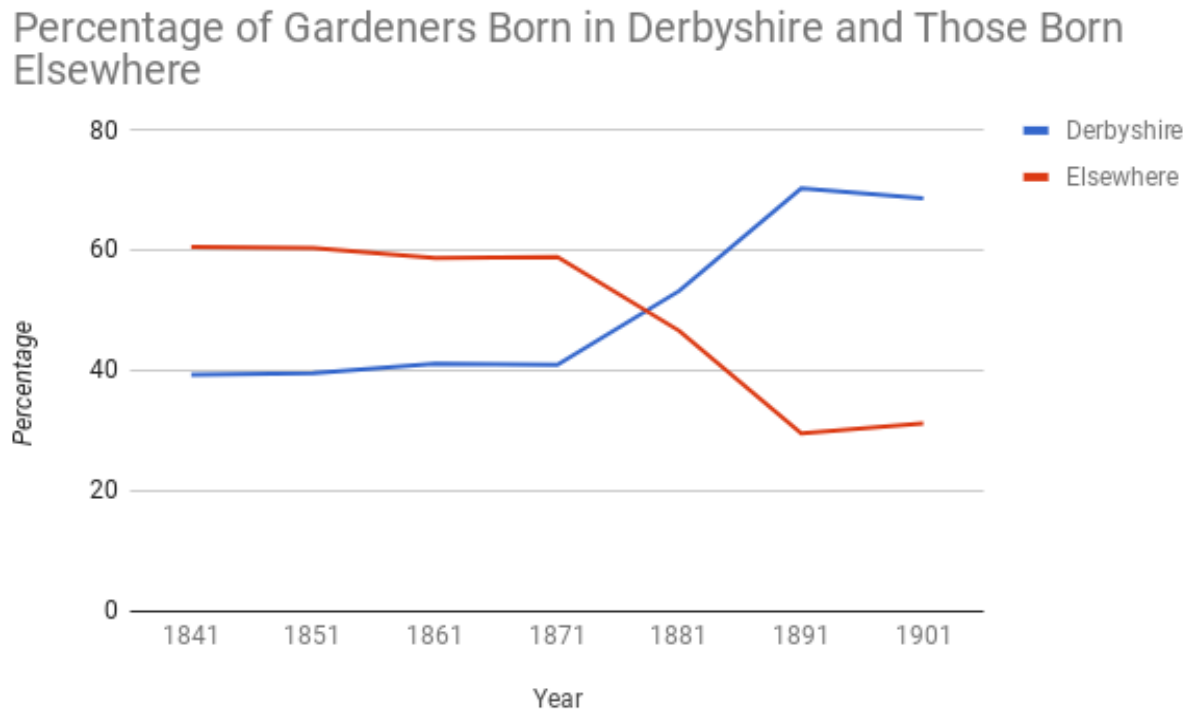


Chart 1.4: Graph showing the percentage of gardeners born in Derbyshire and elsewhere, as recorded in the census.



The mistress of the house has been identified as an integral agent in the management of the household and in the preservation of the boundary between servants and family members. Leonore Davidoff *et al.* argue that this boundary was a particular concern for mistresses in mainland England where, in contrast to households in the Empire, servants were not distinguishable by racial, ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics.¹⁹³ The professionalisation of the country house staff has been understood as part of this preoccupation with rank, as female employers increasingly sought servants who understood and had previously worked in a deferential household culture. Estate villages could not always provide the necessary experience. The low number of local girls working in the country house has been noted by Jessica Gerard. In her sample, only five out of eighteen maid servants were born on the estate, and nearly two-thirds of the scullery maids came from more than ten miles away.¹⁹⁴ She attributes this to it being ‘more difficult’ for local girls to find positions than boys, because they were expected to have basic training and experience, and their own outfits.¹⁹⁵ Mistresses were further incentivised to recruit from outside the estate because maids hired externally were less likely to have unsuitable ‘followers’ nearby to distract them from their work and lead them astray. Followers were a common fear in the discourse of the ‘servant problem’ that plagued late-nineteenth-century mistresses.¹⁹⁶

At Chatsworth, there was no mistress. Even if there was, it would have been difficult for her to have personally managed every change in staff at every one of the Cavendish properties. The narrative of the demanding mistress is therefore an impossible explanation for changes at Chatsworth. It is important to reiterate here that Chatsworth is not understood to

¹⁹³ L. Davidoff, M. Doolittle, J. Fink and K. Holden, *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830-1960* (Harlow, 1999), p. 159.

¹⁹⁴ Gerard, *Country House Life*, p. 171.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ L. Davidoff, ‘Mastered for Life: Servant and Wife in Victorian and Edwardian England’, *Journal of Social History* (vol. 7, 1974), p. 408.

represent a typical country house, but as an interesting case study to explore the potential of the country house as a site of power for non-élite individuals. The argument that changes in the household could be influenced by the agency of servants is valid in any household, regardless of the authority of a mistress or master. Even under the strictest household a servant had the option to leave, which itself constituted a disruptive change. In 1841, for example, the 6th Duke wrote to his sister Lady Granville,

Her Grace [the Duchess of Sutherland] has been sadly put out by the strike among her servants, six of whom have left her to go to Vantini the entrepreneur of Euston Square Hotel, [and] its corresponding establishment at the other end of the railway, Fleetwood in Lancashire. Cook, confectioner, upholsterer, under butler gone.¹⁹⁷

The individual and collective agency of the servants in this event in the Duchess of Sutherland's household is clear. The transformative capacity of individuals who were not employed in the first instance is less clear. Could change in the Chatsworth household also have been influenced by the agency of individuals who were never employed there?

Local girls may have struggled to meet the requirements for a job at the big house, but it is also possible that Chatsworth did not meet their expectations as a potential workplace. In 1866, Elizabeth Wilson left the village of Edensor, where she had been born, to work as a maid at Tushingham Hall in Cheshire. Elizabeth was a career servant. She never married, working as a kitchen maid in Nottinghamshire with her sister as a young teenager, as a nurse maid in Cheshire, and later as a lady's maid in Leicestershire. These are only the positions that can be found in the census but she is likely to have had more. Elizabeth Wilson was therefore well-qualified to seek employment at Chatsworth if she had wanted it. Nor was the provision of her

¹⁹⁷ Letter from the 6th Duke of Devonshire to Lady Granville, 1841, CS1/1/23, DC.

own outfit a problem, as Elizabeth was a skilled seamstress and her mother, Ann, was a dressmaker by profession.

In one of the letters that Ann wrote she implies that, although Elizabeth's employment was necessary for financial reasons, she also chose to leave Edensor for Cheshire because of a desire to travel. Ann writes, 'I shall be sure and send for you home if I cannot manage but I know you want to see a bit of the Countrey and I think it will do you good'.¹⁹⁸ Although Ann understood her daughter's motivations for leaving home, she says that she would prefer her to find a position at Chatsworth, as 'it would be so nice to have you so near and you would get so much better wages'.¹⁹⁹ This is not simply an optimistic wish, as Ann believes that it would be quite possible for Elizabeth to get the position, 'if you like when you have been ware you are a year or so and thayr is a vacanc[y] I think I could praps manage to get you in'.²⁰⁰ After two years at Tushingham Hall, Elizabeth returned home. She is listed in the 1871 census working at home as a dressmaker. This could mean that Ann's optimism was too great after all and Elizabeth was not able to get a position at Chatsworth, that Elizabeth thought it best to stay at home to look after her aging mother, or that Elizabeth simply did not want to get a position there.

Elizabeth's long career in domestic service saw her working in at least five counties in England. This travel should not be understood as a necessity. Maids were so much in demand in Edensor that Ann thinks Mrs Hall, the reverend's wife, would 'never forgive me if I was to tell her of your place [in Cheshire]'.²⁰¹ Elizabeth's geographical mobility should be understood as directly related to her social mobility. By moving from place to place, Elizabeth accrued her own cultural capital in the skills and experiences that she gained from each household and each

¹⁹⁸ Letters of Ann Wilson, circa. 1866-1868, DF33.5, DC. The spellings have been left uncorrected in quoted source material, but square brackets have been used in some quotations to clarify meaning.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ Letter from Ann Wilson to Elizabeth Wilson, c.1868, DF33/5, DC.

experience of travel. This cultural capital was not only important in furthering her career path from kitchen maid to lady's maid, but also in her personal enjoyment and relationships with family members. Elizabeth frequently sent material gifts of apples, flowers and books back home to her mother and siblings as a way to share the sensory and educational experiences that she was enjoying elsewhere in the country.

Domestic service is usually framed through an unequal master-servant relationship in which servants had little freedom of choice. Leonore Davidoff, for example, describes English domestic service as 'exceptionally confining'.²⁰² Although the spatial experience of domestic service in the middle-class home was often one of cramped basements and awkward encounters on staircases, servants could take advantage of market demand to negotiate the terms of their contract and be selective about where they went. This aspect of the agency of young women from the Chatsworth estate is implied elsewhere in Ann Wilson's letters,

About one of Elizabeth Wilson's friends leaving the household of the Edensor vicar and his wife:

Elizabeth Yoxall is leaving Halls she wants more wages... so thay has been a pritty to do about it so she thi[n]ks she can get more wages, Mrs H[all] is verey sorey to part with her.²⁰³

An answer to an enquiry from Elizabeth's mistress about hiring another maid:

I am affraid thay is no one about her[e] that would sute I thout one of Bambers girls would have done verey nice but she is gon to her place, tell Mrs V if I can hear of one that would be likely to sute her I will send her word at wonce

Finally, in reference to the difficulties Elizabeth's sister Julia had finding servants:

they have had such bother to get a cook thay have engaged two and when [the prospective cooks] knew what work [there] was thay wouldnot com unless thay had a kitchen maid and twentey pounds wages Julia think what a goos[e] she has been²⁰⁴

²⁰² L. Davidoff, 'Mastered for Life', p. 408.

²⁰³ All of these quotes are from letters from Ann Wilson to Elizabeth Wilson, c.1868, DF33/5, DC.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

These letters show that, when Ann was writing, the availability of domestic servants from the local area could not fulfil the demand for them. The women that Ann describes, including Elizabeth, are very active, driven by their ‘wants’, for wages, for extra support and for travel. These may be the same desires that drove women from outside the estate to seek employment at Chatsworth.

The availability of cheap and quick transportation that came with the railways opened up new career options for young women. It also changed the nature of domestic service at Chatsworth. When a railway station opened nearby at Rowsley in 1849, thousands of visitors began pouring into Chatsworth every year. The transformation of Chatsworth into a site of mass tourism in the mid-nineteenth century was sanctioned by the Duke, but it was the project of Joseph Paxton and his railway associates. According to Adrian Tinniswood, the opening of the Midland Railway from Derby in 1849 led to around 80,000 tourists coming to Chatsworth each year, increasing again when the line reached Manchester in 1863.²⁰⁵ The arrival of large numbers of tourists fundamentally changed the role of the servants at Chatsworth, who now spent much of their time guiding visitors around the house and gardens. This may also account for the professionalisation of domestic servants in the household. The job now required a certain level of education and knowledge of art, architecture and history.

As well as local cultural and social influences, there were political and legal influences which explain why Chatsworth might have seen a rise in professional servants and the displacement of local servants in the household. Until 1834, domestic servants had the right to settle in a parish in which they had worked for one year and one day. A servant who fell on hard times could therefore become a burden to their adopted parish. When the Poor Law Reform Act of 1834 was passed, unions were set up to share the burden of poverty and to

²⁰⁵ A. Tinniswood, *The Polite Tourist: A History of Country House Visiting* (London, 1998), p. 152.

construct workhouses for the poor. This meant that individual parishes were no longer obliged to give relief payments to paupers. On country estates, it was logical for landowners to subsidize their tenants' rates by employing them in the house or grounds.²⁰⁶ However, after 1834 this incentive was decreased, since bringing in more experienced and professional servants from elsewhere did not carry the risk of seeing them settle in the parish when they were no longer able to work.

Carolyn Steedman writes that the removal of legal protections with the Act of 1834 was the most important factor in creating the 'new' servant of the Victorian age: domesticated and lacking in individuality, in contrast to the sometimes 'astonishingly disrespectful' servant of the eighteenth century.²⁰⁷ Again, this assumption that nineteenth-century servants were 'lacking in individuality' is a generalisation that ignores their agency and defines them in relation to their employer. But the idea that the Poor Law Reform Act influenced patterns of employment at Chatsworth offers further support for the argument that country houses were not isolated and detached from wider society, but intimately connected to changes that occurred on a national level. The new settlement laws may have both incentivised hiring from outside of the Chatsworth estate, and enabled young women like Elizabeth Wilson to find employment in other places, travelling the country as they did so.

So far this chapter has established that the authority of the master or mistress of the household alone is insufficient to account for change in the demography and employment trends of the country house. The influences that caused change should be understood as complex and multifarious. I have demonstrated that servants could exercise agency by leaving their positions. I have also shown that a trend away from employing local girls as housemaids

²⁰⁶ M. Havinden, 'The Model Village' in G. E. Mingay (ed.), *The Victorian Countryside: Vol. 2* (London, 1981), p. 417.

²⁰⁷ Steedman, *Master and Servant*, p. 13.

should not only be understood as a change in the hiring preferences of the country house owner, but should also be credited to the ambitions and changing options available to the local girls themselves. The following section will consider the transformative capacity of the 6th and 7th Dukes of Devonshire, and the motivations and influences behind their relationships with servants and staff.

The Dukes of Devonshire

The individual with the highest authority on the country estate was the landowner. As FML Thompson argues, landowners varied enormously in their ability and attentiveness to issues on their estates.²⁰⁸ Some oversaw every detail, while others had little knowledge or interest in estate management. Even for landowners who preferred to devote their energy to other activities, it was still difficult to disassociate themselves from their property and land. There was more at stake from poor estate management than loss of income. Country estates were also intimately tied to a family's reputation and honour. Owners therefore had many reasons to involve themselves in managing change.

In 1894, *Punch* published a cartoon entitled 'Depressed Dukes', which imagined a conversation between the Duke of Devonshire and the Duke of Westminster reacting to Harcourt's 1894 budget, which raised income tax from 7d to 8d per pound.²¹⁰ 'If this budget passes', says the 8th Duke of Devonshire, 'I don't know *how* I am going to keep up Chatsworth!'. 'If you come to that', replies the Duke of Westminster, 'we may consider ourselves lucky if

²⁰⁸ F. M. L. Thompson, 'Landowners and the Rural Community' in G. E. Mingay (ed.), *The Victorian Countryside: Vol. 2* (London, 1982), p. 457.

²¹⁰ 'Depressed Dukes', *Punch* (30 June 1894), p. 302.

we can keep a tomb over our heads !'. In this satirical portrayal, the Duke's personal fate is inextricably linked to that of Chatsworth. The use of personal pronouns reinforces this, the Duke of Devonshire's phrase 'I don't know how I am going to keep up Chatsworth' suggests the upkeep of the house is his sole responsibility, while the Duke of Westminster's phrase 'if you come to that' conflates the fate of Chatsworth with the fate of the Duke. The overall message of the caption suggests that Chatsworth would be the last possession with which he could part, second to his own tomb. By extension the cartoon associates the loss of Chatsworth with death, both of the Duke himself and of the Cavendish dynasty. The house and estate represented a heavy burden of responsibility which was felt throughout the nineteenth century, not only in the period of general decline following the depression of agriculture.

Fig. 1.1: 'Depressed Dukes', *Punch* (June 1894). 'Punch', Gale PUNCH Historical Archive

[last accessed February 2019].



DEPRESSED DUKES.

Duke of Devonshire. "IF THIS BUDGET PASSES, I DON'T KNOW HOW I'M GOING TO KEEP UP CHATSWORTH!"
Duke of Westminster. "IF YOU COME TO THAT, WE MAY CONSIDER OURSELVES LUCKY IF WE CAN KEEP A TOMB OVER OUR HEADS!"

The heavy responsibility of keeping up Chatsworth was keenly felt by 8th Duke's predecessors, his father (the 7th Duke) and his great uncle (the 6th Duke). The nineteenth-century Dukes of Devonshire each found that their golden inheritance was tarnished. According to David Cannadine, on the 6th Duke's accession in 1811 his income amounted to more than £70,000 a year, which combined with his four country houses, three London houses and extensive lands, made him unrivalled in status and wealth.²¹¹ However, over 60% of the 6th Duke's income was absorbed in repaying debts, mortgages on the estates, and annuities and jointures.²¹² As well as inheriting his mother's gambling debts, the new Duke inherited her extravagant spending habits. He spent lavishly on travelling, collecting and building. James Lees-Milne writes that he was 'bored to tears by business, resenting as a personal affront any restraint on his own reckless spending'.²¹³

When the 7th Duke inherited in 1858, he found himself in a similar position to his uncle in 1811. He wrote in his diary,

The income is large, but by far the greater part is absorbed by the payment of interest annuities [and] the expenses 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 condition of matters than I had expected, though from knowing the Duke's ignorance of business, I did not expect to find them very flourishing.²¹⁴

The 7th Duke was less extravagant than his uncle, but he invested extensively in the railway and iron ore mining in Barrow-in-Furness. In 1873, according to Cannadine, over 80 percent of all Devonshire investments were concentrated in Barrow. Chatsworth meanwhile suffered

²¹¹ D. Cannadine, 'The Landowner as Millionaire: The Finances of the Dukes of Devonshire, c. 1800-c.1926', *The Agricultural History Review* (vol. 25, 1977), p. 79.

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ J. Lees-Milne, *The Bachelor Duke: 6th Duke of Devonshire 1790-1858* (London, 1991), p. 18.

²¹⁴ Diary of the 7th Duke of Devonshire, January 1858, DF5/1/13, DC.

from reductions ‘on an immense scale’.²¹⁵ However, the 7th Duke’s investments and interventions were ultimately disastrous for the family finances. The Barrow venture collapsed with irrecoverable losses. ‘Unable to eradicate debt out of a desire for economy’, writes Cannadine, ‘he ended by enlarging it out of a sense of duty.’²¹⁶ The 7th Duke’s restraint and responsibility was, in the end, more costly than his predecessor’s carelessness.

The 6th and 7th Dukes of Devonshire were not alike in personality, but they both struggled with the pressures of balancing their economic and social responsibilities. Ultimately the 7th Duke was less successful, as his financial failures also came at a social cost. In 1885, his dissatisfied tenants presented him with a ‘memorial for the reduction of rent’, which he refused on the grounds that he felt ‘the holdings are reasonably rented’.²¹⁷ There is little other evidence of resentment held towards the 7th Duke, but nor is there evidence of praise such as the 6th Duke received from his staff and tenants. In a speech in 1843, for example, Joseph Paxton said,

What I consider [the 6th Duke] excels all other men upon Earth in is His generosity to those in distress His justice and Love of mercy His attention to the poor [and] needy His Care of the widow [and] the orphan His sympathy for all who are affected and his undeviating kindness and liberality [and] benevolence to all who have the good fortune to be about him.²¹⁸

Similar language can be found in several places in the archive, including in song lyrics in a gardener’s notebook from 1838 which praise the Duke’s dedication to providing work for the men of the estate.

The Duke of Devonshires health in a bumper drink round
For of all men he merits their praises

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Cannadine, ‘The Landowner as Millionaire’ (Part IV), p. 47.

²¹⁷ Memorial for the Reduction of Rent, 1885, L/93/147, DC.

²¹⁸ Speech from Joseph Paxton to the Estate Workmen, 1843, P/194, DC.

If 20 such Dukes in this country could be found
Theyd find work for our Joiners and Glaziers
Mecanich and labour of every degree
Need not emigrate for imployment
His daily improvement is ment we can see
For the good of poor men- and enjoyment²¹⁹

The choice of the lyric ‘enjoyment’ may have been used primarily to rhyme with ‘employment’, but it is also an interesting selection because it is not clear who is doing the enjoying – the workers or the Duke, or what they are enjoying – the work, or the improved appearance of Chatsworth. If it is suggesting that Chatsworth was being enjoyed by the workers, this may reflect the change that the estate underwent between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, from a place of private leisure to public leisure.

Although the lyrics suggest that the Duke’s motivation was to provide employment and enjoyment for others, it is clear that the improvements at Chatsworth were also for himself. In a letter written in 1837, the agent at Chatsworth wrote to an unknown recipient about ‘a necessity for greater attention to the external keeping of the place, arising out of the more frequent residence of the Duke, and the increasing interest he takes in every thing [sic] connected with it’.²²⁰ The 6th Duke spent more time and money at Chatsworth than the 5th Duke and his two wives, the 6th Duke’s mother Georgiana and Bess Foster. Between 1820 and 1828, he built the new North Wing at Chatsworth with architect Jeffry Wyattville. This significantly increased the living and working spaces allocated to servants, whose bedrooms had hitherto been located in the attics of the main house. Prior to the bedrooms in the North Wing being built, many of the indoor staff, even including the housekeeper, rented cottages at Edensor. In 1826, the Duke personally appointed Joseph Paxton as head gardener, and together they undertook many significant projects in the gardens and park.

²¹⁹ Notebook of James White, 1838, CH14/7/3, DC.

²²⁰ Letter from Sydney Smithers, 8 March 1837, L/83, DC.

As well as offering steady employment to his estate workers, the 6th Duke made a concerted effort to interact personally with the people of his estates. In 1842, his sister commented, ‘one day we went into every cottage in Edinsor, [and] I am glad to see how much he knows about all the poor people [and] their families’.²²¹ This knowledge had been built up through a series of visits that the Duke made to his tenants’ houses, although at times the process was a little naive. In 1838 the 6th Duke began to write a record of visits he made to his tenants in the local villages, of which only the record of Pilsley survives.²²² This record shows that the Duke carried out his visits, unannounced, on a Wednesday afternoon. Over half of the notes for the houses record that he saw the wife or daughter, but not the male head of the household, who was presumably away from home working. Comments from these households include: ‘Feb 14. Saw wife, forget already’. Although the 6th Duke made efforts to get to know his tenants, they were simply too numerous and too dispersed to interact regularly with all of them. The same applied for his staff. Several documents suggest that he was only personally acquainted with his personal, male servants and the heads of departments. In 1849, for example, the 6th Duke wrote that he was travelling to Lismore Castle with ‘the doctor Condell... 2 upper servants besides Meynell [the valet], the cook being one, 3 maids - [and] 2 other livery servants’.²²³ The fact that he only names two servants suggests that he might not have known the names of the others.

Although the 6th Duke could not maintain a personal relationship with all of his employees, he often interacted with them as a group, for example by attending servants’ balls. His fraternisation with his servants sometimes inspired incredulity in his peers. On one

²²¹ Letter from Lady Carlisle, October 1842, CS2/2/95, DC.

²²² There is also one surviving page for Beeley, suggesting that there were once notes on all of the estate villages.

²²³ Letter from the 6th Duke to Francis Edmond Currey, 1849, MS 43,438/2, NLI.

occasion his guest at Chatsworth, Count Apponyi, the Hungarian Ambassador to France, declined an invitation to join him at the servants' ball. The Count wrote shortly afterwards,

The Duke of Devonshire, Lady Granville and Lady Carlisle - in fact the whole clan - sont *affreusement* whigs; in spite of clinging to all the privileges which they owe to their birth... they are not whigs by principle, but through vanity, to render themselves popular, to make themselves adored... If this is not the case, how can we explain their mania to cling to the party which has no other aim but to take from them what they hold most dear in the world: rank, fortune, power?²²⁴

Count Apponyi's criticism was reflective of souring opinions of 'the Grand Whiggery'. As Peter Mandler observes, by the mid-nineteenth century, 'the denomination of "whig" had taken on a narrow and largely pejorative connotation'.²²⁵ It had come to convey a dreamy optimism which was impractical or amateurish in execution. Mandler writes that the aristocracy, 'at the height of self-confidence', was not easily intimidated by these criticisms. The 6th Duke of Devonshire, however, could not be described as 'self-confident' on an individual level.

The 6th Duke's acute lack of self-assurance might explain why he preferred to support his cousins' political careers than to take an active role in politics himself, but one area where he could not escape the uncomfortable reality of his own privilege was in his interactions with servants.²²⁸ This is especially clear when he discusses cases in which he administered discipline. He detested unfair treatment of servants, and was particularly unforgiving of his own anger against them, even when he felt himself to have been provoked. This is clear in a diary entry from August 1846, about an incident involving his valet and his *maitre d'hotel*:

²²⁴ Quoted in Lees-Milne, *The Bachelor Duke*, p. 123.

²²⁵ P. Mandler, *Aristocratic Government in the Age of Reform* (Oxford, 1990), p. 44.

²²⁸ Interesting comparisons can be drawn with Virginia Woolf's uneasy relationship between her identity as a feminist and her status as an employer of domestic servants, discussed brilliantly in A. Light, *Mrs Woolf and the Servants: An Intimate History of Domestic Life* (London, 2007).

I was exceedingly tired after the voyage, and alas lost my temper to my poor servants, and was all that was odious. My aggravations were that they gave me no luncheon on the road... Then on arriving here I could not find my money in the bank notes, made a dreadful work, into poor Meynell [and] Kilbek at last I found them in the account book. O life too short to compensate for Meynell. The honest joy of K[ilbek] when the notes were found. He shoke hand with M[eynell], and that poor fellow had tears in his eyes and I set on, wilful, cap[ri]cious beast. No never will I forget this, or cease to atone.²²⁹

The strong language used here by the Duke, with the repetition of the adjective ‘poor’ to describe his servants contrasted with the adjectives he uses to describe himself in this situation, convey the great disappointment that he felt in this lapse of judgement. The unpleasant incident, and in particular the contrition of his tearful servants, forced the Duke to confront the vast social distance that separated them.

Many middle-class employers dealt with the awkwardness of physical proximity and social distance through cruelty, by denying their servants the freedoms, comforts and expressions of identity that threatened to blur the boundary between master and servant.²³⁰ Jessica Gerard argues that servants’ experiences were similar in the country house, as they were ‘more depersonalized and humiliated in large establishments where autocratic employers pretended they did not exist’.²³¹ The Duke of Devonshire took the opposite approach, mitigating his uncomfortable position of authority by developing relationships with several of his servants which, if the class division was not so extreme, would resemble friendships.²³²

One such friendship was with Robert Meynell, the 6th Dukes valet and companion. They had grown up together at Devonshire House, and Meynell travelled around with him and attended to his personal needs every morning and night. In 1842, the Duke wrote to a friend, ‘Meynell is going [to London] tomorrow on business and he is so good and so entirely in my

²²⁹ 6th Duke diary entry, 13 August 1846, DF4/2/2/5, DC.

²³⁰ See L. Davidoff, ‘Mastered for Life’ and P. Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant* (Dublin, 1975).

²³¹ Gerard, *Country House Life*, p. 221.

²³² For a study of friendship and domestic service, see S. Holton, ‘Friendship and Domestic Service: The Letters of Eliza Oldham, General Maid (c. 1820–1892)’, *Women’s History Review* (vol. 24, 2015), pp.429-449.

confidence that you will I am sure have no scruples in confiding equally in him'.²³³ He also described him in his diary as 'perfect [and] the model of service'.^[12] However, Meynell's behaviour slowly began to deteriorate as he became more prone to indulging in drinking, gambling, and prostitution.

After a series of minor misdemeanours, a serious incident occurred in 1844. While stopping in Derby on a journey from Bolton Abbey to Chiswick, Meynell '[sent] for a woman', an 'old love' who Meynell had installed as a barmaid at the inn.²³⁴ On being told that she was no longer working there, Meynell made a scene and called the innkeeper a 'fool', to which great offence was taken. The Duke called the incident a 'a dreadful bore' but said that when the innkeeper accused Meynell he 'c[oul]d not help taking Pecksniff'.²³⁵ This is a reference to Seth Pecksniff, a principal character in Dickens' novel *Martin Chuzzlewit*, published the year before the incident at the inn. Pecksniff, a teacher of architecture, believes himself to be highly moral, but profits from his students' work which he passes off as his own.

'Pecksniffian' was a popular term for an 'unctuous hypocrite, a person who affects benevolence or pretends to have high moral principles' or 'a person who interferes officiously in the business of others'.²³⁶ It is likely that the Duke, as a patron of Dickens, would have been acquainted with the character of Pecksniff beyond the popular saying, and there are pertinent parallels between the novel and the situation at the inn which might indicate a conscious choice of literary allusion. At one point in Dickens' story Pecksniff's most dedicated and mistreated student, Tom Pinch, rescues his sister from an abusive family with whom she was employed as a governess. Meynell defended himself by claiming that the woman he sent for was being

²³³ Letter from 6th Duke to 'Fredo', August 1842, CS2/109/8, DC.

²³⁴ 6th Duke's diary, 1844, DF4/1/2/24, DC.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ 'Pecksniff', *OED Online*, Oxford University Press (March 2016) [last accessed August 2016].

maltreated by the innkeeper who ‘treated her like their child’.²³⁷ The reference to himself ‘taking Pecksniff’, therefore, may also have had a deeper meaning, as a self-criticism and a reflection of his own hypocrisy towards his servants.

The Duke felt obliged to step in and defended his valet, calling him ‘the best of servants and married men’, but the incident shook his trust in Meynell. He wrote in his diary, ‘Poor Meynell is I suppose frail and weak, but surely I cannot be supposed to know that, and if I did, can *I* take the high moral line and begin to purify my house by parting with him?’.²³⁸ The Duke’s choice of wording to describe the valet, as ‘frail and weak’ rather than ‘immoral’ or ‘drunk’, suggest a degree of pity. The Duke himself suffered from the same weaknesses, and the two sometimes encouraged each other. His emphasis on ‘can *I* take the moral line’ suggests that he was aware of the hypocrisy of punishing Meynell for sins he had committed himself. It took a further seven years for him to part with his valet, after Meynell was found in a brothel while in charge of the Duke’s dog. The 6th Duke’s preoccupation with his conduct towards his employees and tenants was one of many distinctive factors which influenced how Chatsworth was managed in the nineteenth century.

The 6th Duke died having never married, so on his death in 1858 the estate passed to his nephew, also called William Cavendish. On his inheritance, the new 7th Duke was already fifty years old and had experience of running his own household. Unlike his uncle, the new Duke prioritised the reduction of expenditure over the retention of staff. When he decided to reduce his household at Chatsworth, he wrote that ‘great discontent is inevitable’, resigning to the social impact of his decision.²³⁹ After initial reductions were made when he took over at Chatsworth, the 7th Duke’s expenditure slowly started to rise again.

²³⁷ 6th Duke’s diary, 1844, DF4/1/2/24, DC.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ Diary of the 7th Duke of Devonshire, January 1858, DF5/1/13, DC.

Maintaining the legacy of the 6th Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth proved to be a demanding task. The glasshouses required constant maintenance, coal was purchased for the boilers in enormous quantities, and the public expected to continue to be allowed free access.

In 1884 he reflected,

I think the opportunity should be taken to make some reductions in the garden expenditure which has become gradually much larger than in Paxton's time.²⁴⁰

The 7th Duke's lamentation that the expenditure 'has become gradually much larger', demonstrates the forces that were outside of the landowner's control, and the many different responsibilities that came with owning an estate. His active cost-cutting measures when he first inherited the estate slipped over time as other pressing concerns occupied his time.

While the 6th and 7th Dukes of Devonshire were, in their own ways, actively interested in the management of Chatsworth, it was not always within their capacity or character to dictate change, particularly without a Duchess to share the burden of responsibility. The Dukes therefore turned to a trusted circle of advisors, whose power on the estate was less obvious but no less significant. Studies of land agents as mediating influences between landlords and their tenants have recently offered a key revision in the field of country house studies.²⁴¹ Despite the technological and social changes that have transformed the British countryside since the principles of land agency emerged through medieval bailiffs and stewards, the essential skills required of land agents are the same today as at any point in the past. Land agents have therefore been recognised as a useful lens through which to view the changing landscape of the estate

²⁴⁰ Letter from the 7th Duke to his son, January 1884, CS2/4/795, DC.

²⁴¹ See S. Matthews, 'Landlord, Agent and Tenant in Later Nineteenth-Century Cheshire', *Transactions / Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, (vol. 156, 2007), pp. 193-218; C. Beardmore, S. King and G. Monks (eds.), *The Land Agent in Britain: Past, Present and Future* (Newcastle, 2016); G. Monks, 'The Duke of Portland and his Agent: The Education Act of 1870', *Family & Community History*, (vol. 19, 2016), pp. 95-105; C. Beardmore, 'The Rural Estate Through the Eyes of the Land Agent: A Community in Macrocosm c 1812-1844', *Family & Community History*, (vol. 19, 2016), pp. 17-33; L. A. Rees, C. Reilly and A. Tindley (eds.), *The Land Agent: 1700-1920* (Edinburgh, 2018).

community, as it was their job to observe, mediate and adapt to these changes. Carol Beardmore, for example, has used the archive of the Marquis of Anglesey's land agents as a 'historical prism' through which to observe a complex rural community. Geoff Monks has focused on William Cripwell, the 5th Duke of Portland's land agent at Welbeck, to explore the role of the professional land agent in resolving conflict at times when the fragility of the estate's social harmony was exposed. The following section builds on the work that these historians have done in terms of reframing social relations on the country estate. Rather than looking at how land agents can be understood as proxy agents of the landowner's power, however, I will explore how land agents and other senior figures exercised power over the Duke in their own pursuit of cultural and social capital.

The Dukes' Advisors

Without wives to assist them in the management of their households and estates, the 6th and 7th Dukes of Devonshire called on their closest advisors. Power was devolved to these individuals, who advised the Dukes and were at liberty to make decisions over matters that they regarded as 'beneath' his attention. This proxy decision-making process relied on an implicit agreement which was bound by both personal and professional trust, hereafter referred to as a 'psychological contract'. The term psychological contract was first used by American organisational psychologist Chris Argyris, who defined it as an implicit relationship between employees and their foremen which facilitated the gratification of each other's needs.²⁴² In 1989, Denise Rousseau developed this concept, defining it as a promise under which the parties

²⁴² C. Argyris, *Understanding Organizational Behaviour* (Homewood, 1960).

were bound to a set of unwritten obligations.²⁴³ Neil Anderson and Rene Schalk suggest that, despite being a central issue in relations between employers and employees, these obligations are ‘for the most part implicit, covertly held and only infrequently discussed’.²⁴⁴ The psychological contract between the Dukes and their advisors involved high stakes. A misunderstanding or breach could result in a significant loss of reputation for both parties. When successfully negotiated and maintained, however, the psychological contract between landowner and advisor could be highly mutually beneficial. The Duke could safely delegate the responsibilities of estate management without appearing incompetent, while the advisors themselves could expect to accrue social and cultural capital from their elevated status in the community.

Land agents were key individuals in the management of country estates, but this was not the only profession which allowed individuals to wield influence over the Duke and the rest of the community. Nor were the ways in which they exercised their power limited to the authority bestowed by their job title. The psychological contract between the landowner and his advisors was intensely personal, and individuals that held the Duke’s trust could be called on to act in all manner of roles beyond their occupational remit.

At Chatsworth, the job of the land agent sometimes overlapped with other roles on the estate. When the 6th Duke inherited in 1811, many of the roles on the estate associated with land agency were undertaken by Thomas Knowlton, the house steward. Knowlton was dismissed for misconduct in 1826, and subsequently the sole agent for Chatsworth appears to have been William Ashby, who lived nearby at Ashford-on-the-Water. When he died in the mid-1830s, his clerk Sydney Smithers became the land agent for Chatsworth and the

²⁴³ D. M. Rousseau, ‘Psychological and Implied Contracts in Organizations’, *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal* (vol. 2, 1989), p. 121.

²⁴⁴ N. Anderson and R. Schalk, ‘The psychological contract in retrospect and prospect’, *Journal of Organizational Behavior* (vol. 19, 1998), p. 637.

neighbouring Derbyshire estates. Another land agent, John Cottingham, was based at Hardwick. As head gardener Joseph Paxton's influence over the Duke increased, he took on the title of head woodman, and from the mid-1840s he took over the duties of land agent, his wage doubling from £276 to £500 per annum. When the 6th Duke died in 1858, the 7th Duke decided to replace Paxton with the Hardwick agent, John Gregory Cottingham, who is also referred to in some sources as the Chatsworth 'steward'.

These land agents were influential for a number of reasons. Firstly, they were established in the local area. John Gregory Cottingham was the son of the agent and the housekeeper at Hardwick, and nephew of the housekeeper at Chatsworth. Joseph Paxton, while not born in Derbyshire, established himself locally through marriage, by wedding the niece of the housekeeper at Chatsworth. This meant that they had a thorough knowledge of the area and the families, and the respect of the local population, which was useful to their employers. This knowledge is evidenced, for example, in a letter from Sydney Smithers to the 6th Duke in 1838:

George Holmes, the Blacksmith and Freeholder, is a widower, with four grown up daughters, whom Your Grace met with. they are all well conducted young women, and will by and by become possessed of Village fortunes. Holmes was himself in the forge, afraid to present himself to Your Grace, he is rather an odd character, and is looked upon as a "very worldly man".²⁴⁶

Mr Smithers was able to access the villagers in a way that the Duke was not, in this case because George Holmes was afraid to meet him. The land agent therefore served as a bridge between the Duke and the community, accessible to both. Influence flowed in both directions over this bridge.

²⁴⁶ Letter from Sydney Smithers to the 6th Duke, March 1838, CS2/3871, DC.

As well as serving the Duke's interests, the agent forwarded requests from the villagers. In the same letter from 1838, Smithers writes of a boy who had been apprenticed to a tailor in Chesterfield, but his master 'proved drunken' and now 'it appears desirable that he sh[oul]d have some more regular occupation'.²⁴⁷ In addition to writing the wishes of the villagers in his own words, the agent had the power to filter and change the messages that came through him in other ways. In another letter from 1838, a farm tenant, John Lees, wrote to the Duke begging to be released from a payment stipulated in his tenancy agreement. The letter was intercepted by Mr Smithers, who commented at the bottom 'I consider this a very improper application'.²⁴⁸ The Duke of Devonshire's lands were extensive and scattered, stretching from Brighton, to Ireland, to Yorkshire. The agents were responsible for managing the estates and properties on the Duke's behalf, acting as the representative of the Duke to the tenants, and the tenants to the Duke. As the gatekeeper for this communication, the agent enjoyed a certain level of personal influence.

The agent who held particular influence over the 6th Duke was Joseph Paxton, and this significant relationship will be explored in detail in this thesis. In matters of the household staff, Paxton often intervened and gave advice. In 1851, when the 6th Duke reluctantly dismissed his long-serving valet, he wrote in his diary, 'It seems to me incredible, but I try to look at it like Paxton, who says we ought to think true Meynell died two years ago, for then his change took place'.²⁴⁹ The influence that Paxton holds over the Duke at this point in his employment is confirmed by the Duke's explicit statement that he is trying to adopt Paxton's mentality. In the gardens, Paxton recruited and dismissed individuals without consulting his master. He also took control of changes made to the household of the 7th Duke, even after he resigned in 1858. Although the 7th Duke did not think it would be appropriate to employ Paxton

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ Letter from John Lees to the 6th Duke of Devonshire, April 1838, CS6/3889, DC.

²⁴⁹ 6th Duke's diary, 1852, DF4/2/1/32, DC.

in the long run ('Paxton is not the man to undo so much that of what has been his own creation'), he was required in the short-term because of the respect that was held for him in the local community.²⁵⁰ The agent's position as respected gatekeeper of the community made him the appropriate candidate for choosing who was released from service at Chatsworth, and how.

While the land agent is an established figure as mediator of the estate, there were also other individuals who wielded a comparable level of influence over the Duke and the estate community. Several other individuals occupied the same advisory circle as the land agents. These included doctors William Condell, physician to the 6th Duke, and Edward Wrench, physician to the 7th Duke, who treated both the Cavendish family and their tenants, servants and workers. In some ways they had greater access than any other individuals to the breadth of the estate community. Edward Wrench's extensive diaries record how he moved routinely between the bedsides of the estate's poorest tenants and the dining table of the big house, where he undoubtedly discussed the state of the neighbourhood.²⁵¹ The dual role of the estate physician ensured his intimate knowledge of, and therefore influence over, all of Chatsworth's inhabitants. Three other individuals who held particular influence at Chatsworth were Benjamin Currey and his son William Currey, the chief accountants, and George Spencer Ridgway, the house steward at Devonshire House in London. George Spencer Ridgway began at Devonshire House as a footman, was promoted to valet, and soon came to combine the roles of personal secretary, agent and steward. He was principally based at Devonshire House, but travelled with the Duke where needed, including to Russia for the coronation of Nicolas I. In *Social Gleanings*, 1875, Mark Boyd claims that Ridgway was the Duke's 'foster brother', 'his mother, Mrs. Ridgway, having suckled the future Lord of Chatsworth'.²⁵² Boyd also writes that

²⁵⁰ 7th Duke's diary, 1858, DF5/1/13, DC.

²⁵¹ Diaries of Edward Wrench, 1856-1912, Wr collection, UNL.

²⁵² M. Boyd, *Social Gleanings* (London, 1875), p. 129.

it was Ridgway who introduced the Duke to Paxton while the latter was a labourer in the Chiswick gardens.

These men were paid senior employees, but influence also came from less official roles. Joseph Paxton's wife Sarah, although not a paid employee, held the trust of the Duke, both as an extension of her husband's authority and in her own right. In 1840, for example, the 6th Duke wrote to her,

Dear Mrs Paxton, This is because I think Paxton is at Bolton. Edward Outram has just told me of his mothers death and he is going down to the funeral. I am anxious that it should be done respectably. I did not know how ill she was, or would have sent him sooner. I believe the sister is very deserving, and you can do any thing for me that w[oul]d be agreeable or comforting at this time for her, yrs sincerely, Devonshire.
London 19 April²⁵³

This letter demonstrates how necessity interfered with formal delineations of status, role and gender in daily social interactions on the country estate. In this letter, the 6th Duke asks the head gardener and land agent's wife, who was not an employee, to arrange the funeral of a tenant. This tenant was the mother of the Duke's butler Edward Outram, who was at Devonshire House in London at the time. The letter also raises interesting questions about the emotional labour undertaken by married women on the country estate. Although marriage disqualified women from work at the majority of country houses, it did not prevent their labour from being called upon. The implicit trust that the Duke places in Sarah, as a middle-class woman with high moral character, is evident from his confidence that she is qualified to ensure the funeral is 'done respectably' and to comfort Outram's sister on his behalf. This is one of very few examples of the Duke writing directly to Sarah, rather than to Joseph, but the Duke's

²⁵³ Letter from the 6th Duke to Sarah Paxton, April 1840, P/90, DC.

trust in Sarah's abilities to act as proxy suggests that she and the Duke had a psychological contract of their own.

Although the Paxtons were helped by their high intelligence and the support of the Duke, their rise through the estate hierarchy was not incidental. It was consciously and sensitively reinforced through small negotiations in the language and visible displays of authority that they used to distinguish themselves. Following Queen Victoria's visit to the estate in 1843, for example, a party was organised for the workmen as a celebration for the success of the visit. The proceedings conformed to the social conventions and protocol of the estate hierarchy, and focused heavily on the absent landowner (who was presumably told about the event afterwards). Fourteen toasts were given, which followed an order that was deliberately flattering to the Duke. The first was to 'The Queen', followed by 'Prince Albert and the Royal Family', 'the Duke of Devonshire', 'Lord Burlington and the House of Cavendish', then 'the Duke of Wellington and the nobility who met the Queen at Chatsworth'.²⁵⁴

The order of the toasts placed not only the Duke, but his family, above the other nobility. The following toasts were to, 'Mr Currey and the Dukes establishment', 'the Dukes tenantry', 'agricultural trade and commerce', 'the land we live in', 'the chairman' (Joseph Paxton), 'Mr Holmes' (the foreman of the works), 'Mr Condell' (the doctor), 'the workmen assembled to day', and finally 'the people'. This also laid out a hierarchy among the servants and estate community. Joseph Paxton modestly placed himself (for the list is written in his own hand) below the agents and tenants, but above the foreman of the works and the doctor. This positioning suggests that Paxton was aware of the threat he posed to the other agents, having taken over many of their responsibilities, but wished to assert his precedence over other senior

²⁵⁴ List of Speeches given to the Estate Workmen, 1843, P/194, DC.

servants. He also gave the greatest number of speeches, including those to the most illustrious people, while the foreman of the works, the doctor, the foreman of the stables, the Duke's valet, the head gamekeeper, and Paxton's draughtsman gave one each.

Although Joseph was obligated to resign from his positions at Chatsworth, by 1858 Joseph and Sarah Paxton were securely established in their status on the estate and beyond. By the time of the 6th Duke's death, Joseph Paxton had a knighthood for designing the Crystal Palace in 1851. He was also renowned for his work in publishing, domestic architecture, railway investment, politics and, of course, horticulture. Although the Paxtons' success was undoubtedly due to their personal qualities and talents, their social mobility was above all else attributable to the social capital they accrued through association with the Duke and his network of contacts. The benefits of the Duke's support were not always freely given but sometimes had to be negotiated. Paxton's first foray into newspaper publishing in 1840 was met with consternation by the Duke, who initially denied his permission. The chief agent, Benjamin Currey, agreed with this decision, stating that,

you were right in the answer you have given. There is no doubt but that a newspaper, on whatever subject it may start, is a speculation, [and] that its management must require much capital, great literary talent, and the exclusive attention of the Editors, [and] that it is inconsistent with other occupations... I must say I should have no faith in its success, but great fears of its proving an entire failure²⁵⁵

Benjamin Currey was wrong to assume it would be a failure. The Gardener's Chronicle was a phenomenal success and continued to be published for 150 years. Its advertising section was particularly popular. After the abolition of the glass tax in 1845, small domestic glasshouses, popularised by the Crystal Palace, were produced for a mass market. Many of these were

²⁵⁵ Letter from Benjamin Currey to the 6th Duke, May 1840, CS2/25/1, DC.

designed by Paxton, and so, as well as generating profit from the newspaper he also made money from glass house sales.

Joseph Paxton's success in his many responsibilities beyond Chatsworth, invite the question of why the Duke permitted him to pursue them despite being advised by Benjamin Currey that they were 'inconsistent with other occupations'. The answer might be found in the nature and strength of the psychological contract between Joseph Paxton and the Duke. The relationship between the Paxtons and the Duke relied on implicit mutual trust, and was maintained and renewed by their frequent contact with each other, both by letter and in person. The trust that the Duke placed in Joseph and Sarah Paxton reflects a wider esteem that the Duke and his fellow Whigs held in the professional middle classes, which they put into practice with their support of the 1832 Reform Act.²⁵⁹ By using his wealth and power to enfranchise and invest in individuals like Joseph Paxton, the 6th Duke carved out a role for himself in a rapidly-changing society, as a patron of middle-class talent.

Joseph Paxton was well-suited to his role advising the Duke. He was decisive and intelligent, and as someone from the lower ranks of society, he was less burdened by the weight of the social responsibility that plagued the 6th Duke. His confident judgement, as demonstrated in the many recommendations he made to the Duke in subject matters ranging from religion to billiard balls was a complementary counterbalance to the Duke's lack of self-assuredness. Joseph Paxton's confidence allowed him to adapt easily to new social situations as he climbed the ranks, from having his portrait painted by the Duke's commission in 1836, to having his bags carried by Sir Frederick Adam's servant in 1838, to guiding Queen Victoria and Prince Albert around a horticultural show in 1842. He wrote matter-of-factly about each of these events to Sarah, keeping a modest record of his rise to fame.

²⁵⁹ The 6th Duke's support of the Reform Act is evidenced in his diaries for 1831 and 1832.

Joseph's ability to converse with people from any background was not only due to confidence, but due to his advanced communication skills. When travelling abroad in Italy with the Duke, for example, he wrote to Sarah, 'I have got on so well with the Italian language that I can go any were alone, buy any thing, and ask all sorts of questions with perfect case'.²⁶⁰ Similarly, with his better-educated wife's help, he learned the language of the middle- and upper-classes, including following social conventions in letter writing. In both written correspondence and conversation, Joseph spoke frankly with the Duke while continuing to follow social and linguistic conventions, always referring to the Duke in letters as 'your Grace' and 'my Lord Duke', even if the contents of the letters could be construed as irreverent. The Duke often anticipated the disapproval or reprimands he would receive from his head gardener, for example in one letter he writes 'I am afraid you will despise the moss [on its way to Chatsworth]... but I do not remember ever seeing it in England, and I think it is beautiful'.²⁶¹ Joseph endeared himself to the Duke and made the transition from servant to friend not through deference, but through honesty. He even went as far as to criticise the Duke's religious beliefs, 'battling' with him in a carriage ride and calling him a 'ranting canting saint', but was forgiven because their psychological contract was built on trust and mutual respect.²⁶² The Duke relied on such judgements of character, even when they were cutting and personal.

The notion that mutual trust and honesty (even when it bordered on insubordination) was the foundation on which Joseph Paxton built a successful relationship with the 6th Duke, and by extension a successful career, is supported by instances in which the relationship between the Duke and other staff members broke down. In 1850, the Duke's doctor at Chatsworth, William Condell, expressed fears that the financial terms of his future retirement had not been formally agreed. The Poor Law Amendment act of 1834 repealed the automatic

²⁶⁰ Letter from Joseph Paxton to Sarah Paxton, February 1839, P/66, DC.

²⁶¹ Letter from the 6th Duke to Joseph Paxton, September 1841, P/123, DC.

²⁶² Letter from Joseph Paxton to Sarah Paxton, 2 June 1837, P/39, DC.

right of servants to post-employment poor law settlement, removing the security of legally-prescribed parish aid. Presumably uncertain of his future, Condell had established a medical practice at Baslow, a village near to Chatsworth, in order to supplement his income as physician to the Duke's household and to save for retirement. Having been asked by the Duke to accompany him on a trip to Ireland, Condell expressed concern that his permanent practice in Baslow would suffer from his absence.

If the Duke were to die I should be almost penniless, [and] under present circumstances it is impossible for me to help myself... when I am so frequently obliged to leave my patients. When I was first placed at Baslow it was understood that I was not to accompany the Duke travelling again but to trust to what the neighbourhood afforded in the way of practice [and] also to the salary I rec[eive]d from the Duke for my attendance on His Grace [and] the Household.²⁶³

It seems that while there was an 'understanding' established in relation to Condell's role on the estate and as a servant of the Duke, this was a psychological contract rather than a written contract. The discomfort that he feels from his ambiguous situation is evidenced in the reluctance and emotion with which he writes, for example,

There is nothing in the world so painful as uncertainty, [and] if I have been guilty of any wrong expressions of feeling... arising from the uncertain position I find myself in at this period of life with nothing but a shattered practice to depend upon for the future, and certainly not to an avaricious motive.²⁶⁴

The doctor's position was not only unclear in relation to the household, but also in relation to the law. The Master and Servant Acts were deemed by the courts to apply to 'servants' and 'labours' but excluded higher-status 'employees'.²⁶⁵ The test for differentiating between a

²⁶³ Letter from William Condell to Benjamin Currey, August 1850, CS2/10/3, DC.

²⁶⁴ Letter from William Condell to the 6th Duke of Devonshire, August 1850, CS2/10/6, DC.

²⁶⁵ S. Deakin, 'The Contract of Employment: A Study in Legal Evolution', ESRC Centre for Business Research - Working Papers (2001), p. 20.

‘servant’ and an ‘employee’ was exclusivity of service, although the difference was not clarified explicitly until the Master and Servant Act of 1867. William Condell was sometimes in the Duke’s exclusive employ, for example when traveling abroad, but at Chatsworth he would have been legally considered to be an ‘independent worker’.²⁶⁶ This classification may have afforded him even less protection than the status of ‘servant’ since he would not have been protected by the Truck Act of 1831, which regulated payments.²⁶⁷

In the context of the doctor’s ambiguous legal status, the absence of a legal obligation for the parish to provide for him, and the uncertainty of his practice’s future, an emotional reaction to being asked to accompany his master abroad appears rational. Condell’s desire for clarity, however, was met with regret by the Duke, who interpreted it as the doctor having underestimated the bond of trust between them:

I think you must be quite aware of the regard and interest and thankfulness I feel toward you, but I also think that you should have had sufficient reliance upon me to prevent you ~~writing for~~ making stipulations for the future.²⁶⁸

The edit that the Duke makes to his wording suggests that, further to regret, the doctor’s apparent lack of trust in his master’s kindness and generosity invokes annoyance or even anger. The uncharacteristic crossing out of words might suggest an unsettled frame of mind, while ‘making stipulations’ could be interpreted as an opinion that the doctor is making unreasonable or inappropriate demands. This is supported in another folio. The Duke’s London agent wrote Condell’s proposal for a new employment agreement on a piece of paper, below which the Duke has written, in his own hand, ‘Not Sanctioned’.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ Letter from the 6th Duke of Devonshire to William Condell, August 1850, CS2/10/5, DC.

²⁶⁹ A memorandum written by Benjamin Currey, August 1850, CS2/10/4, DC.

The matter was resolved by the Duke's decision that Condell should stay at Chatsworth and receive 'any present addition to [his] income that may be thought right'.²⁷⁰ The party who decided what would be 'right' for William Condell was probably one of the Duke's agents, the most likely being Joseph Paxton. Although Condell wrote his letter to Benjamin Currey, the London agent, he acknowledged Paxton's superior influence, 'I submit this statement to you hoping that you will consider it [and] consult with Mr. Paxton as to the best mode of proceeding'.²⁷¹ Unlike Joseph Paxton, William Condell failed to maintain the psychological contract between himself and the Duke. By explicitly calling into question the Duke's intentions to provide him with an income on retirement, the Duke felt that Condell had disrupted the mutual trust between them. In so doing, he had also reminded the Duke of the uncomfortable truth of the vast social distance between them. Joseph Paxton was far better at mediating this discomfort of inequality, understanding that the Duke valued authenticity of character over excessive deference. Despite this incident, and the Duke's frequent annoyance at Mrs Condell's 'petticoat influence', the relationship was repaired and William Condell was one of the staff members who comforted the Duke on the night he died at Hardwick Hall in January 1858.

Another of the Duke's close advisors, Sydney Smithers, was less fortunate and never fully repaired his relationship with his employer. Unlike William Condell, who had underestimated the Duke's generosity, Sydney Smithers overestimated the privileges that the psychological contract afforded him. In 1841, the Duke went to see Smithers at his home Churchdale, in Ashford-on-the-Water. On arrival, he found that the agent's home was covered in scaffolding, with 'large works beginning' and 'some old buildings pulled down that joined his home'.²⁷² The Duke had a strong reaction to this sight, and declared himself 'disgusted'.²⁷³

²⁷⁰ Letter from the 6th Duke of Devonshire to William Condell, August 1850, CS2/10/5, DC.

²⁷¹ Letter from William Condell to Benjamin Currey, August 1850, CS2/10/3, DC.

²⁷² Letter from the 6th Duke of Devonshire to Mr Currey, 4 March 1841, DF4/1/8/2, DC.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

Churchdale belonged to the Duke, and he concluded ‘I can hardly suppose that it is not to be at my expense’.²⁷⁴ Moreover, he had decided that no more costly works were to take place in 1841, and had conveyed his wishes, ‘in such strong terms that I am astonished he should have commenced after receiving that letter’.²⁷⁵ The significance of this matter to the Duke was more personal than financial. He wrote, ‘Whether he thought there 1000£ or 5000£ w[oul]d be laid out makes very little difference in my opinion of his conduct in this affair’.²⁷⁶ The more details the Duke ascertained, the more angry he became. He wrote,

Upon examination this evening I find that the “trifling addition” to a house that wants nothing but a clerks office, contains three business offices in the common[?], and the rest of of the addition, occupying as large a space as the now existing building, possesses a withdrawing room 29 feet by 20, and a corridor or passage distinguished from the servants passage, 50 feet long by almost 10 wide. Of the rooms above I have no plan, but from the elevation I perceive that they would be sufficient to lodge many families besides Mr Smithers’s.²⁷⁷

The use of the full word ‘withdrawing room’, rather than ‘drawing room’ as written elsewhere, emphasises its use as a private space. The description of a corridor as ‘distinguished from the servants passage’ has the same effect.

In return for the high wages and social benefits of their position, the Duke’s senior staff were expected to forfeit their time and privacy to the performance of their work. The Duke feared that alterations to the agent’s home might interfere with his professional interactions with tenants. He wrote, ‘if, besides his office, [and] his clerks office, he possessed a drawing room and a dining room I would not have him think them too good for the lowest farmer who might come to him on my business’.²⁷⁸ This anxiety that the ‘lowest farmer’ might not be welcomed into the agent’s house reveals the importance of the trust between the Duke and his

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ Letter from the 6th Duke to Mr Currey, 24 March 1841, DF4/1/8/2, DC.

²⁷⁷ Letter from the 6th Duke to Mr Currey, 11 March 1841, DF4/1/8/2, DC.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

advisors. The agent's business was the Duke's business, and discontent towards the agents, he feared, would engender discontent towards him. The improvement of Smithers' house, then, had serious implications for the cohesion of the estate, and for the integrity of the master-servant relationship. The Duke lamented the 'want of truth and forwardness' shown by Mr Smithers above all else.²⁷⁹

The Duke considered Mr Smithers' behaviour serious enough to warrant transportation to Australia. However, Joseph Paxton and the other agents worked together to protect their colleague. They not only had a professional association, but a personal one. The Paxtons went on holiday with Mr and Mrs Smithers, they were 'very kind' to Sarah when she was confined with a difficult pregnancy in 1838, and they shared a mutual enthusiasm for speculation in railway shares. Joseph Paxton was also planning his own home improvements, which began the following year with the construction of Barbrook House, funded by the Duke. The harsh punishment of a land agent for extending his house would have set a precedent that the Paxtons in particular would have been threatened by.

As Lucy Delap argues, the 'classing process' through which the middle classes made sense of their amorphous identities was established through the continual assessment of each other's standing.²⁸⁰ Physical markers including dress, property, transport and other possessions were an essential component of this process. In Paxton's assessment of Smithers' actions, he empathised with the desire to reproduce cultural capital through the expansion and improvement of property, because it was a desire that he had himself. Smithers appealed to his colleagues by showing how his current living situation affected his ability to maintain domestic respectability, a distinctive middle-class anxiety that the upper-class Duke was less inclined to sympathise with. To Benjamin Currey, he wrote,

²⁷⁹ Letter from the 6th Duke to Mr Currey, 11 March 1841, DF4/1/8/2, DC.

²⁸⁰ L. Delap, *Knowing Their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2011), p. 64.

my position necessarily brings me in daily communication not only with the tenantry and persons of that description, but very frequently with the gentlemen of the neighbourhood... With this view I appropriated one of the best rooms in the house as an office, and the only one affording the means of a double communication with the front and back entrance, the latter along a kitchen passage and through a pantry. It is a very common occurrence for my kitchen to be occupied all the early part of the day, and I may safely say more or less every day, by persons coming to me on business, this is not only objectionable as operating as it has done to interfere with the common work of the house most materially, and to the almost total exclusion of the mistress of the house at that time of the day, but there are a class of persons, the tenantry and others, to whom some respect is due, and who ought not to be set down in my kitchen, to say nothing of the unpleasantness of servants getting their meals on such occasions, and the disorder consequent upon such interruptions.²⁸¹

The ‘unpleasantness’ of coming into contact with servants was another anxiety that Pamela Horn has argued was particular to the middle classes. Horn argues that servants in middle-class household were isolated from the rest of the family in a way that sometimes bordered on cruelty by masters ‘for whom the preservation of petty distinctions of rank was all-important’.²⁸² As well as having to meet with tenants and gentlemen in his kitchen, where the servants took their meals, Smithers occasionally had to send his family to sleep at an inn when he was accommodating guests on business.

Joseph Paxton and the other agents wrote frankly of their plans to sway the Duke. Joseph wrote to the Benjamin Currey, ‘I talked with the Duke about [Smithers] on Monday but his mind is so much warped that I did not venture to advocate an excuse’.²⁸³ He advised Currey to delay the Duke’s decision, in the hope that time and reflection would cause him to doubt his own judgement. ‘Delay’, he wrote, ‘time will temper it all down’.²⁸⁴ In the meantime, Smithers’ advocates wrote and spoke to the Duke about the effect that Smithers’ dismissal, or transportation, would have on his family. Joseph wrote, ‘as to their going to Australia neither

²⁸¹ Letter from Sydney Smithers to Benjamin Currey, 8 March 1841 CS2/25/5, DC.

²⁸² P. Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant* (Dublin, 1975), p. 13.

²⁸³ Letter from Joseph Paxton to Benjamin Currey, 24 March 1841, DF4/1/8/2, DC.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

of them would reach it alive, and then there would be five children thrown on the mercies of this precarious world'.²⁸⁵ Dismissal, he wrote, 'will certainly kill his wife'.²⁸⁶ This tactic worked, and the Duke wrote, 'Paxton gave me such an account of the condition of poor Mrs Smithers that I had not courage to continue'.²⁸⁷ In a letter informing Smithers of the Duke's forgiveness, the influence of the agents was made explicit, attributing the change of heart to 'letters he has today received from Mr Cavendish [and] Mr Currey and by a conversation with Mr Paxton'.²⁸⁸ Smithers continued as land agent at Ashford until his death in 1856, but his duties at Chatsworth were reduced.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that change affected the Chatsworth estate community at all levels and was driven by countless competing influences, among which conscious intervention by the landowner was only one factor. Household management in particular has been assumed to be controlled by the mistress of the house, but non-élite individuals also played a role in the changing demography of the Chatsworth staff. In 1811, local girls may have been expected to work as maids in the big house until they married, but the advent of the railways and changes in national recruiting practices opened up new options for them. Elizabeth Wilson took advantage of these new opportunities, working her way up the domestic service career ladder by travelling across the country.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ Undated letter from the 6th Duke to Benjamin Currey, DF4/1/8/2, DC.

²⁸⁸ Letter written on behalf of the 6th Duke to Sydney Smithers, March 1841, DF4/1/8/2, DC.

The Dukes of Devonshire, this chapter has argued, did not have the capacity or, in the case of the 6th Duke, the confidence to dictate all changes relating to demography and employment at Chatsworth. They relied heavily on a circle of advisors whose power to influence relied on the careful negotiation of a psychological contract. Those who were successful, notably Sarah and Joseph Paxton, were able to earn considerable social and cultural capital in their own right. With so many complex influences, it can be concluded that power was not only exercised by the landowner over his dependents. It was accessible in some form to every individual through their transformative capacity on the estate and in the household. This chapter has mostly focused on individual agency, but the co-operative influence of the Duke's advisors described here can also be understood as an expression of collective agency, a concept which will be explored further in the next chapter in terms of social curation in the estate villages.

Chapter Two

Model Villagers: Gentrification, Comfort and Dependence in the Estate Village

The first half of the nineteenth century saw two major building projects on the Chatsworth estate. The first was the reconstruction of the North Wing, completed in 1828, and the second was the remodelling of the estate village of Edensor. Over the course of two decades, much of the village was demolished, before rebuilding began in earnest in 1838. Inspired by villages including Blaise Hamlet near Bristol, the new model village of Edensor was completed by 1842. It was smaller than the old village, but consisted of grander and more ornamental houses. The refashioning of Edensor was as much a process of physical reconstruction as it was a social reconstruction. Planned housing is intimately connected with class relations and the power of the state in the history of modern Britain, particularly in urban areas.²⁹⁰ Class tensions in relation to planned housing have been found to be particularly acute when existing housing is demolished and tenants compulsorily rehoused.²⁹¹

The replacement of old housing with new was often informed by ideological and political motivations in addition to the more obvious aesthetic and economic reasons. The destruction of slum housing from the 1930s onwards, for example, was motivated by a belief that the ‘clearance of physical slums [would lead] to the destruction of social

²⁹⁰ For slum clearance, council housing and working-class neighbourhoods in 19th and 20th century Britain, see: M. Daunton, *A Property-owning Democracy? Housing in Britain* (London, 1987); M. Daunton (ed.), *Councillors and Tenants: Local Authority Housing in English Cities, 1919–1939* (Leicester, 1984); C. Hamnett, ‘Housing the two nations: socio-tenurial polarization in England and Wales, 1961–81’, *Urban Studies*, (vol. 21, 1984), pp. 389–405; D. Englander, *Landlord and Tenant in Urban Britain, 1838–1918* (Oxford, 1983); A. Offer, *Property and Politics, 1870–1914: Landownership, Law, Ideology and Urban Development in England* (Cambridge, 1981); M. Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes: The Politics and Architecture of Early State Housing in Britain* (London, 1981).

²⁹¹ B. Jones, ‘Slum Clearance, Privatization and Residualization: The Practices and Politics of Council Housing in Mid-twentieth-century England’, *Twentieth Century British History* (vol. 21, 2010), p. 536.

disorganisation'.²⁹² Many displaced tenants were rehoused in high-rise buildings, which developed their own social stigmas and, eventually, the idea that 'the higher the building, the higher the crime rate'.²⁹³ These social meanings fixed to the built environment are related to the concept of architectural determinism. This theory ascribed the built environment as the main, or even sole determinant of social behaviour. It was promoted by theorists such as Alice Coleman, whose idea that certain buildings 'breed anti-social people' was influential in Thatcherite social housing policies.²⁹⁴

The term 'architectural determinism' was coined in 1966 and today is widely discredited for ignoring the fundamental social and economic inequalities underlying living conditions.²⁹⁵ Despite the short-lived influence of architectural determinism as a legitimate term in the twentieth century, however, versions of the concept can be traced back to Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, and even further to eighteenth-century economists such as Adam Smith. Nineteenth-century improvers were motivated by Smith's maxim 'as the houses, so the people', a motto adopted by the Central Cottage Improvement Society.²⁹⁶ 'Improvement' in this sense had two meanings, both as architectural design and as social design. The building of planned housing therefore had an implicit secondary purpose in the building of planned communities.

Extensive interventions by landlords in their tenants' housing were as controversial in the nineteenth century as in the twentieth, but for different reasons. The devastation caused by the Highland clearances in Scotland cast suspicions on the motivations of English landowners

²⁹² W. Morrison, *Theoretical Criminology from Modernity to Post-Modernity* (London, 1997), p. 248.

²⁹³ J. Rosenthal, 'Housing Study: High Rise = High Crime', *The New York Times* (26 October, 1972).

²⁹⁴ A. Coleman, *Utopia on Trial: Vision and Reality in Planned Housing* (London, 1985), p. 133.

²⁹⁵ P. Spicker, 'Poverty and depressed estates: A critique of Utopia on trial', *Housing Studies* (vol. 2, 1987), pp. 283-292.

²⁹⁶ J. Denby, "'As the Houses, So the People": Gardeners: Their Accommodation and Remuneration, 1800-1914', MA Thesis, University of Buckingham, 2013, p. 152.

who also demolished houses on their estates, albeit on a far smaller scale.²⁹⁷ John Meadows White wrote in 1835, ‘the landlords of large estates take good care to prevent settlements being gained. They pull down cottages, or forbid their erection’.²⁹⁸ Even those who saw housing clearance and reconstruction in a positive light, such as social reformer Edwin Chadwick, debated extensively about the most beneficial new designs for housing the poor. What was common to both these debates and the discourse around social housing in the twentieth century, was an absence of the voices of residents themselves.

The opinions of nineteenth-century labourers about their housing preferences were dismissed as irrelevant. At a Social Science meeting in Edinburgh, for example, a man called James Robb drew attention to the accommodation of Scottish labourers. In conversations with ploughmen, he claimed to have learned that ‘It was a great mistake to build too large a house for a Ploughman. He did not like it for two reasons: first because he was not able to furnish it; and next, because its emptiness made it colder than a smaller house would be’.²⁹⁹ Robb’s argument was vehemently contested and represents a tiny minority in the nineteenth-century debates that occurred about labourers’ housing. The envisioned social world of the planned village is well-documented in these debates, but the real impact of village reconstruction on the lives of the communities affected is little understood. In response to this problem, this chapter asks: what effects did the reconstruction of Edensor have on the behaviour and, moreover, the agency of its residents?

The letters of the Wilson family are a rich source with which to investigate these issues of agency and authority. In particular these sources are used to address assumptions that model villagers experienced high levels of comfort, but that their independence was sacrificed in

²⁹⁷ K. Snell, *Parish and Belonging* (New York, 2006), pp. 153-157.

²⁹⁸ J. Meadows White, *Parochial Settlements an Obstruction to Poor Law Reform* (London, 1835), p. 8.

²⁹⁹ G. Hastings (ed.), *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science* (London, 1864), p. 761.

exchange. First, however, the chapter focuses on the reconstruction of the village itself, how it was interpreted by contemporary observers, and the influences behind its design. It argues that the philosophy of architectural determinism at Edensor was primarily encouraged by middle-class senior employees. The 6th Duke was more interested in the comfort and aesthetics of his tenants' housing than its effect on their behaviour. By foregrounding the moralising power of middle-class improvers, rather than upper-class landlords, and by assessing tenants' own perspectives, this chapter adds a crucial missing piece to the historiography of the model village, and of planned housing more widely. As John Bryson and Phillippa Lowe conclude in their study of story-telling and history construction in Bournville, 'A people-based or social history of Bournville along with other model/planned villages are stories that urgently need to be told'.³⁰⁰

The Transformation of Edensor

Edensor is one of Chatsworth's three estate villages, with Pilsley, to the north-west of Chatsworth, and Beeley, to the south. As Chatsworth's closest village, and the community that is most visible to Chatsworth's visitors, Edensor has seen more extensive alterations by the Cavendish family than either of the other villages. Between 1817 and 1841 Edensor was almost entirely demolished and rebuilt as a model village, while the other two villages were expanded, Pilsley in particular, to house displaced tenants. The three estate villages all qualify as 'close parishes' in Mills' model, because of the small number of landowners. In Edensor, the

³⁰⁰ J. Bryson and P. Lowe, 'Story-telling and history construction: rereading George Cadbury's Bournville Model Village', *Journal of Historical Geography*, (vol. 28, 2002), pp. 21-41.

Cavendish family acquired the remaining freeholds over several decades in the late eighteenth century, purchasing the Courtenay family's properties in 1798 and John Hutchinson's house in 1799. Pilsley was mostly bought up by the 1830s.

Some of the best sources for understanding the physical evolution of the village are maps and paintings. Most paintings from the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century show Chatsworth from the west, either from an angle which excludes the village or with artfully-placed trees obscuring the houses. One painting, however, depicts Chatsworth from the east. It was painted by Jan Siberechts around the year 1703 and contains the clearest and most complete image of the old Edensor.³⁰¹ The village shown in Siberecht's painting appears to have remained relatively unchanged since Senior drew his map in 1617. On the top left-hand corner of the painting is the road that sloped down the hill, turning right after the church and carrying along down towards the River Derwent, flanked on either side by at least twenty-five distinct buildings, including the church and the inn. It suggests that four large fields, probably used for crop-rotation agriculture, lay at the centre of the village, and that the village was separated from the park by a wall.

³⁰¹ J. Siberechts, *A View of Chatsworth from the East*, c. 1703, oil on canvas, DC.

Fig. 2.1: Jan Siberechts, 'A View of Chatsworth from the East', c. 1703, oil on canvas, DC.

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A painting from forty years later by Thomas Smith completes the section of the village not shown in Siberecht's painting.³⁰² It depicts the vicarage and mill that were in full view of the house, and continues the wall that separated Edensor from the park, up to the bridge over the river. In 1801, John Constable created a drawing of the entrance to Edensor in pencil and sepia wash.³⁰³ While the image is not very detailed, it shows a series of low, possibly thatched cottages, crowded closely together. This is consistent with descriptions of the old village. While Constable's drawing is characteristically romantic, later writers describing how Edensor looked before the reconstruction were less complimentary. A visitor to the new village in 1842 wrote, 'They who were familiar with Chatsworth a few years back, could scarcely have failed to notice a number of shabby cottages that were crowded together near the Edensor gates, and within the boundaries of the park itself, to which they were, in truth, a most unseemly appendage'.³⁰⁴ Prior to the demolition of the village and its reconstruction, the appearance of the 'unseemly' village was the result of several centuries' worth of industrial and domestic built and restored at different stages. Although almost every resident worked for Chatsworth in some capacity, Edensor in the eighteenth century was a place of industry and trade, not simply accommodation for estate staff. A survey in 1788 recorded shoemakers, tailors, butchers, blacksmiths, barbers and badgers (travelling tradesmen), in addition to the gardeners, grooms, labourers and servants that would be expected in an estate village.³⁰⁵

Demolitions began in Edensor in the late eighteenth century, as part of works carried out in the park under the supervision of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, the landscape architect. The vicarage, inn, mill and a handful of outbuildings were pulled down and moved elsewhere.³⁰⁶ The first house to be pulled down under the 6th Duke was Mr Barker's house in

³⁰² T. Smith, *A View of Chatsworth from the South-West*, 1743, oil on canvas, DC.

³⁰³ J. Constable, *The Entrance to the Village of Edensor*, 1801, pencil and sepia wash, V&A.

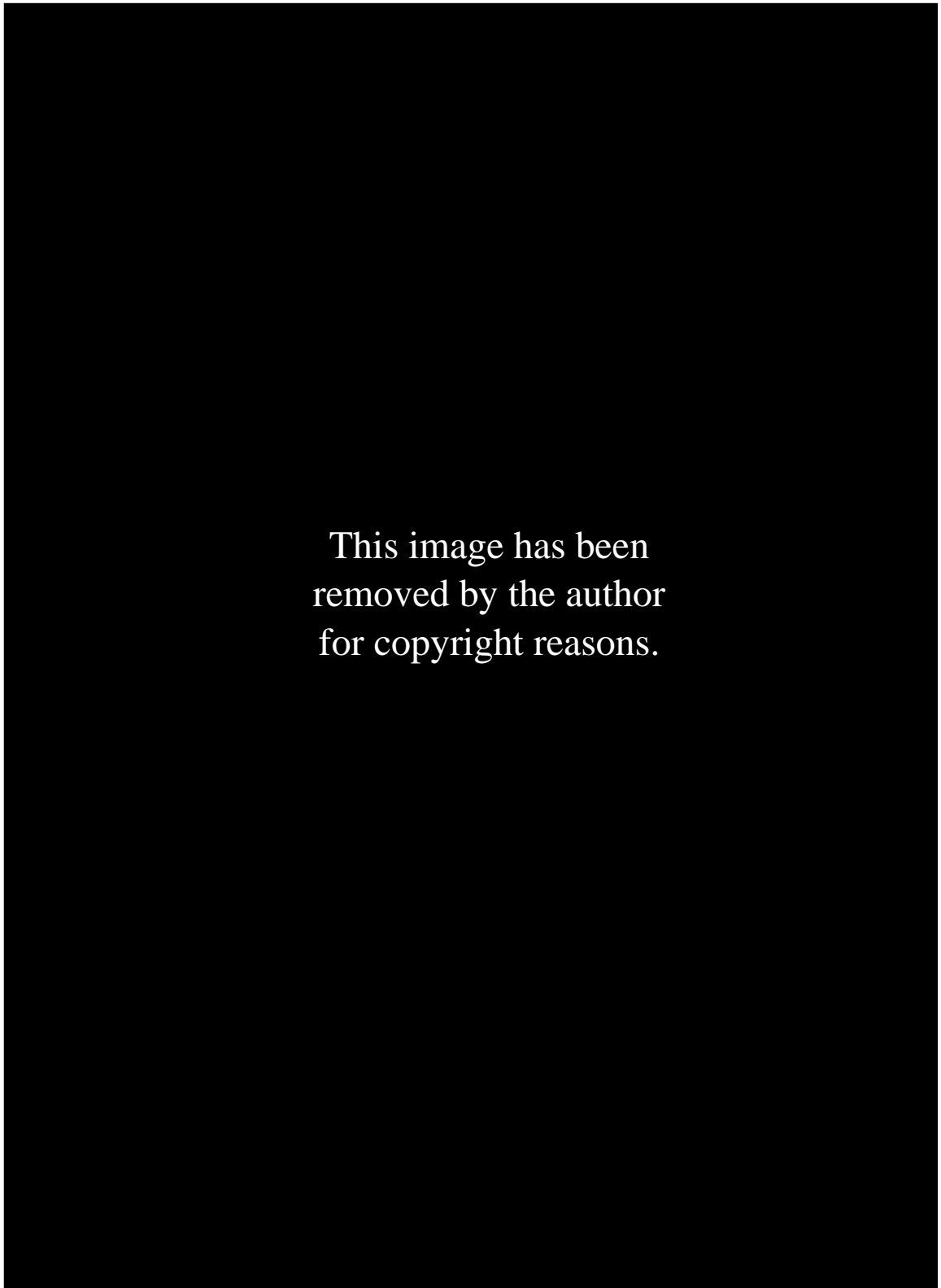
³⁰⁴ 'Chatsworth', *Gardeners Chronicle & New Horticulturist* (London, 1842), p. 187.

³⁰⁵ Survey of Chatsworth, 1788, AS/1078, DC.

³⁰⁶ Barnatt and Williamson, *Chatsworth*, p. 158.

1817, and cottage clearance continued slowly through the 1820s and 1830s. It appears that the Duke's first priority was to build a new road through the park, which went past the village rather than through it. At some point in the 1830s, attention moved to the houses and the overall look of the remaining village around the church. Some of the houses were built as new, incorporating a range of architectural styles from Italianate villa to castellated lodge. Other houses were left largely intact, with only cosmetic changes made to their fronts.

Fig. 2.2: A map of Edensor in 1858, Map 2529, DC.



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The Performance of the Model Village

‘The village [of Edensor] is truly a model’, claimed Llewellyn Jewitt in *Black’s Guide to Buxton and its Environs* in 1868.³⁰⁷ ‘The beauty of the villa-cottages of which it is composed, the luxuriant display of evergreens and bright flowers in the gardens, and the general air of cleanliness which prevails, cannot fail to impress the mind favourably’.³⁰⁸ Again, four years later Jewitt wrote in his short book *Chatsworth*,

It is, indeed, the most perfect model of a village anywhere to be seen, and the beauty of its villas- for every cottage in the place is a villa- the charm of its scenery, and the peace and quietness which seem to reign in and around it, make it as near an *Eden* on earth as one can expect any place to be.³⁰⁹

However, the peace and quiet that so delighted Jewitt in 1872 had inspired in another ‘a sort of uneasy pleasure, which half persuades us to call it pain’ thirty years earlier.³¹⁰ P.G. Patmore, writing in 1842, called Edensor the Duke of Devonshire’s ‘toy village, embroidered into one corner of the northern skirts of the park’.³¹¹ On entering the gates, Patmore mused disparagingly whether the village was a stage set for a performance of *Love in a Village*, or the ‘fairy residence’ of a white cat he encountered on a garden wall, or a collection of ‘alms houses for decayed dandies’ such as disgraced Regency socialite Beau Brummel inhabited in his French exile.³¹²

The village of Edensor divided opinion among nineteenth-century observers. For

³⁰⁷ L. Jewitt (ed.), *Black’s Guide to Buxton and its Environs* (Edinburgh, 1868), p. 55.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁹ L. Jewitt, *Chatsworth* (Buxton, 1872), p. 79.

³¹⁰ P.G. Patmore (published anonymously as ‘Author of “Tremaine”, “De Verre” etc.’), *Chatsworth, or, The Romance of a Week* (London, 1844), p. 36.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 36-41.

Jewitt, an illustrator and natural scientist, Edensor represented the codifying power of architecture in taming the rural landscape and amplifying its beauty. The emphasis on cleanliness in Black's guidebook might also reflect advances in understandings of the relationship between housing and disease following the cholera epidemics of the mid-nineteenth century. Edensor embodied both the latest advancements in public health, and the nostalgia and aesthetics of traditional rural life. For Patmore, who grew up in London during the tumultuous two decades at the end of the eighteenth century, Edensor was more reminiscent of Marie Antoinette's *Hameau*, the artificial hamlet in which the Queen of France played the part of the poor shepherdess, surrounded by a select handful of real agricultural labourers. Constructed in the grounds of Versailles, Jill Casid argues that the *Hameau* became 'not only the emblem of a class crime (making an amusement out of the spectacle of the misery of her fellow citizens, the working poor) but also potentially of a sexual one'.³¹³ As the *Hameau* was ridiculed for its tenuous utility in its guise as a working farm, so Patmore mocked the impractical design of Edensor's houses, where he claims 'human creatures of the ordinary height could almost look down their delicate chimneys, while standing on their diminutive lawns'.³¹⁴

Although Jewitt and Patmore's personal impressions of Edensor were fundamentally different, there were several points on which they agreed. First, they write of the village not as a physical place but as a fantasy- as Eden, or a fairy tale kingdom, or a setting for a play. They therein agree on the performative nature of the estate village as a public space of exhibition. Neither author establishes the boundary of the private world of the estate village. Both of their observations deny the existence of such a boundary, with Jewitt admiring the flowers in tenants' gardens and Patmore imagining himself looking through a 'peep-hole', taking note of

³¹³ J. Casid, 'Queer(y)ing Georgic: Utility, Pleasure, and Marie Antoinette's Ornamented Farm', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* (vol. 30, 1997), p. 305.

³¹⁴ Patmore, *Chatsworth*, p. 37.

the ‘unsullied brightness of every window, the immaculate whiteness of every drapery within, the perfect preservation of every flower and leaf without’.³¹⁵

Just as the village itself is described as ethereal and otherworldly, so the architect behind the village is interpreted by both authors as a hidden or non-existent figure. Patmore, although he calls Edensor the ‘Duke’s own village’, avoids insulting the landowner by attributing his actions to ‘the shallow counsel of his estate’s physician’, a metaphorical figure employed to treat the ‘diseased’ village that preceded it, for which ‘all ordinary modes of treatment [were] tried in vain’.³¹⁶ While Patmore implies the fault of the Duke’s advisors and architect, the ambiguity of the physician renders them as fictional as the village in Patmore’s imagination - a character in the play rather than a real individual. Likewise the Edensor in Jewitt’s description is controlled not by an identifiable person, but by the ‘peace and quietness which seem to reign in and around it’.³¹⁷ Jewitt also states that, ‘luckily, there is neither a village ale-house, blacksmith’s forge, wheelwright’s shop, or any other gossiping place’, as though their absence was by chance and not by design.³¹⁸

Influences Behind the Reconstruction

The design of Edensor was not an accident, but the result of a collaboration between the Duke his agents, and a wider network of middle-class reformers. The influences behind the village’s design, however, have been the subject of several local myths, probably in part due to patchy

³¹⁵ Patmore, *Chatsworth*, p.39.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

³¹⁷ Jewitt, *Chatsworth*, p. 79.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

records in the series of letters written by the Duke and by Joseph Paxton. Many books and online sources suggest that Edensor was ‘moved’, that it was demolished and rebuilt because it spoiled the 6th Duke’s view from the windows of Chatsworth, and that the entirety of the project occurred between 1838 and 1841.³³⁵ Tom Williamson and John Barnatt have already addressed these particular myths in their account of the archaeological history of the estate, *Chatsworth: A Landscape History*.³³⁶ By looking at maps, and surveys on the ground, they show that Edensor would not have been visible from Chatsworth after the mill, vicarage and inn were cleared in the eighteenth century. They have also shown that the demolitions and reconstruction occurred in several distinct stages, not all at once. However, some of the popular stories surrounding Edensor, particularly those relating to the actors involved, and their motivations and experiences, have remained unaddressed.

These popular stories include the suggestion that the Duke was too busy to choose designs for each of his cottages, and therefore ordered a whole book of designs drawn up by his draughtsman instead of choosing one style. Another is that Gardener’s Cottage, the sole surviving house on the old high street, was not included in the demolitions because the tenant refused to move out, or the freeholder refused to sell. Conversely, it has also been suggested that the Duke did not wish to disturb the occupant, who was ill or elderly.³³⁷ This is more consistent with the 6th Duke’s character. In his *Handbook of Chatsworth and Hardwick*, written as a guide for guests, he wrote that some of the rooms at Chatsworth remained unchanged for many years ‘from unwillingness to disturb Hannah Gregory, the house-keeper who dwelt there for half a century’.³³⁸ However, there is no other evidence to support any of

³³⁵ See, for example, J. Robinson, *The Architecture of Northern England* (London, 1986), p. 79; N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Derbyshire*, revised E. Williamson (New Haven and London, 1978), pp. 205-207; ‘Edensor’, *Derbyshire UK: Guide to Derbyshire & the Peak District*, <http://www.derbyshireuk.net/edensor.html> [last accessed May 2017].

³³⁶ Barnatt and Williamson, *Chatsworth*, p. 158.

³³⁷ D. Naylor, *The Chatsworth Villages: Beeley, Edensor & Pilsley* (Ashbourne, 1993), p. 84.

³³⁸ Duke of Devonshire, *Handbook of Chatsworth and Hardwick* (London, 1845), p. 9.

these explanations, and each of these stories gives disproportionate significance to the role of the landowner. By looking through the correspondence of the land agents, it is possible to see that the cottage clearance, and the processes of closure and gentrification that followed, were more significantly influenced by middle-class ideas of moral improvement than by upper-class paternalism.

The main character in most of the stories about Edensor, as in the emotional descriptions of close parishes written by doomsaying politicians in the 1840s and 1850s, is the despotic, whimsical or dismissive landowner. In reality, the Duke was far from alone in deciding to demolish and rebuild Edensor. As well as the draughtsman, John P Robertson, the Duke was advised by Joseph Paxton, who in turn may have been inspired by John Claudius Loudon, a Scottish landscape planner in whose office Robertson had trained. In 1835 Paxton and the Duke had been to Blaise Hamlet, John Harford's model village, and the Duke wrote in his diary, 'The most perfect cottages... I ever saw... Paxton was struck with the chimneys'.³³⁹ It might have been this visit to Blaise Hamlet that inspired the design of the chimneys in Edensor, each one of which is different. There has been some disagreement over how involved Paxton was in the design of Edensor, with some arguing that most of it was the work of John Robertson.³⁴⁰ It is evident that both Paxton and the Duke considered it to be 'their' project. In the 6th Duke's *Handbook*, he includes the re-modelling of Edensor in a list of the 'remarkable and conspicuous' 'creations of [Paxton's] talent'.³⁴¹ One individual who has received no credit for the village's reconstruction, however, is Sydney Smithers, Chatsworth's forgotten land agent. The land agent was far more involved in the day-to-day decisions that affected the lives of the tenants and expenditure on the estate, than the Duke himself. In 1838, when new houses

³³⁹ Darley, *Villages of Vision*, p. 84.

³⁴⁰ A. Hall, 'John Robertson of Baslow, Architect', *Baslow History*, www.baslowhistory.co.uk [last accessed June 2017].

³⁴¹ Duke of Devonshire, *Handbook*, p. 113.

at Edensor were being built, the Duke and Joseph Paxton went away on a year-long tour of Europe, leaving Sydney Smithers to manage the works. The plan to demolish and rebuild Edensor was therefore, from its conception, shaped by several actors besides the Duke.

It is not known when the plan to rebuild Edensor first came about. It is likely that it was considered as an option while the cottages were being cleared to make way for the new road. It must also have crossed the minds of Joseph Paxton and the Duke when they visited Blaise Hamlet in 1835. New gardens were created and garden walls erected as early as 1833, but work did not begin on the new houses until 1838. An undated letter written by the Duke suggests that the project was his idea. He writes,

Paxton is gone to London, I was rather ailing yesterday and gave him the proposal about Edensor without writing you a letter, today the frost has returned and has cured me without the necessity of doctoring. Pray talk fully to Paxton. He will tell you that I am in earnest about my 3 villages. I never knew anything of them before, but now I take great interest in the people and in the houses. I w[oul]d submit to delay in the works [at Chatsworth] sooner than retard what I want done at the villages. You will think this one of my fancies with which I am apt to be run away, but it is more than that, and it will be a great pleasure and occupation to me. I think that near such a place as this the villages ought to [be] remarkable for neatness and comfort and all rational advantages. Messrs Smithers and Paxton know all I feel about it.³⁴³

The hyperbole of the Duke's statement that he 'never knew anything' of his villages before (he would at the very least have travelled through them many times in his carriage), suggests a sudden change of perspective. In 1837, just before Edensor's reconstruction began, the 6th Duke broke off his relationship with his mistress, Eliza Warwick, and his religious outlook became increasingly evangelical, which was itself induced by the influence of his converted family members. It was in June of that year that Joseph Paxton wrote to his wife that he feared

³⁴³ Letter from the Duke of Devonshire, probably to Benjamin Currey, undated, L/83/2, DC.

the Duke had become ‘a ranting, canting saint’.³⁴⁴ It is possible, therefore, that the Duke’s newfound concern for his villagers was motivated by this increased attention to religion. However, the letter above cites his main concerns as ‘neatness, comfort and all rational advantages’. Each of these terms suggest a limitation to the Duke’s aspirations for the village, with a particular focus on the physical comfort of the tenants. The employment of the term ‘rational’, in the context of the preceding two words, seems particularly aimed at managing the scale of the project. The ideological aspects of the reconstruction were more explicitly motivated by the agents, Sydney Smithers and Joseph Paxton.

Smithers began his career as the clerk to William Ashby, the previous land agent, and took over when Ashby died around 1836. As Joseph Paxton outgrew his role as head gardener, his remit crossed over into other areas of the estate, including land management. Paxton and Smithers appear, however, to have had an amicable relationship and a complementary approach to sharing the work. As Stephen King has stated, land agents had to balance a variety of competing tasks.³⁴⁵ They had to ensure that the estate remained economically sustainable, avoid tension and conflict within the community, and manage the owners. Joseph Paxton was very good at managing the Duke, while Smithers was adept at keeping an eye on the estate finances and staying abreast of people and events in the community.

Smithers and Paxton mediated the relationship between landowner and tenant, drawing on the language of respectability and professional insight to make recommendations to the Duke. In March 1838, for example, Smithers wrote a long letter to the Duke about the health and wellbeing of his tenants:

I cannot omit to mention to Your Grace how much I was pleased with the behaviour of [Widow Alsop]. the good sense and kindness of her observations applicable to her

³⁴⁴ Letter from Joseph Paxton to Sarah Paxton, 2 June 1837, P/39, DC.

³⁴⁵ S. King, ‘The Role of the Land Agent: Continuity and Continuity’ in C. Beardmore, S. King and G. Monks (eds.), *The Land Agent in Britain: Past, Present and Future* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2016), pp. 129-150.

unfortunate mother and sister were very creditable to her. Upon speaking to Holmes he made no objection to their both remaining for the present provided they paid their rent at Lady day. Widow Alsop will then owe him a year's rent £3.4., and I can suggest no better mode to Your Grace of affording her assistance, than by just at this time enabling her to pay her rent.³⁴⁶

Sydney Smithers encouraged the Duke's interest in the tenants, and facilitated his personal visits to their houses. Over the course of these visits the Duke appears to have begun reflecting the language of his advisors. In the same year that Sydney Smithers wrote the above letter, the Duke did a tour of the houses in Pilsley. He was armed with a table written by Smithers which informed him of the names and occupations of tenants, the number of children, the acreage and other details for each household. A column was left next to this for the Duke to write his own observations. Again, these notes express a preoccupation with neatness and bodily comfort. He made notes where more chairs were required, where ladders appeared dangerous and where tenants appeared in poor health. However, the exercise also appears to have drawn the Duke's attention to issues of behaviour and morality. Within the framework of the table prepared by Smithers, the Duke noted that some tenants appeared 'respectable' and 'decent looking', while one was a 'bad father'.³⁴⁷

The Duke's education in matters of estate management was a process in which his agents consciously challenged and provoked the Duke into addressing the poor conditions in which some of the tenants lived. 'I am afraid Your Grace may find the perusal of these details troublesome', wrote Sydney Smithers, 'but I have been induced to make them from the kind interest Your Grace has taken in the people'.³⁴⁸ In his letter, Smithers used emotive language to make a case for the Duke to give aid, referring to the tenants he discusses as 'poor', 'dreadfully afflicted' and 'unfortunate', mirroring the language in the Duke's own notes and

³⁴⁶ Letter from Sydney Smithers to the Duke of Devonshire, 13 March 1838, CS6/3871, DC.

³⁴⁷ Notes on Pilsley Village by the 6th Duke, January 1838 onwards, unnumbered, DC.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

thereby strengthening his resolve to help them. Through this education the Duke went from having, by his own admission, no knowledge of the tenants, to a ‘great interest in the people and the houses’.³⁵³

In addition to his part in influencing the Duke’s initial determination to rebuild Edensor, Smithers continued to oversee the building works as they progressed. In August 1838, the Duke and Paxton embarked on a journey abroad that lasted just over a year, although Paxton returned in May. They were, therefore, absent while the building works in Edensor were beginning. In their absence, Smithers was in charge of making decisions about the demolition and construction of the cottages. As Sarah Paxton’s uncle noted in a letter in October 1838, when Bampton’s house was ‘obliged to be taken entirely down’, ‘Mr Smithers sanctioned it being done’ while the other cottages were ‘progressing nicely’.³⁵⁴ Even on the Duke’s return, Smithers continued to influence decisions about the village, primarily with a view to reducing expenditure. In 1840 he wrote to Benjamin Currey, the accountant:

[The Duke] then returned to the Village, expressing his anxiety to have it all finished, excepting Burgoine’s house, [and] said “but did you explain to Mr Currey that I shall not be living here by which a very great saving will be effected” I of course replied in the affirmative, [“]and what did he say?[]” [“]He still hoped that Y[ou]r Grace would forego the proposed additional cottage[]”. After a little reflection he said “Well I should have liked to have had it done, and I think I might, as there will be such a saving, but I sh[ould] not wish to be unreasonable”. I ~~just~~ ventured to observe that the outlay here just now was large. I believe you will find His Grace quite reconciled to give up these two objects of increasing expenditure.³⁵⁵

In this letter, Smithers informs Currey that he has persuaded the Duke to ‘give up’ the idea of hiring extra masons to finish the cottages, and of building an extra cottage at the gate of the

³⁵³ Letter from the Duke of Devonshire, probably to Benjamin Currey, undated, L/83/2, DC.

³⁵⁴ Letter from J Gregory to Joseph Paxton, 19 October 1838, P/54, DC.

³⁵⁵ Letter from Sydney Smithers to Benjamin Currey, 27 June 1840, L/83/2, DC.

village. The letter shows how the senior staff worked collectively to influence their master. Smithers draws on the opinion of the accountant to legitimise his own opinion that expenditure was too large. Collaboration between Smithers and Paxton is evident at other times, and both used the other to strengthen their stances on estate issues. The outnumbered Duke, relying on the better judgement of his staff, generally became reconciled to their views, always acutely aware of avoiding being ‘unreasonable’. As well as indicating the senior staff’s power in influencing the reconstruction of the village, this letter also demonstrates their differing approaches. Smithers often prioritised estate finances over the wishes of the Duke, in a way that the ambitious Joseph Paxton rarely did.

The decision to rebuild Edensor was not only the idea of the 6th Duke of Devonshire, but also of his agents: Sydney Smithers, Joseph Paxton and chief agent Benjamin Currey, who continued to influence the direction of the project after it had begun. There were also other incidental factors affecting and influencing the process of closure that occurred on the Chatsworth estate. When Christian, Countess of Devonshire died in 1675, she and her husband left a sum of £500 to be invested in cottages on the estate, with any profit from rents to be used to support young boys and girls on the Count’s Derbyshire estates who were eligible to be apprentices.³⁵⁶ In 1832, it was found that there was an £800 surplus accrued from rents, which had not been spent on apprenticeships, and that no children in Edensor were at that time eligible to become apprentices.

The Duke appealed to spend the surplus on the education of the village children instead, presumably by improving the school, buying provisions or employing more staff. The Master of the Rolls, however, ruled that the money should be spent on improving the cottages that had been bought with the initial funds, since this complied better with the instructions of the will.

³⁵⁶ Documents relating to the will and charities of Christiana, Duchess of Devonshire, 1832, L/93/45, DC.

It is not clear which cottages these were, but it is possible that some of the early work at Edensor, perhaps the improvements noted the accounts for 1833, were carried out as a result of the court case the previous year. These early improvements and the evangelism promoted by the Duke's family may have been among the factors that turned the Duke's attention towards his villages and inspired him to improve them. It seems clear, however, that the Duke's agents were especially integral in promoting the ideological notions of moral improvement which underpinned the new design. Sarah Webster has previously argued that land agents 'supervised' the moral improvements of tenants, but these findings at Chatsworth suggest that their role can be understood in more active terms.³⁵⁷

A Middle-Class Vision for an Upper-Class Estate

Joseph Paxton wrote explicitly about his motivations for improving the village of Edensor. In 1842 he wrote to Edwin Chadwick,

We have erected a number of Cottages in this place for the Peasantry; but being in the vicinity of a Ducal palace they are not only comfortable, but highly ornamental, and not suitable for general purposes. While I fully agree with the Report, that the first step for preserving the health of the poor in the crowded neighbourhoods of Towns is efficient drainage; I can assert from my own observations in the country that improvements in the dwellings of the poor, have a wonderful effect in raising their moral character ... To improve the habitations of the poor must evidently be the first step towards ameliorating their condition for they can never be expected to attend strictly to moral obligations until their homes are rendered comfortable. Cottage gardening is also a subject to which it would be well if Landlords were to pay more attention, for I have invariably found during my experience, that labourers when allowed some garden ground, always took a greater interest and pride in their homes; beside the exercise in a garden being healthy it is both advantageous in a pecuniary

³⁵⁷ S. Webster, 'Estate Improvement and the Professionalisation of Land Agents on the Egremont Estates in Sussex and Yorkshire, 1770-1835', *Rural History* (vol. 18, 2007), pp. 47-70.

[and] moral point of view, and having this impression, in order to forward the object I published at a cheap rate the small “Cottagers Calendar” which I send herewith.³⁵⁸

There are several themes to unpick in this significant letter, in particular the precedence he gives to morality, his use of Edensor as a site of experimentation, and thirdly the implications for public health.

To an extent, Joseph Paxton’s motivations aligned with those of the Duke, in that he wished the tenants to be ‘comfortable’ in their new houses. But despite being integral to the design of the village, he frames its ornamental aesthetics in a negative light, as an unavoidable consequence of their proximity to Chatsworth and one which caused the houses to be impractical. The impracticality of the houses, however, was of secondary importance in Paxton’s mind to the positive effects that the village had on morality, a determinist link that he makes three times.

Interestingly, Paxton frames the moral improvement of the villagers not as a motive for the reconstruction, but as an unexpected outcome. The Duke had hoped modestly for the new Edensor to bring ‘rational advantages’ to its residents. For Paxton, Edensor had a far wider socio-political significance as a site of experimentation. He used his experience with designing and observing the village at Chatsworth to legitimise his political stance, which by this point was gaining sway. By the early 1840s, he had accrued significant social capital beyond the Duke’s own circle. In London he was regularly socialising with writers, politicians and businessmen who shared his liberal values. These included Charles Dickens, Mark Lemon, Douglas Jerrold, William Makepeace Thackeray and, of course, Edwin Chadwick.³⁵⁹ At the time of Paxton’s letter, Chadwick had just written his *Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Poor*, and would write a supplement to it the following year. These reports led to

³⁵⁸ Letter from Joseph Paxton to Edwin Chadwick, September 1842, CHADWICK 1545, UCL.

³⁵⁹ K. Colquhoun, *A Thing in Disguise: The Visionary Life of Joseph Paxton* (London, 2003), p. 110.

the Public Health Act of 1848. Paxton's 'findings' therefore came at an important moment in public health policy, and may have promoted the implicit architectural determinism in subsequent housing policy and later nineteenth-century movements such as the Garden City movement.

Joseph Paxton's experiment in Edensor had a legitimate basis in concerns about public health. Edensor was demolished and reconstructed at a time when rampant cholera epidemics were perceived to be caused by bad 'miasma', often shown in depictions of cholera as a polluted, grey mist. The prevention of bad air, believed to originate from the dirt and overcrowding associated with crowded tenement-style accommodation, was a priority in city planning projects in the nineteenth century. Prevailing beliefs about bad air and darkness associated with illness had also influenced the building of the North Wing at Chatsworth in the 1820s. The 6th Duke writes in his *Handbook of Chatsworth and Hardwick* that, while the three former service buildings in the same location were 'not unseemly', they were 'bad within, and not fit to be retained'.³⁶⁰ He describes 'an impervious wood', filled with 'meat-safes, and larders, and carpenters'-pits, and dog-kennels, and dark recesses for lumber'.³⁶¹ The use of the adjectives 'impervious' and 'dark' to describe the storage hints at the cramped and claustrophobic conditions that were associated with illness at the time.

These 'bad' spaces, including the kitchen, were replaced by the North Wing. In *The Victorian Country House*, Mark Girouard notes that 'Victorian architects were obsessed by the need to keep kitchen smells out of the rest of the house... Victorian kitchens in big country houses had their own roofs, with lanterns or top lighting to let the light in and the smells out'.³⁶² Girouard implies that smells from the kitchen insulted Victorian sensibilities by reminding

³⁶⁰ Duke of Devonshire, *Handbook*, pp. 3-4.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

³⁶² Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, p. 30.

country house owners and their guests of the presence of servants working behind the scenes. While an aversion to the sensory evidence of labour is an important topic that will be discussed in this chapter, Girouard and others have underestimated the impact on country houses of a wider fear of smells and the ‘Great Stink’ in cities like London.³⁶³ It also underestimates the paternalistic care of employers. The 6th Duke goes on to write in this *Handbook of Chatsworth and Hardwick*,

The [new] kitchen itself is handsome and spacious, and contains steam-cupboards, and a hot steam table ; and wood is the sole fuel employed in the huge grate, as well as coke for the steam contrivances, which, diminishing the quantity of blacks, must add greatly to the cleanliness of the place.³⁶⁴

The remedies that the Duke considered improved the ‘cleanliness’ of the kitchen, namely spaciousness and clean air, were almost certainly influential again in the case of Edensor, and more widely they appear frequently in debates about appropriate housing for labourers.

When the reconstruction of Edensor is considered in light of contemporary discussions about health and hygiene, it seems probable that the grandeur of the houses was not only an aesthetically-motivated decision, but derived from the belief that small houses bred the conditions through which diseases spread. The new houses were also supplied with fresh water, and Paxton was particularly concerned with proper drainage. Although this determination originated from the belief that the bad smells associated with sewage spread disease, Paxton inadvertently avoided the spread of disease via waste before it was proved that cholera spread

³⁶³ On smells and hygiene in the nineteenth century, see: J. Hillier and S. Bell, ‘The ‘Genius of Place’: Mitigating Stench in the New Palace of Westminster before the Great Stink’, *The London Journal* (vol. 35, 2010), pp. 22-38; D .S. Barnes, *The Great Stink of Paris and the Nineteenth-Century Struggle Against Filth and Germs* (Baltimore, 2006); J.P.Ribner, ‘The Thames and Sin in the age of the Great Stink: Some artistic and literary responses to a Victorian environmental crisis’, *The British Art Journal* (vol. 1, 2000), pp. 38-46.

³⁶⁴ Duke of Devonshire, *Handbook*, p. 149.

through contaminated water, using similar methods to those that would later be implemented in cities.

Miasmatic theory may also have influenced the arrangement of the outdoor spaces. In the fields west of Edensor is a ‘remarkable’ collection of barns.³⁶⁵ Jonathan Denby suggests that these were used to house tenants’ livestock away from the village, and that each house had an allotted barn and a small area of land on which to keep their animals, perhaps as recompense for land that was lost to the park during the demolition of the old village.³⁶⁶ Siberecht’s painting of Edensor in 1703 shows four large fields at the centre of the village. It is possible that agriculture was moved out of Edensor not only to make way for the 6th Duke’s new road through the park, but to keep the odours of the animals at a distance from the villagers whose smallholding would once have been attached to, or close to, their home. In addition to the spaces allotted to tenants for livestock, the new houses at Edensor were built with gardens. Paxton encouraged the cultivation of cottage gardens with several publications, believing that it was important for the rural poor to be able to provide themselves with fresh vegetables and flowers. As well as improving the appearance of the village, vegetable cultivation provided the tenants with nutritious food, and the pleasant smell of flowers may also have been thought to improve the quality of the air.

Joseph Paxton’s work on Edensor, and importantly his subsequent advertisement of its positive impact, were influential in solidifying his own political agenda, and may also have had an influence in the public health and housing policies that Chadwick helped to create. The implications for how middle-class power can be understood to have operated on and beyond an upper-class estate are significant. Paxton was not the supervisor of the village’s

³⁶⁵ Barnatt and Williamson, *Chatsworth*, p. 168.

³⁶⁶ J. Denby, “‘As the Houses, So the People’: Gardeners: Their Accommodation and Renumeration, 1800-1914’, MA Thesis, University of Buckingham, 2013, p. 34.

reconstruction, but the engineer. While his aims to improve the physical hygiene of Edensor were a pioneering and influential success, however, some of his other objectives failed. Rather than improving the conditions of ‘the Peasantry’ at Chatsworth, the new houses ultimately pushed out the labourers and led to the gentrification of the village.

The Embourgeoisement of Edensor

The key impact of village demolition that nineteenth-century politicians observed was that it drove the settled poor into adjoining parishes. This relieved landowners from the burden of maintenance, but applied pressure to the infrastructure and living conditions in neighbouring ‘open’ communities.³⁶⁷ This nineteenth-century scandal inspired the open/close parish model developed by Dennis Mills. In the open/close parish model, close parishes were ‘subject to the overriding influence of the large landowners who dominated [their] populations’, while ‘open’ parishes were owned by a greater number of freeholders and therefore less strictly regulated.³⁶⁸ Close parishes were subject to population controls, with landowners restricting the number of occupants in their villages. While the impact of village clearance on neighbouring ‘open’ parishes has been well researched, the impact of reconstruction in ‘close’ villages is relatively unexplored.

While the 6th Duke and his head gardener took pleasure in improving the landscape and upgrading the quality of the housing, the process of building a model village was highly

³⁶⁷ ‘Reports to the Poor Law Board, on the Laws of Settlement, and Removal of the Poor’, *Justice of the Peace*, (vol. 14, 1850), p. 237.

³⁶⁸ D. R. Mills and B. M. Shortt, ‘Social Change and Conflict in Nineteenth-Century England: The Use of the Open-Closed Village Model’, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, (vol. 10, 1983), p. 253.

disruptive to the tenants. Those that stayed in their homes had to put up with the noise and discomfort of living on a building site. As the remodelling was beginning in 1838, Sarah Paxton observed, ‘I fancy Mrs Hodgson will not much like the noise of workmen so close about her’.³⁶⁹ Most of the tenants, however, were evicted and temporarily lodged elsewhere. The majority went to Pilsley, another of Chatsworth’s three estate villages, where housing was built quickly to accommodate displaced tenants. The rental accounts show that the number of tenants paying rent to the Duke at Pilsley rose between 1821 and 1834 from 12 to 52.³⁷⁰ It is difficult to say how emotionally unsettling this relocation was for the tenants. Many of the individuals evicted from their homes in Edensor in the 1820s, before plans for the new village were drawn up, would not have known whether they could expect to return. Mrs Bramwell asked the Duke during his tour of Pilsley whether she and her family could return to Edensor, as Pilsley was ‘[too] far for hir husband to go to [and] from the farm’.³⁷¹ On the other hand, Pilsley was only a mile away, and the two communities were connected through relatives and co-workers, so the new environment would not have been entirely unfamiliar.

In addition to the rental accounts, the temporary relocation of Edensor’s population is evident in the 1851 census. Hannah Turnbull, for example, is recorded as a resident of Edensor in 1851, which is also listed as her birthplace.³⁷² Her eldest daughter, Sarah Mary, was also born in Edensor, around 1826. Hannah’s subsequent children, however, were born in Pilsley between 1832 and 1839, at the time of the demolition and reconstruction of the village. By the time Hannah’s youngest daughter Elizabeth was born, around 1844, the new village was complete and they had returned to Edensor. As well as the inconvenience, and presumably emotional distress, that may have affected tenants leaving their homes, those who made an

³⁶⁹ Letter from Sarah Paxton to Joseph Paxton, October 1838, P/51, DC.

³⁷⁰ Rental Accounts for Edensor Collection, 1821-34, C/131/1-10, DC.

³⁷¹ Notes on Pilsley Village by the 6th Duke, January 1838 onwards, unnumbered, DC.

³⁷² 1851 census returns of England, Derbyshire, Chatsworth and Edensor, H.O.107/2149, digital image Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> [last accessed 10 March 2017].

income from the manufacture and sale of goods lost money through the disruption caused by works of this nature. In 1874, a tenant at Sheldon named Michael Frost complained to the land agent at Chatsworth of the inconvenience of having his house rebuilt:

if I must have any thing more done at my Place I should like another lot of Masons for I never saw/ such a Idle lot. I should like the house finished as I think I lost from £15[.]00 to 20 Pounds by the last years Cheese [sales]... my wife says she wishes I had never asked for a new house³⁷³

Although Michael Frost was writing thirty-five years after the reconstruction of Edensor, the inconveniences he describes may have affected Edensor's tenants in the same way.

The demolished cottages were replaced with larger houses, but Edensor's population decreased in size following the reconstruction. When a survey was taken of the village in 1788, there were 403 inhabitants.³⁷⁴ An 1830 guide book states that in 1821, just before the first demolitions and at the height of the village's population, there were 509 villagers.³⁷⁵ Following the reconstruction of the village, and even after the tenants had been moved back into the houses, this number had decreased by 40%, and the census of 1841 records only 304 residents.³⁷⁶ Some of the absent villagers may have chosen not to return to the village. In the several years between the cottage clearance and village reconstruction, many of them married and settled elsewhere. In 1788 there were eighty-six households counted in Edensor, while there were fewer than fifty in 1841. In the first year of the village's completion, the tenants responded to this decrease in housing by subletting rooms in their new houses, until the Duke

³⁷³ Letter from Michael Frost to John Gregory Cottingham, 8 June 1874, L/93/44, DC.

³⁷⁴ Edensor Residents Survey, 1788, AS/1078, DC.

³⁷⁵ S. Glover, *The Peak Guide: Containing the Topographical, Statistical, and General History of Buxton, Chatsworth, Edensor, Castleton, Bakewell, Haddon, Matlock, and Cromford* (Derby, 1830), p. 53.

³⁷⁶ 1841 census returns of England, Derbyshire, Chatsworth and Edensor, H.O.107/184/7, digital image Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> [last accessed March 2017].

put a stop to the practice. In 1840, the following announcement was displayed in public:

IT having become known to me that, in many instances, several Families have been taken to reside in one Cottage, and disapproving thereof... I have determined that, for the future, no Lodgers, nor any married part of the Cottagers' Family, shall be received into any Cottage as residents³⁷⁸

The lodger ban was motivated by a legitimate concern for the dangers of overcrowding, but its social effects were profound on working-class families which relied on savings from communal living and additional incomes from lodgers.

The concept of gentrification is usually observed in urban regeneration, but it also has clear relevance for the model village.³⁷⁹ The alterations carried out at Edensor saw the demolition and/or relocation of noisy, communal spaces in which visible and audible signs of manual labour were on view to the public. The Devonshire Arms pub at Edensor, which had been separate to the inn, was never replaced.³⁸⁰ The New Inn (now the estate offices) at the entrance to the village, built in the late eighteenth century, was its closest substitute, but this was a formal Georgian building intended for polite visitors to Chatsworth. The rental accounts for 1841 also record that Martha Strutt, the blacksmith, was 'removed from Edensor' to a 'new House & Blacksmiths Shop' in Pilsley.³⁸¹ John Holmes' carpenter's shop was similarly 'pulled down' and he was 'removed' to Pilsley.³⁸² These tenants are the only two for whom the words 'removed' are used, and the common factor is their workshops.

The labour that remained unavoidable was either hurried, hidden, or conformed

³⁷⁸ Notice to residents of Edensor, February 1840, L/94/250, DC.

³⁷⁹ See: D. A. Ghertner, 'India's urban revolution: geographies of displacement beyond gentrification', *Environment and Planning* (vol. 46, 2014), pp. 1554-1571; P. Watt, "'It's not for us': Regeneration, the 2012 Olympics and the gentrification of East London', *City* (vol. 17, 2013), pp. 99-118; D. Smith and L. Holt, 'Studentification and apprentice gentrifiers within Britain's provincial towns and cities: extending the meaning of gentrification', *Environment and Planning* (vol. 39, 2007), pp. 142-161.

³⁸⁰ Barnett and Williamson, *Chatsworth*, p. 158.

³⁸¹ Rental Accounts for Edensor Collection, 1841, C/131/17, DC.

³⁸² *Ibid.*

tolerably to the rural nostalgic image of the village. As at most other country houses with servants' wings, labour was consciously hidden in the house, gardens and villages, to give visitors the impression of a seamless, invisible operation. On some occasions this absence of human effort was exaggerated to great effect. When Queen Victoria visited Chatsworth in 1843, Paxton and his workers organised a show to entertain the guests and the thousands of people who had come to catch a glimpse of the Queen after dinner. Three thousand lights were attached to trees and there were fireworks and canon fire. Paxton and two hundred labourers from the villages worked through the night to clear the debris, and at seven o'clock the morning after the Duke of Wellington remarked 'I came out to view the field of battle, but I find that all the slain and wounded have been removed... I should have liked [Paxton] for one of my generals'.³⁸³ On a more quotidian basis, Paxton fined his workers in the case that 'utensels of any discription whatever be left out of place, or put away unclean or walks carelesly dirted'.³⁸⁴ In the new village of Edensor, the only visible labour besides occasional building maintenance, was gardening. This labour was acceptable because, according to Paxton's letter to Chadwick, it was good exercise, provided the houses with fruit and vegetables, and promoted good morality in the villagers.

The removal of workshops and the pub from Edensor was noticed by Llewellyn Jewitt, who attributed it to the peace and quiet of the village. The artificial landscape and soundscape noted by Jewitt represented the substitution of Edensor's culture for one that was constructed from a bourgeois ideal of the rural working class: teetotal, clean, quiet, simple, charming in appearance, and inherently cheerful. The smaller, grander and quieter village of Edensor was so agreeable to refined tastes that in 1851, the 6th Duke offered the use of one of the houses in the village to his friend Mary Thornhill, whose family owned Stanton Hall. He advertised the

³⁸³ K. Colquhoun, *A Thing in Disguise: The Visionary Life of Joseph Paxton* (London, 2004), p. 126.

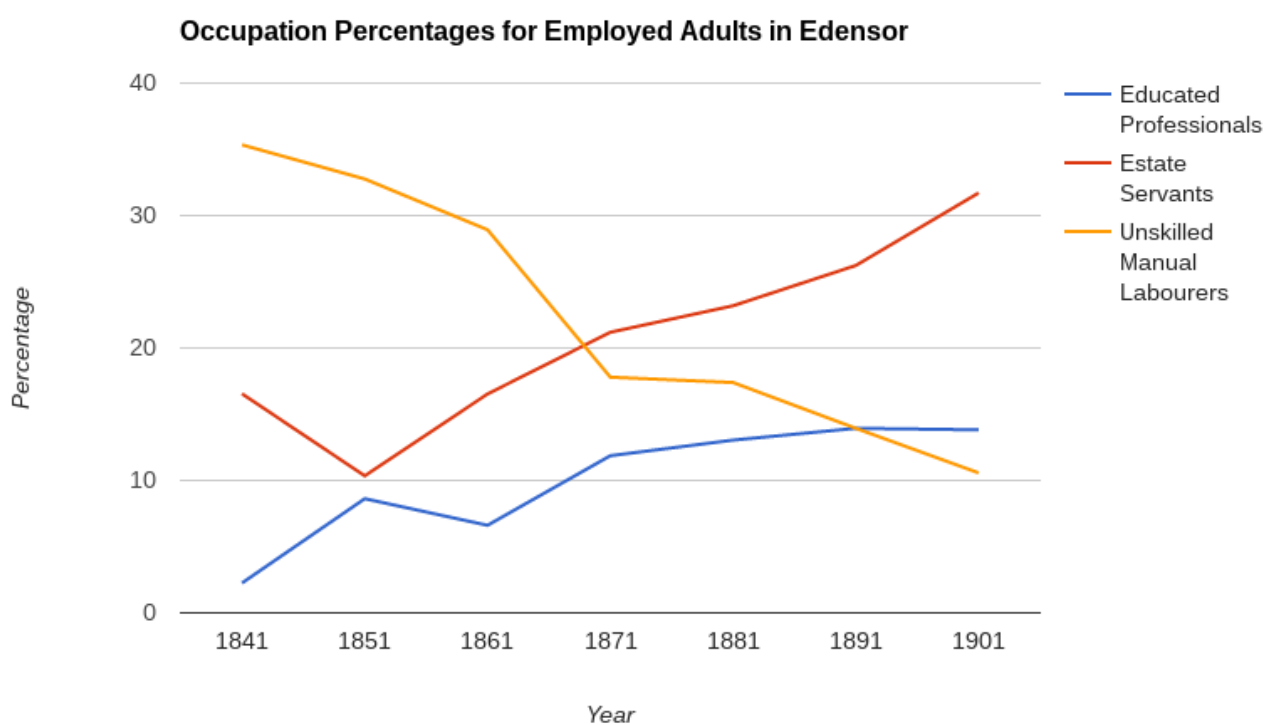
³⁸⁴ Notebook of James White, 1838, CH14/7/3, DC.

home to her as ‘an agreeable and peaceful residence’.³⁸⁵ Soon after her arrival, Paxton wrote to his wife with amusement that he had seen Miss Thornhill ‘in a sort of open Tub drawn by a little rough Pony and driven by Miss Hunt. The whole turn out Pony and all I think might sell for 30 shillings’. Paxton’s sketch and description of the upper-class Miss Thornhill being pulled in a ramshackle cart is reminiscent of Marie Antoinette riding a donkey around her *Hameau* at Versailles.

Nowhere is the process of gentrification in Edensor clearer than in the occupation trends recorded in estate surveys and the census. In 1788, a third of the heads of household whose occupations were listed in a village survey were recorded as unskilled manual labourers. In 1841 this had not changed significantly, with 35.3% of employed adults recorded as unskilled manual labourers including farm hands. By the turn of the twentieth century, only 10.6% of employed adults were labourers, while educated professionals (including clerks, teachers, surveyors, etc.), had risen from 2.3% in 1841 to 13.8% in 1901. After 1871, the largest occupational category was estate servants (including gardeners, gamekeepers, grooms, etc.), with 31.7% in 1901, double what it had been sixty years earlier. For the majority of cases, this was not due to inconsistent enumeration or individuals gaining skills and changing employment, but because of new individuals coming into the village. In 1788, 87.2% of householders were listed as ‘belong[ing] to Edensor’. In the 1851 census, 65.6% of residents recorded had been born in Edensor. By 1901 this had fallen to only 22.5%.

³⁸⁵ Letter from 6th Duke to Mary Thornhill, December 1850, CS2/11/5, DC.

Chart 2.1: A graph showing the percentages of employed adults in Edensor working as unskilled manual labourers (including farm hands), male servants (including game keepers, gardeners and stable workers etc.) and educated professionals (including teachers, surveyors, clerks etc.) between 1841 and 1901.



With forty percent of Edensor's inhabitants either forced out of the village by lack of accommodation, or choosing not to return after the reconstruction, it seems important to understand where they went, and how far the community was scattered. Unfortunately, the 1841 census did not include people's exact birthplaces. Therefore, it is necessary to turn to the 1851 census. While some people would have died or moved around between 1841 and 1851, it still offers an interesting insight into the effect of the village's reconstruction on the geography of the population. Of the 382 people born before 1840 who listed their birthplace as 'Edensor, Derbyshire' on the 1851 census, 214, or 56%, were not living in the village.³⁸⁶ Of these 214 people, 68% remained in other parts of Derbyshire, while the rest were spread over fourteen counties. Over half of the people born in Edensor before or during the cottage clearance and reconstruction of the village, therefore, were living elsewhere ten years after its completion.

To understand how much of this population movement was caused by the construction of the model village, it is necessary to carry out the same survey of a similar village. Beeley lies on the southern edge of Chatsworth park. It is the furthest estate village from the house, and saw fewer changes in the 1820s and 1830s than Edensor or Pilsley, although some of the displaced tenants from Edensor lodged there. 56 people who had been born in Edensor were living in Pilsley in 1851, while only fifteen resided in Beeley. In 1851, of the 372 people who had 'Beeley, Derbyshire' recorded as their birthplace, 114, or 31%, were living elsewhere. Of these 114 people, 88% were living in other parts of Derbyshire, while the rest were spread over nine counties. From this analysis of the 1851 census, it can be concluded that people who were born in Edensor before or during the rebuilding project that took place in the 1820s and 1830s, were not only less likely to live at their place of birth than people born in estate villages that

³⁸⁶ This data was gathered by searching for people by birthplace on www.ancestry.com, and manually counting the 1851 addresses of each person born in Edensor, Derbyshire before or during the reconstruction of the village. Some people may be missing due to incorrect transcription or missing census data.

saw fewer changes, but they were also less likely to live in the same county. Some of these are accounted for elsewhere in the Cavendish property network. Ten people from Edensor were residing in Middlesex in 1851, eight of whom worked at Chiswick or Devonshire House, the Duke's London residences.

While it is not possible to access the emotions and experiences of people who moved, or were moved, from their homes at Edensor in the 1820s and 1830s, it is possible to make some conclusions about the immediate impact on the population. Edensor had around 500 tenants when the building works began in the early 1820s. When the cottages were cleared, many of the tenants who were moved went to Pilsley, and some relocated to Beeley and Baslow. Both Mills and the concerned politicians of the nineteenth century argued that tenants displaced from close parishes were forced into open parishes, but in the case of Edensor, over a quarter went to the other closed villages on the estate. When the new village was finished, the population was diminished by 40%, with only 307 people enumerated at Edensor in 1841. 56 of the absent villagers are accounted for at Pilsley in 1851, while the rest had settled in other parts of the county or further afield. In a comparison between Edensor and Beeley, which was not altered to the same extent, it was found that people who were born in Edensor were 25% more likely to live elsewhere in 1851, and 10% more likely to live in a different county altogether. This is not a perfect analysis because it does not account for people who lived in Edensor before 1841 but who were not born there. However, it suggests that the reconstruction of the village was a transformative event in the lives of the villagers, and caused higher numbers of permanent relocation than in an estate village which had not been altered to the same extent.

The Bodily Comfort of Tenants

The tenants who remained or returned to Edensor found their lifestyles significantly altered. It has been assumed by both contemporary observers and by historians that model housing positively affected tenants in terms of their comfort, but negatively in terms of their agency. The following section draws on the letters of the Wilson family to challenge and explore these two related assumptions.

The lifestyles of model villagers were a subject of intrigue for critics such as P. G. Patmore, who wrote about Edensor in terms of a poisoned chalice for personal and social freedoms:

the elite [tenants] have been installed in this beau ideal of a village, at an almost nominal rent, but under a tenure, the conditions of which may be guessed from what we have observed while looking on this prettiest and most plausible of mistakes — which can only be described by negatives. It has no shops, no smithy, no “ public,” no pound, no pump; — no cage, no stocks ; — no quoits, no single-stick, no wrestling, no kite-flying, no cricketing, no trap-ball, no pitch and toss, no dumps ; — no shouting, no singing, no hallooing, no squabbling, no scolding; — no love-making, no gossiping, no tittle-tattle, no scan — Yes ! one thing the miserable denizens of this " happy village" have gained, in vice of their elevation in the scale of social life: they may scandalize one another to their hearts content ! And it is to be hoped that they do so : for what is left but scandal, to those whose lives must be conducted in a whisper ?³⁹⁴

Drawing on the case of Lockinge House in Wantage, historian Michael Havinden made similar observations, writing that, where a landlord was providing the housing, ‘he would inevitably expect to receive the gratitude, respect and obedience of his tenants. Equally invariably they were inclined to feel a sense of being manipulated and a loss of self-respect.’³⁹⁵ Havinden’s study concludes with quotes from the letters of a special commissioner writing to the liberal

³⁹⁴ Patmore, *Chatsworth*, pp. 44-45.

³⁹⁵ Havinden, ‘Model Villages’, p. 422.

Daily News following an inspection of the model village of the Lockinge Estate, and a reply from the landowner Lord Wantage. Havinden writes, ‘these two quotations provide such an excellent summary of the conflicting contemporary views of model villages that further comment is hardly necessary’.³⁹⁶ The perspectives of the tenants themselves are entirely absent in both contemporary accounts and the historiography.

The agency of the tenants in Patmore’s Edensor, and in Havinden’s Lockinge estate, is non-existent. They are powerless to the will of the landowner, trapped in a tainted contract, and socially isolated from their own class. The village itself is perceived as a golden cage in which the conditions of entry are set in stone and strictly enforced. However, Nigel Cavanagh has argued that workers’ housing in the model village should be understood not as a static emblem of deference, but as forums in which fluctuating power relationships between landlord and tenant were maintained by a process of performance and negotiation.³⁹⁷

The conditions of life in the closed village were speculated by Dennis Mills in relation to his open/close parish model. He argued that conflict was not a feature of closed villages, ‘especially those with resident gentry’, since ‘the dice was too heavily loaded against the labourers, who were in any case better off materially than their fellows in open villages’.³⁹⁸ He goes on to explain that by being better-off, he means that rents were lower, and accommodation was higher quality, with larger gardens than in open villages. Havinden similarly argues that model villages ‘almost certainly provided above-average accommodation by standards of the time, and usually supplied it at an artificially low rent’.³⁹⁹ There are therefore two aspects to the ‘comfort’ described as belonging to the tenants of estate villages. The first is physical

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 426.

³⁹⁷ N. Cavanagh, ‘Cottages and the Country House: Power, Paternalism and Protest in Elsecar’, *Industrial Archaeology Review* (vol. 40, 2018), p. 22.

³⁹⁸ D. Mills, ‘Social Change and Social Conflict in Nineteenth-Century England: The Use of the Open-Closed Village Model’, *The Journal of Peasant Studies* (vol. 10, 1983), pp. 254-255.

³⁹⁹ Havinden, ‘Model Villages’, p. 420.

comfort, arising from the provision of high-quality housing with large gardens, and the second is financial comfort, with low rents. These will be dealt with separately.

The 6th Duke of Devonshire, Joseph Paxton, Sydney Smithers and the other individuals integral to the reconstruction of Edensor believed that the new village offered comfortable housing to the tenants. However, their idea of comfort was framed through each of their different perspectives and values. The Duke wanted his village to be ‘remarkable for neatness and comfort’.⁴⁰⁰ His association of comfort with neatness is interesting because, while comfort can have a variety of subjective meanings, ‘neatness’ is invariably a product of labour. While something comfortable might not become less comfortable over time, something that is ‘neat’ will inevitably become less neat without continual maintenance. The Duke thus sets out an unspoken expectation, or psychological contract, that in exchange for comfortable housing, his tenants will maintain the village and their individual residence in good order.

In 1863 one ‘Canny Scotch Rustic’ wrote into the *Gardeners Chronicle*, one of Paxton’s successful magazines, to draw attention to a speech made by the prime minister, Lord Palmerston, in 1859,

No cottage ought to be without three sleeping places- one for the man and his wife, another for the girls, and another for the boys. The effect of improving these dwellings is almost marvellous. In the first place, you know that the comfort of a man’s house depends upon the tidiness of his wife and the mode in which she tries to make him comfortable... When a cottage is in such a ramshackle state that it is impossible for a wife to keep it clean, she becomes a slattern, everything goes to ruin, the man is disgusted, and flies to the beershop.⁴⁰⁴

In debates and discussions surrounding the accommodation of the labouring poor, the physical

⁴⁰⁰ Letter from the Duke of Devonshire, probably to Benjamin Currey, undated, L/83/2, DC.

⁴⁰⁴ ‘Cottagers’, *The Gardeners’ Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette*, (vol. 23, 1863), p. 1046.

health of the cottagers was interchangeably discussed alongside their character, behaviour and moral conscience. Clean cottages made for clean cottagers, and a large house ensured that the sexes could be housed in separate bedrooms. A family whose private accommodation consisted of a small dirty cottage in which parents, brothers, sisters and even servants shared a bedroom, were not considered capable of leading respectable public lives. Since the cleanliness of the domestic home was a woman's responsibility, the moral wellbeing of her family came under her responsibilities by extension. Lord Palmerston stated that,

[If] the wife feels that she can by a little exertion mak[e] the cottage decent and respectable, she does so, and then the man enjoys the comfort and happiness of his home, stays away from the beer shop, and the sum of money he would spend in liquor goes to the benefit of his wife and children.⁴⁰⁶

Palmerston did not venture to consider what happened if it was not possible to make the cottage decent 'by a little exertion'. The prime minister stated in 1859 that the cottage wife directly controlled her family's physical health, moral and spiritual wellbeing and even finances through the effectiveness of her domestic labour.

Since domestic labour has been historically disregarded in favour of productive labour, the impact of the construction of model villages on the women who were expected to maintain them has remained undocumented by historians. Dennis Mills argued that close parish communities were 'materially better-off' than to those in open parishes.⁴⁰⁷ This perspective comes from a male-centric reading of these communities which ignores the experiences of women. In order to investigate other, more hidden experiences of life in the estate village, it is

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁷ D. Mills, 'Social Change and Social Conflict in Nineteenth-Century England: The Use of the Open-Closed Village Model' in M. Reed and R. Wells (eds), *Class, Conflict and Protest in the English Countryside, 1700-1880* (London, 1990), p. 91-92.

useful to turn to feminist histories of domestic labour, in particular studies of domestic service. The isolation experienced by domestic workers in the homes of their masters and mistresses has been well-documented since interest in servants arose with second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, and with growing interest in social history in the same period. Historians began to research the hard physical labour associated with cleaning and maintaining the home. Some historians have also analysed both the positive and negative experiences associated with ‘improvements’ in the home, in particular with new technologies. Pamela Sambrook, for example, suggests that servants disliked telephones because they were expected to answer them immediately, whereas the bells could be responded to after a reasonable delay.⁴⁰⁸

As with masters and mistresses in the home introducing new technologies to their servants, it is unlikely that landowners building their tenants commodious new houses with gardens and field barns would have considered the extra labour required in using and maintaining them, particularly by the women. The letters of Ann Wilson offer a rare insight into the extent of domestic labour required to maintain a house in a model village. The Wilson family were in the small minority of families that moved to Edensor immediately after its completion, having not lived there before. William Wilson grew up the son of a timber merchant in Beeley. His wife Ann was born in Bakewell. They married in 1841, the year that Edensor was completed, and moved into William’s mother’s house while William worked as a gardener under Andrew Stewart, the foreman of the kitchen gardens. The first few letters in the collection are written to or by William, from his friend John Milner, an old Chatsworth colleague who was writing while departing England for a position in Calcutta. The following nine letters, are written to Ann while William was convalescing in Southport for an illness which affected his lungs and skin. The illness was to kill William in 1851 at the young age of thirty-five, ten years after his marriage to Ann. She was left to care for their five children alone,

⁴⁰⁸ P. Sambrook, *A Country House at Work* (Swindon, 2013), p. 199.

although their youngest son, also William, died shortly after his father. The surviving children were Julia, born in 1842, Edmund, 1844, Elizabeth, 1845 and Alfred, born in 1849. The remainder of the letters, almost forty in total, are written from Ann to her youngest daughter Elizabeth in the late 1860s. The collection of letters therefore covers a wide time period, from the horticultural heyday of the 6th Duke to the first decade of the 7th Duke. Ann's letters in particular give a rare unfiltered account of everyday life on the Chatsworth estate in the mid-nineteenth century.

Fig. 2.3: Ann Wilson's semi-detached cottage in Edensor. Image taken by author.



The letters that Ann sent to her youngest daughter Elizabeth, who was working as a maid in Cheshire in the late 1860s, offer an insight into Ann's working life. It appears that in leaving home to work as a maid, Elizabeth hoped to save up for a sewing machine for her mother, who worked as a dressmaker. Ann writes, 'if we could rais a sewing machien I think we should manag verey well without you haveing to be from home'.⁴⁰⁹ In the meantime, therefore, Ann was sewing dresses by hand. In twelve separate letters written between 1866 and 1868 she mentions how busy she is with sewing, for example, 'I doant know when all the sewing will get done I never was so busey I shall be obliged to refuse some of the sewing I sopose'.⁴¹⁰ In addition to the sewing, Ann was expected to keep lodgers, usually temporary estate employees, in her house. She also made cheeses, cared for livestock, and maintained her garden. In several letters she describes how busy she and Edmund are with these duties,

just think what I have to do Simon [a stone mason lodging with Ann] coming in to all his meals and he has a deal of cooking done Cow milking chees making and such a lot of sewing I scarceley know wich way to turn

you say I never say aney thing about myself I have not time to think of my self much more write

I have such a deal of sewing in I doant know when it will all get done, the calf is going on Thursday and I am taking milk to the Chees

I have so much to do I have no time think of myself cow pig calf and so much sewing and churning I should like to habe sent you somethings by Mr L Vawdrey but I have no time

I had a letter from Julia yesterday she is verey busey cleaning I doant know how I am to get ours done I have so much sewing and the Cow and calf to attend too

I don't know how all the cleaning is to get done

Edm[un]d is very busey Gardening every night that it is fine Mr Atkins come to help him on Saterdag and he is coming again next Saterdag if it is fine so I hope he will get it done soon this year for he his allway busey with one thing or an other.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁹ Letter from Ann Wilson to Elizabeth Wilson, c.1867, DF33.5, DC.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹¹ Letters from Ann Wilson to Elizabeth Wilson, c.1867, DF33/5, DC.

Even with the help of her son Edmund, Ann frequently describes herself as overwhelmed by work. While preventing the spread of disease was a motive behind the reconstruction of the village, there were other aspects to maintaining health that were not considered in the design. The labour that Ann put into maintaining her house and keeping her livestock took a toll on her physical and mental health.

Sometimes Ann used her busyness as an excuse for a delay in writing to her daughter, and therefore some of her activities might be exaggerated, but she complains to her daughter in seven letters about illnesses that she attributes to or associates with her work:

I have been so poorley this last ten days I was obliged to have the Dockter I had the fluttering at the heart so bad he said it is from the same cause as the stomackach he sais it is with doing to much, I think it is with carring gruill and water for the Cow I hope I shall soon be all well again and I have got the pain in my face a gain today

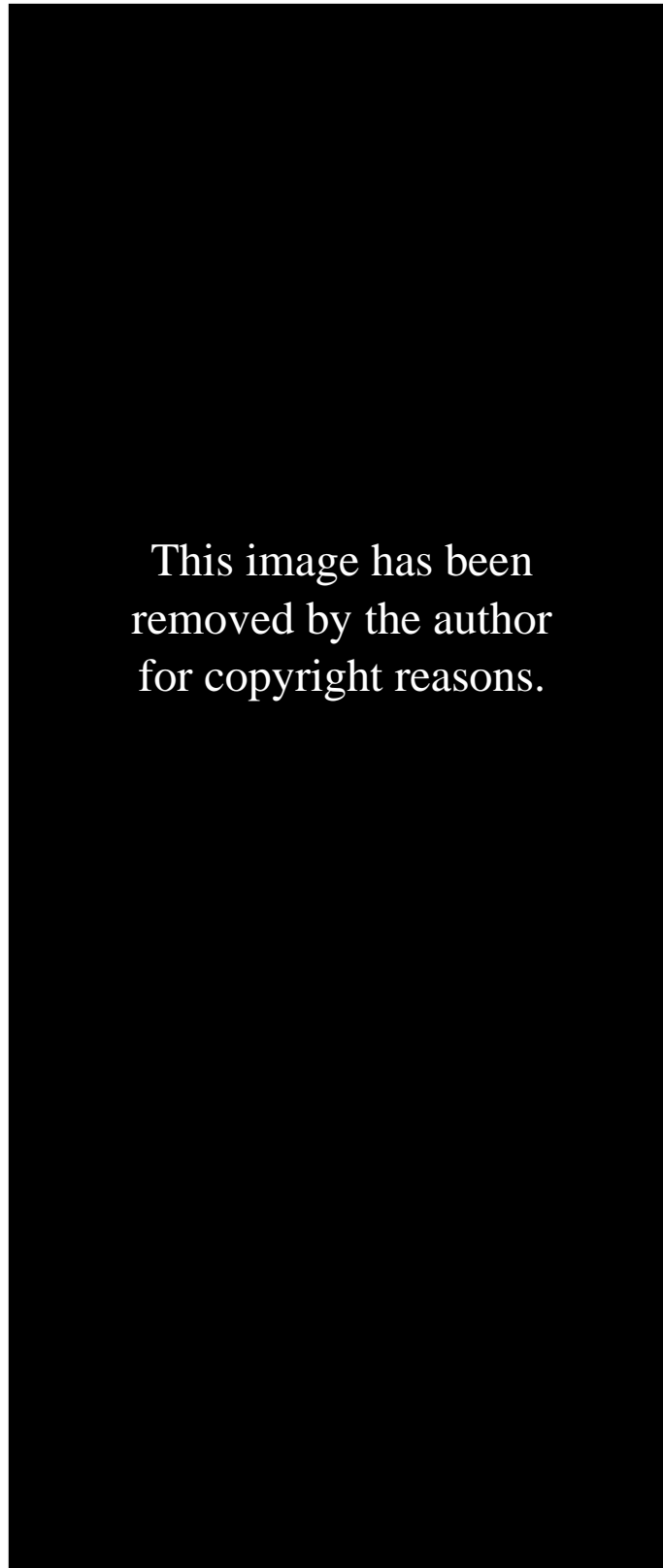
I have been verey busey ever scince you left home and I have had the stumack so bad this fiew days but I hope and trust it will soon be better

I doant feel verey well I am over workt

I am verey tired to day I whent fore times to the field yester day and I have had the Stumack ache to day but I hope I shall be better soon I have such a deal of sewing Come from Mrs Hall this morning and she wants it all befor thay go to the sea side⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁸ Letters from Ann Wilson to Elizabeth Wilson, c.1867, DF33/5, DC.

Fig. 2.4: A map of Edensor and surrounding lands in 1858. The blue star shows the location of Ann Wilson's house, while the red shows her fields. Map 2520, DC.



The activity which seemed to be particularly strenuous was taking care of the cow. The rental accounts and corresponding maps for 1858 show that Ann Wilson was renting a house, yard and garden, plus a separate garden, and three ‘closes’ of one acre each.⁴¹⁹ Tom Williamson and John Barnatt write that the small fields to the north of Edensor were laid out after the fields around the village were taken up as park land in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Barns were added to some of the fields in the 1830s and 40s, designed to go ‘hand in hand with the remodelling of Edensor village, part of the wider scheme to improve the condition of the tenants’.⁴²⁰ Ann’s small enclosed fields were one mile uphill from her house, accessible by a sloping track. On the day that she walked to the field four times, she would have walked eight miles in total. Long distance walking was a common argument against close villages, where labourers had been forced to leave their cottages and move elsewhere but still worked in the same place, and were therefore forced to walk several miles to work. Ann Wilson’s experiences, and other evidence at Chatsworth, suggests that this was also a problem for tenants who remained in close villages. As unsightly fields were moved away from the village, it became harder and more time consuming for tenants to access their livestock.

Some of the symptoms Ann describes associated with her health might not only be caused by the physical strain of sewing, cleaning, cooking, and carrying gruel and water. The ‘fluttering at the chest’ is most likely to have been heart palpitations, a common symptom of an anxiety that may also have caused the stomach problems that she describes. In addition to feeling anxious and tired as a result of her heavy workload, Ann expresses in three letters a sense of loneliness and isolation. All but one of her children worked away from home, and Ann appears to have had little time to socialise:

it is verey loneley being by my self so much if I had not plenty of work I should be

⁴¹⁹ Edensor Rental Survey, 1858, C/125, DC.

⁴²⁰ J. Barnatt and T. Williamson, *Chatsworth: A Landscape History* (Bollington, 2005), pp. 168-169.

verey Lost

[Edmund, her son living at home] his allway[s] busey with one thing or an other they
~~praxick~~ are ringing every other night

you must com then as well I feel so lost with onley Edmund Julia might as well live at
London for aney thing I see of her⁴²¹

In *Villages of Vision*, Gillian Darley explores the mythology and artistry behind the construction of model villages in the nineteenth century from the viewpoint of the landowner, architect and tourist, but in her chapter about Edensor she hints at the cultural and social impact of planned villages on the inhabitants. ‘At their worst’, she explains, ‘the villa estates, with no effort made to induce any sense of community, were oases of detached villas left isolated behind their sturdy hedges’.⁴²² While Ann Wilson’s loneliness appears to originate primarily from her lack of time for social activities, illnesses and the absence of her children, it was also part of a wider cultural transformation which saw traditional village activities, sights and sounds swept away and replaced with a culture that was essentially artificial.

The Financial Comfort of Tenants

The new model village limited Ann Wilson’s agency by increasing her domestic workload relative to a tenant in the old village. This physical discomfort was not mitigated by financial comfort. At the time of Ann’s letters, Edensor had the highest average rents of the three estate villages. When Lord Burlington saw Edensor being constructed in September 1838, he wrote

⁴²¹ Letters from Ann Wilson to Elizabeth Wilson, c.1867, DF33/5, DC.

⁴²² Darley, *Villages of Vision*, p. 89.

that the new buildings, while pretty, were ‘too good’, and ‘appear to me unnecessarily expensive’.⁴²³ His view did not change over time, and when he inherited in 1858 and became the 7th Duke, he adjusted the rents accordingly. The average rent in Edensor rose from £10.2.9 per annum in 1834, before the remodelling, to £19.4.2 in 1859.⁴²⁴ In the same period, the average rent in Pilsley only rose from £7.17.0 to £9.6.0.⁴²⁵ While a writer observed that the tenants in Edensor paid ‘an almost nominal rent’ in 1844, by 1859 they paid almost double the average rent in Pilsley.⁴²⁶ As well as money for these higher rents, there were extra costs associated with living in Edensor. The Edensor Club was only open to men who had the ability to pay for their membership, although occasionally friends would pay for each other in times of difficulty. Since there were no shops in Edensor, there were expenses related to travelling to buy provisions. There were also the expenses of time and money associated with ‘keeping up appearances’. Rather than modifying the behaviour of the pre-existing community at Chatsworth, Paxton and the Duke’s remodelled village attracted a new community of wealthier residents who could afford the rents, partake in the social activities, and whose wives could either afford domestic help or make housekeeping their primary occupation.

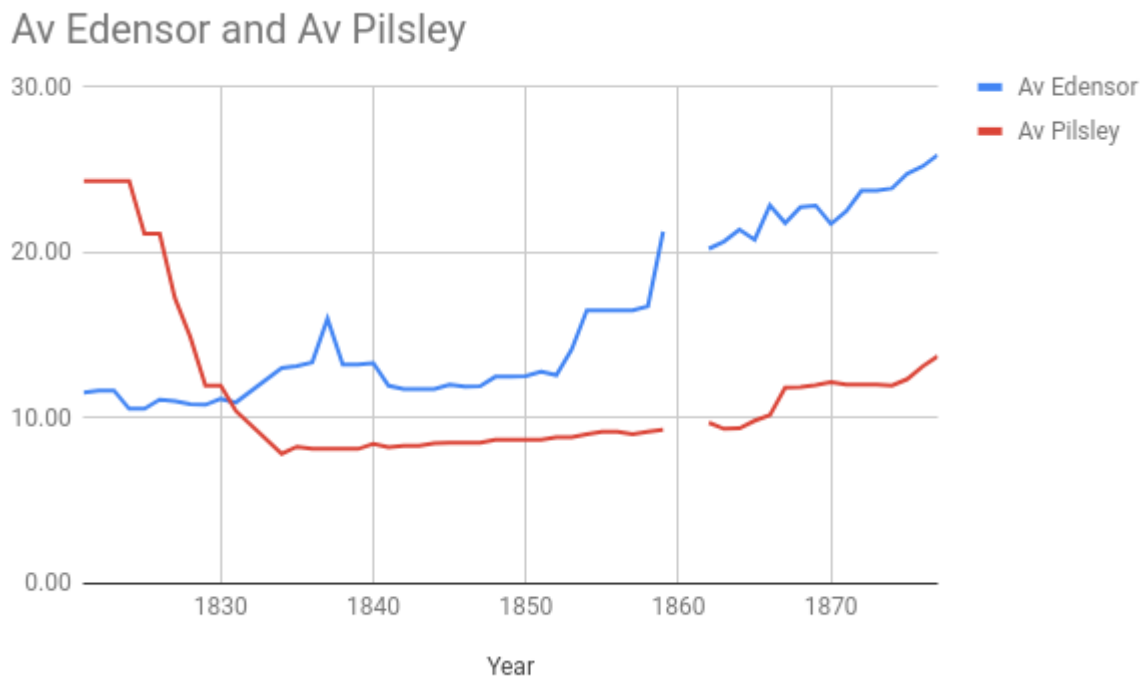
⁴²³ Diary of Lord Burlington, 1838, DF5/1/1, DC.

⁴²⁴ Rental accounts for Edensor Collection, C/131/1-59, DC.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁶ P. G. Patmore, *Chatsworth; or, the Romance of a Week* (London, 1844), p. 44.

Chart 2.2: A comparison of average rents in Pilsley and Edensor between 1821 and 1877. The dramatic drop in average Pilsley rents in the 1820s is due to the relocation of tenants from Edensor and the rapid construction of housing in Pilsley to accommodate them. From 1842, when tenants returned to the reconstructed Edensor, until 1858, rents grew at a comparatively steady rate. In the 7th Duke's period, however, rents at Edensor rapidly increased until the average rent in Edensor was almost double that in Pilsley. Rental accounts for Edensor Collection, C/131/1-59, DC.



Ann Wilson's rent was relatively low. It started at £6 in 1845, when William took over the tenancy from his mother, then rose to £6 15S in 1858 under the 7th Duke.⁴³⁵ Even this higher figure was around one third of the average rent in Edensor at the time. However, the extent to which this constitutes a 'nominal' rent depends on the ability of the tenant to pay it. When William Wilson died in 1851, Ann did not receive an estate widow's pension. As Sarah Paxton explained in a letter two years later,

Mary, late in the offices is not very well in her place, & she appears to expect a living from the Duke by having "something regular". I told her she was much too young a woman to have a pension as Widow Wilson had not one, when left with 5 children.⁴³⁶

William was thirty-five when he died, and Ann was only twenty-eight when she became a widow. She was therefore deemed young enough to support herself. However, the eldest of their children was only nine, so Ann was left as the sole breadwinner in the family. The family had already been in arrears of £3 with their rents before William's death, and by 1854 their arrears had doubled to £6. The debt was finally paid off in 1858, possibly written off as irrecoverable when the rents were reassessed (although this is unlikely since Ann's rent was then increased), or because the children had started to earn an income. By 1858, two of the children were teenagers and able to work. In the 1861 census, Julia (aged nineteen) and Elizabeth (aged fifteen) were working as a cook and kitchen maid respectively for the Wright family at Lamcote House in Radcliffe, Nottinghamshire. Eighteen-year-old Edmund, meanwhile, was working as a gardener at Heaton Hall, just north of Manchester.

The struggle for money is a common theme in the Wilson family letters. In 1849, when William was convalescing in Southport he wrote that the purchase of an umbrella would see him 'comfortably satled in the workhouse', and that 'by this time 4S and 7D is all the money

⁴³⁵ Rental accounts for Edensor Collection, C/131/1-59, DC.

⁴³⁶ Letter from Sarah to Joseph Paxton, April 1854, P/868, DC.

I have, and I am in debt'.⁴³⁷ The family formed their own small credit network. Ann lent money to all of her children, particularly Alfred, who had moved to Manchester by 1868 to find work as a labourer. Ann frequently worried about Alfred's ability to care for himself. She wrote to Elizabeth, 'Alfred didnot come I send him money a few weeks ago to buye him a coat but I ecspect he has spend it in some thing else I have sent him a many pounds scince Christmas trade has been so bad'.⁴³⁸ However, the majority the letters which mention money are about Elizabeth sending money home to her mother. Ann's reliance on Elizabeth's salary sometimes made her feel uncomfortable, and in one letter she writes 'I am affraid I have robd you'.⁴³⁹

The Wilson family's agency was limited by their resources. They appear to have had little expendable income to spend on luxuries or to put in savings. When Ann sold some cheese for £4, for example, she writes that 'it will just pay the price for the cow and calf'.⁴⁴⁰ In several of the letters, Ann mentions that she is trying to pay for a sewing machine. It is another point over which Ann feels some embarrassment about taking her daughter's money, 'we will talk about the sewing machien when you come I cannot think of haveing your money for a machien'.⁴⁴¹ However, she appears conflicted about the knowledge that buying a machine would enable her daughter to come home. She writes in another letter, 'I wish you could be at home, if we could rais a sewing machien I think we should manag verey well without you haveing to be from home'.⁴⁴² Money can therefore be seen as a driving factor in Ann Wilson's anxieties. Her rental arrears and ambition to buy a sewing machine meant that she was separated from her children.

⁴³⁷ Letter from William Wilson to Ann Wilson, 1849, DF33/5, DC.

⁴³⁸ Letter from Ann Wilson to Elizabeth Wilson, c.1867, DF33/5, DC.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*

The observation that rents in model villages were ‘nominal’ and ‘artificially low’ is a view that solely takes into account the perspective of the landowner. Affordability is relative. Although the rents may have returned a low yield in consideration of the large sums of money invested into model villages, it was not necessarily a rent that was easily paid by the tenants. Ann Wilson’s rent of £6 to £6 15S per annum was low in comparison to average rents in the village. However, without a widow’s pension, Ann was reliant on her unreliable dressmaking income, any extra money that she could make from cheese making, and her children’s incomes. It was a situation which caused her to confide feelings of anxiety and isolation in letters to her daughter. Added to the physical strain of keeping up with housework, carrying gruel uphill to the field and catering to her lodger, it can be surmised that Ann Wilson’s agency was limited by her resources and by her physical health. Life in the model village, therefore, was not always the ‘comfortable’ existence that both historians and contemporary observers have assumed.

Agency and Dependence

If the comfort of the model village has been overstated, it is worth asking whether the dependence of the villagers on the landlord, and the landlord’s power over tenants’ daily lives, have also been overstated. As part of the psychological contract of tenancy, residents were expected to conform to an unwritten code of conduct. However, it should not be assumed that this code of conduct was consciously connected to the landowner’s expectations. The Edensor Club, a social club for men, was managed by an elected committee of tenants, not by the Duke or his senior servants. Members could be fined by the committee for fighting and for not

attending church, or excluded for poaching.⁴⁴⁵ These rules are evident in the club accounts, where such incidents are recorded. These incidents of misbehaviour allude to expressions of individual agency through the defiance of expectations. The means by which the community self-policed these incidents, however, also suggests a form of collective agency.

A collective concern for the reputation and moral health of the model village can be seen in an event that occurred in 1841, on the completion of the new Edensor. While the Duke was away in Italy, his nephew reportedly wrote to him that the villages on the Chatsworth estate were ‘in the worst state of demoralisation, of any in this part of the country’.⁴⁴⁶ This remark had been prompted by an event which occurred in the schoolyard. A seventeen-year-old farmhand from Pilsley had pushed a fifteen-year-old schoolgirl into a privy, ‘where they remained a quarter of an hour’.⁴⁴⁷ In the absence of the Duke, his nephew Lord George Cavendish summoned the local magistrate to take witness statements. The boy was convicted of rape and sentenced to prison. When the Duke heard what had happened, he was outraged, not at the behaviour of the boy but that the case had been made so public. He wrote,

They send a boy of 17, who they say was of hitherto good character, to prison where he is sure to be corrupted [and] quite ruined, for yielding to the advances of the poor foolish girl, and they fasten a scandal to the school by the publicity, and enlighten and corrupt the little girls whom they turn into witnesses. I said I thought the matter sh[oul]d have been hushed up, [and] the boy punished by dismissal or in any way but sending him to prison.⁴⁴⁸

His two main concerns appear to be the moral corruption of the boy and the witnesses, but most of all the scandal attached to the school by the publicity. The Duke expresses no concern for the victim, on the contrary he calls her ‘foolish’ and suggests that her ‘advances’ led to the

⁴⁴⁵ Edensor Club Book, 1836-1868, DE/CH/7/1/1, DC.

⁴⁴⁶ Letter from Joseph Paxton to the 6th Duke, November 1841, P/126, DC.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁸ Letter from the 6th Duke to Joseph Paxton, November 1841, P/127, DC.

event. Paxton assured him that the villagers had felt the same sentiment, and that in his absence they had collectively dealt with the matter.

nearly every one in the villages round look upon it as a boyish trick and think if the boy had been well flogged by his father, and the Girl had her bottom whipped by her mother that it would have been much better than the exposure that has taken place... his neighbours collected the fine, rather than he should have gone to prison and had the fine been 100£ it would have been gathered for him directly⁴⁴⁹

The decision of the villagers to collect the fine and soften down the scandal, independently of the Duke, appears to have been motivated by communal pride and defensiveness over the reputation of the village. However, while Paxton's letter implies a cohesiveness of attitude in the community, it masks the conflict and disagreement that followed the incident. The witness statements from the girls' friends were taken the day after the incident by the local magistrate. It must, therefore, have been reported immediately to an adult in the community, perhaps a teacher or one of the children's parents, who thought it required urgent attention. If all of the community had indeed agreed that it was a simple 'boyish trick', it would not have been thought necessary for the magistrate to be called in. One individual who is known to have disagreed with Paxton and the Duke about the crime was Sydney Smithers, who wrote, 'The culprit was in appearance quite a young man, nothing boyish about him'.⁴⁵⁰ His involvement in the case angered the Duke, who wrote to Paxton, 'I beg you to shew Mr Smithers what I write, [and] tell him I wish he had written to me at once about it'.⁴⁵¹

The rape in the schoolyard at Edensor injured the rural idyll that Paxton and the Duke had aspired to create. The association of the school with a violent sexual crime committed by the son of a tenant against the daughter of another tenant, was perceived not as a personal

⁴⁴⁹ Letter from Joseph Paxton to the 6th Duke, December 1841, L/83, DC.

⁴⁵⁰ Letter from Sydney Smithers to Joseph Paxton, January 1842, L/83, DC.

⁴⁵¹ Letter from the 6th Duke to Joseph Paxton, November 1841, P/127, DC.

tragedy for the girl and her family, but as an uncomfortable indication that Paxton and the Duke's social experiment with architectural determinism had failed. Paxton comforted the Duke by insisting that the moral improvement of the village was an ongoing process, and that the case was indicative that individuals in the community were policing each other's behaviour.

In our Villages if the smallest thing occurs it is ferreted out and exposed, whereas in the neighbouring Villages, these things go on with impunity and are not mentioned or exposed. I am prepared to prove there is very considerable improvement in our Villages within the last few years, which I am sure will progress if the people are properly managed, and not over interfered with⁴⁵²

Tied to the culture of working-class respectability promoted by Edensor's design were the philosophies of self-improvement and self-sufficiency. Joseph Paxton's intention for the village was not for it to be ruled with an iron rod, but for the residents to be inspired to behave well by the design of the village, within the parameters of an 'organised freedom'.

One of the 7th Duke's principal concerns in his estate villages was attendance at church.

While he was still Lord Burlington, he had posted a sign at Holker in Lancashire. It read,

Holker, December, 1840. IN consequence of several circumstances having lately occurred in HOLKER of which I strongly disapprove, I have made the following Rules, the neglect of which will oblige me to remove the parties from their Cottages. All parents must, as their children grow up, endeavour to procure situations for them, as they will not in future be allowed when grown up, to reside in the Cottages of their parents... I am sorry also to find, that the proper observance of the Lord's Day has been much neglected ; and being convinced that many instances of misconduct are chiefly owing to this neglect, I think it my duty earnestly to express my wishes that no person who has not a sufficient reason for being absent, will in future neglect the Public Worship of Almighty God. BURLINGTON.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵² Letter from Joseph Paxton to the 6th Duke of Devonshire, November 1841, P/126, DC.

⁴⁵³ Notice to the Tenants of Holker, December 1840, L/94/250, DC.

It may have been the 7th Duke's belief that insufficient attention to religion inspired misconduct that led him to rebuild the church at Edensor, making it larger and able to accommodate more people.

Ironically, the building of the new church led to a scandal in the village. One of the stonemasons who had been brought up from London to work on the new church was Ann's lodger Mr Simon. Ann writes in her letters about his dalliance with Tamar Bland, a neighbour's daughter and friend of Elizabeth, and about her subsequent pregnancy. The couple quickly married, but he was taken back down to London by his father. Ann wrote,

Simon whent from Edensor last tuesday but one and left her at home he will praps never be herd of aney more his Father come to see him the week before he left and I think he didnot know Simon was married when he come, I never saw aney one alterd has Tamar his she his got dredfuley proud and she looks awfully ill she had two teeth taken out the day he had gon to London he kept waveng his hat on the end of his stick to her has he went down the vilage I doant like such ways⁴⁵⁴

Ann's personal disapproval of Mr and Mrs Simon demonstrates her individual contribution towards the collective agency of the village in its own moral surveillance.

Ann mentions the church several times in her letters, updating Elizabeth on the progress of the building works, and commenting on how busy the church was when the Duke was in residence. For example, she writes, 'I have been to Church this afternoon thay is service twice a day wile the Duke is at Chatsworth I got my favourite seat every time ecsept the first Sunday... a gret maney was obliged to stand'.⁴⁵⁵ Ann's description of the busy church suggests that it was only when the Duke was in residence that the church experienced such a high turnout.

⁴⁵⁴ Letter from Ann Wilson to Elizabeth Wilson, c.1867, DF33/5, DC.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

It appears from Ann's letters that the Duke's daughter Louisa was more often present on the estate than her father. The 6th Duke often took his friends to visit the villages, and as his notebook about Pilsley shows he also called into the tenants' houses alone. This tradition was continued by Lady Louisa. While this type of contact between landowning families and their tenants has been perceived by some historians as an invasion of privacy, or a superficial attempt at benevolence, it seems that Ann was genuinely appreciative of the attention. When Ann Wilson's eldest daughter Julia got married, Ann wrote to Elizabeth, that 'Lady Luesia [the Duke's daughter] calld to see me on saterday she knew all about the weding she enquired about you'.⁴⁵⁶ The ability to call at the house went both ways. In one letter Ann writes, 'I went with Annie to Chatsworth to see the table laid and saw all the Drawing rooms and bed rooms and the Ladys go to Dinner'.⁴⁵⁷ Rather than resentment, fear or indifference, Ann displays pride in her relationship with Lady Louisa. On informing Elizabeth that Lady Louisa is due to arrive at Chatsworth for Easter, she comments that, 'Chatsworth agrees with her health so well'.⁴⁵⁸ Ann's proximity to the Cavendish family, and therefore her ability to comment on things like their health and appearance, offered her a kind of social capital by acquaintance.

However, in the *dramatis personae* of Ann's letters, the Cavendish family feature relatively little. Lady Louisa and the Duke are mentioned nine times in total. Ann mentions Elizabeth's employers, Mr and Mrs Vawdrey, far more often, a total of seventeen times. In William Wilson's letters home from Southport he does not mention the Duke at all, but mentions Joseph Paxton and Andrew Stewart, his direct superiors in the garden, five times. Likewise Edmund Wilson does not mention the Duke, but tells his sister about the land agent, the head gardeners and a 'very ugly ladies maid' at the house.⁴⁵⁹ It appears from their

⁴⁵⁶ Letter from Ann Wilson to Elizabeth Wilson, c.1867, DF33/5, DC.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁹ Letter from Edmund Wilson to Elizabeth Wilson, c.1867, DF33/5, DC.

correspondence that the Wilson family thought little in their daily lives about the Cavendish family, particularly when they were not in residence at Chatsworth, but spent far more time talking about the people they came into contact with on a regular basis. Their letters support the view that, other than when Lady Louisa came to call, or when Ann sat near the Duke in church, the landowning family were relatively remote figures compared to the people who they interacted with every day.

While the tenants of the estate were indirectly dependent on the Duke, this was not a relationship which defined their everyday outlook. They were more likely to attribute power to their direct superiors, for example Edmund Wilson comments that the former head gardener Mr Taplin, who moved to America after Chatsworth, 'ought to have a whip [and] be amongst the Blacks and then he would be in Character'.⁴⁶⁰ Such irreverent comments about the Cavendish family do not exist in the Wilson letters. This is perhaps not because of a duty of deference, but because their relationship to the Cavendish family was less visible and less important on a day-to-day level.

Another facet of daily independence that is revealed in the Wilson letters relates to leisure and personal interests. Ann's proximity to the guests and family coming and going from Chatsworth enabled her to monitor the fashions and accrue her own cultural capital. Dressmaking was Ann's occupation, but she also seems to have had a personal interest in clothes. She often expressed judgement in new styles, for example stating that her new fashion book has 'nothing welle in it'.⁴⁶¹ She also gave advice to her daughters to ensure that they were keeping up with the trends, for example telling Elizabeth that if she cuts her jacket shorter 'I think it would be a bout as they are worn now'.⁴⁶² Ann's knowledge and skill with clothing

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶¹ Letter from Ann Wilson to Elizabeth Wilson, c.1867, DF33/5, DC.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*

constituted part of her identity as a parent. She wrote about making jackets, bonnets and dresses for the girls, and shirts and singlets for Alfred, to stop him from catching ‘his Death of cold’.⁴⁶³ She also expressed pride in passing on her skills to Julia and Elizabeth, ‘I hear you are getting quite clever making bedhangings Mrs V [Elizabeth’s employer] ought to be pleased it is not every housemaid that can do that kind of sewing’.⁴⁶⁴ Sewing and knitting were not only an occupation for Ann, but also expressions of cultural discernment and motherly nurturing. While sewing was primarily an activity that took place in the home, there were many other leisure activities that took Ann and her family beyond the estate. For example, Ann visited the arboretum at Derby with Edmund, and often went to Darley Dale to visit friends. The children also travelled outside of Edensor to pursue their interests. Ann’s letters suggest that Elizabeth was partly motivated to leave home out of a desire to ‘see a bit of the Countrey’.⁴⁶⁵

On a day-to-day basis, the findings discussed in this section suggest that the landowning family had little bearing on either the collective or individual agency of tenants. Although the evidence of mutual surveillance suggests that freedom was contrived through a panopticon effect, rather than organic, the tenants can still be understood as active agents in their conformity to the new moral culture of the village. When villagers interceded in the rape investigation, for example, neither the Duke nor Paxton were in the neighbourhood at the time. Ann Wilson’s letters also suggest a level of individual agency in her accrual of cultural capital as a follower of fashion and an arbiter of taste. Her professional and personal involvement in dressmaking shaped her identity and outlook as a community member and as a mother.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

This chapter has charted the reconstruction of Edensor ‘from below’ and, crucially, from the ‘middle’. It looked first at the reconstruction of the village itself and how it was received by contemporary critics and admirers, who perceived it as an otherworldly performance of a village, in which the community and architect were abstract characters. In response to both contemporary and historiographical assumptions that model villages were ‘supervised’ by land agents under the direction of the landowner, this chapter has firmly placed Joseph Paxton and Sydney Smithers as the coordinators of the new village at every stage. It appears that the Duke’s interest in the village was first inspired by interventions by these two senior employees. Paxton accompanied the Duke on visits to other model villages, while Smithers challenged him to address the conditions of his own tenants. The village was then planned by Joseph Paxton and John Robertson, with the Duke’s approval and input, while Smithers executed the physical construction of the new housing in their absence.

This chapter concluded that the architectural determinism underpinning the design of Edensor did not come from the Duke, who simply wished for the houses to be neat, comfortable, pretty and ‘rational’, but from Joseph Paxton. Paxton saw Edensor as a valuable site of experimentation, and later reported his observations on the effects of good-quality housing and gardens on the morality of the labouring poor to Edwin Chadwick. Edensor and Paxton were therefore part of a larger national reassessment of policy relating to public health and housing. In spite of his contractual status as a servant, Paxton therefore wielded significant influence on the estate and beyond through his activities in the estate village. Some aspects of Paxton and the Duke’s ambitions, however, failed in the long term. The morality of the tenants was called into question as soon as the village was completed, when a girl was raped in the schoolyard. Paxton interpreted the villagers’ collective response to the crime as a sign that the

new village had engendered a positive culture of mutual surveillance. The new village was more effective in encouraging an influx of middle-class families however, than in moralising the existing tenants. The artificial embourgeoisement of the village was soon met by a demographic embourgeoisement, as labourers were displaced over time and replaced with educated professionals. Rents in the village inevitably increased after the 6th Duke's death to account for the grander accommodation offered in comparison to the other estate villages.

The impact of the new village on the agency of local tenants who stayed was explored through the letters of Ann Wilson. In particular, this investigation focused on the notion that model villagers exchanged their independence for bodily and monetary comfort. Both of these assumptions were challenged. Wilson's letters suggest that the model village generated a level of domestic labour that was unsustainable for a single working woman. The architecture of the building and layout of the village itself limited her agency by causing more of her time to be occupied in labour and walking, thereby bringing on illness through physical stress and isolation. Conversely, the culture of the village was in some ways empowering for Ann. Through her proximity to the Cavendish family she was able to pursue her interest in fashion, but other than this the landowners featured relatively little in her daily outlook. Ann accrued social and cultural capital through her own professional specialism, mobility and social networks. By foregrounding the power of middle-class individuals and by considering the real impact of planned housing on tenants, this chapter adds a critical new perspective to a historiography which has thus far emphasised the power of landlords and the state. The theme of agency and authority in contested spaces is continued in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Pride and Primula: Identity, Mobility and Gender in the Gardens

Binary divisions in the social, spatial and material characteristics of the country house have influenced how household communities have been understood by historians. Adrian Tinniswood discusses the boundaries between ‘public’ and ‘private’ spaces, necessitated by the flow of tourists to country houses from the eighteenth century onwards.⁴⁶⁶ Likewise, in Mark Girouard’s classic *Life in the English Country House*, certain spaces are identified as either ‘masculine’ (such as the billiards room) or ‘feminine’ (such as the drawing room).⁴⁶⁷ Activities conducted at the country house were similarly gendered, with hunting in particular associated with aristocratic masculinity, while many indoor activities were feminine. The leisure activities associated with the country house in turn engendered another division identified by Girouard, ‘between the authoritarian and the recreational aspects of early-nineteenth-century houses- between the company gathered round the billiard table and the man-traps waiting in the woods’.⁴⁶⁸ Country houses were both a site of leisure and a highly politicised site of power for their owners, which Girouard again projects onto a divide between ‘indoor’ and ‘outdoor’.

The construction of social distance in domestic architecture was by no means limited to the upper-class household. Historians such as Jane Hamlett have explored similar social meanings in the layouts of middle-class homes. Hamlett argues that the organisation of the household, in particular the nursery system which confined the servants and children upstairs,

⁴⁶⁶ A. Tinniswood, *The Polite Tourist: A History of Country House Visiting* (London, 1998), pp. 91-99.

⁴⁶⁷ Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, p. 233.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

‘had a crucial impact on authority practices in the home’.⁴⁶⁹ These domestic practices had a lasting impact, teaching children early lessons in moral order and social identity which may have been instrumental in forming their notions of class difference.⁴⁷⁰ A child growing up in the country house would have recognised an even more tangible disconnect between the family’s space and the servants’ space. The majority of nineteenth-century country houses had distinct servants’ wings, separating the sights and smells of labour from the inner sanctum of the home.

If binary divisions between public and private, indoor and outdoor, masculine and feminine, and authoritarian and recreational, have been identified in the ‘upstairs’ world of the country house, these demarcations are more deeply engrained in our understanding of the ‘downstairs’ world. The very language of, ‘upstairs’ and ‘downstairs’, suggest an impermeable social barrier between employer and employees, represented in physical form by both the stairs and the ‘green baize door’. Behind this door, in the servants’ wings of country houses, each household function had ‘its own area and often its own room’, separate from the servants’ bedrooms.⁴⁷¹ Moralising nineteenth-century employers ensured that the separation between labour and leisure was further subdivided by gender, with male and female ‘zones’. ‘At night’, writes Girouard, ‘infinite care was taken to see that men and women slept in different parts of the house, without access to one another’.⁴⁷² In addition to separation by status, role and sex, one of the main demarcations perceived in the country house is between indoor and outdoor staff. Girouard writes, ‘although the Victorians tended to employ more gardeners, keepers, foresters and estate workers than in previous generations, these did not eat in the servants’

⁴⁶⁹ J. Hamlett, ‘“Tiresome trips downstairs”: Middle-Class Domestic Space and Family Relationships in England, 1850-1910’ in L. Delap, B. Griffin and A. Wills (eds), *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain since 1800* (Basingstoke, 2009), p. 111.

⁴⁷⁰ Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, p. 127.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 276-279.

hall'.⁴⁷³ The same observation is made by Caroline Ilkin in *The Victorian Gardener*, 'The indoor and outdoor servants were managed separately and generally segregated, with only the head gardener having any need to cross the threshold of the house'.⁴⁷⁴ Similarly, Jessica Gerard writes that the formal social structure "below stairs" 'inhibited friendships between servants of different ranks and departments'.⁴⁷⁵

The spatial and social divisions 'upstairs' in the country house have been associated by historians with conscious tension in the household. Girouard describes the divide between the house's authoritarian and recreational functions as 'a conflict which the Victorians recognised and tried to get rid of'.⁴⁷⁶ Tinniswood writes about the landed gentlemen forced to retreat to their private chambers by the incessant presence of visitors, such as Horace Walpole, harassed by 300 visitors per year.⁴⁷⁷ Much has also been written about the tensions negotiated between servants and (predominantly) mistresses, and the issues of privacy encountered in servant-employing households.⁴⁷⁸ However, these social and spatial boundaries are almost exclusively analysed from the perspective of the householder, within the confines of the 'upstairs' household spaces which they predominantly inhabited, or within the framework of the master-servant relationship. The interaction between the family and servants in the upstairs rooms, for example, was explored by Lawrence Stone in *Broken Lives*, which challenges the narrative of stringent spatial separation between master and servant.⁴⁷⁹ Studies of interactions between and among servants are rarer because masters were far more vocal about their domestic woes than

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁴⁷⁴ C. Ilkin, *The Victorian Gardener* (London, 2014), p. 4.

⁴⁷⁵ Gerard, *Country House Life*, p. 222.

⁴⁷⁶ Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, p. 244.

⁴⁷⁷ Tinniswood, *The Polite Tourist*, p. 92.

⁴⁷⁸ See L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London, 1987), pp. 388-396; Gerard, *Country House Life*, pp. 239-271; S. Holton, 'Friendship and Domestic Service: The Letters of Eliza Oldham, General Maid (c. 1820-1892)', *Women's History Review* (vol. 24, 2015), pp. 429-449; P. Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant* (Dublin, 1975), pp. 109-132; J. Rollins, *Between Women: Domesticity and Their Employers* (Philadelphia, 1985)

⁴⁷⁹ See 'Middleton v. Middleton' in L. Stone, *Broken Lives: Separation and Divorce in England 1660-1857* (New York, 1993), pp. 162-247.

their dependents. ‘My house is a torment, not a comfort!’, wrote Horace Walpole following the arrival of three German visitors at his house in 1786 (the thoughts of his housekeeper, unable to ignore the presence of visitors, are absent).⁴⁸⁰ In 1830, Emily Eden also expressed her annoyance at noisy intrusions on her privacy, writing in a later-published letter that it was ‘part of a servant's privilege to have creaking feet’.⁴⁸¹

While spatial and social boundaries in the ‘upstairs’ realm of the country house are understood to have been consciously contested, their rigidity in the servants’ realm has been seen as self-evident, due to servants' perceived lack of power. An over-reliance on household accounts, manuals, rules, inventories and plans has led to a narrative about country house servants which emphasises functionality over sociability. By studying the diaries, letters and witness statements of servants, in this case gardeners, the boundaries enforced by employers in the spaces inhabited by their staff can be shown to be as flexible and contested as those upstairs, and the staff themselves as autonomous individuals rather than extensions of their master’s household. This chapter explores the notion of liminality, both in the space of the gardens and in the status of the gardeners. Victor Turner defines liminality in terms of an absence of status, such as that experienced temporarily in ritual rites of passage.⁴⁸² This thesis understands liminality in a slightly different sense, as the conflict between multiple competing identities.

This chapter focuses on the park and gardens as liminal spaces which acted as a nexus between the private indoor realm of the house and the public spaces of the estate village and the world beyond. It explores how these outdoor spaces witnessed and engendered social tensions in relation to masculine authority, frustrations between servitude and professional pride, and flexibility in the physical boundaries that divided the estate. It draws on rich sources

⁴⁸⁰ Tinniswood, *The Polite Tourist*, p. 92.

⁴⁸¹ E. Eden, *Letters from India by the Hon. Emily Eden* (London, 1872), p. 113.

⁴⁸² ‘Liminality and Communitas’ in V. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago, 1969), pp. 94-130.

relating to the garden in the time of head gardener Joseph Paxton, including the letters of Joseph and his wife Sarah, and the diaries and notebooks of gardeners. The case study of Sarah Paxton adds to our understanding of female gardeners through a consideration of women who did not engage in gardening either as a leisure pursuit or as a political statement, but as a form of unpaid labour. The rest of the chapter looks at how male gardeners reconciled their status as skilled professionals with their subordinate status as servants. Space is a central concept throughout the chapter, in particular how gardeners transcended the physical confinement which is seen to define the experience of domestic service, and how this in turn impacted the management of the gardens. Challenging spatial demarcation is a key part of reassessing power on the country estate.

The Chatsworth Gardens in the Nineteenth Century

The status of horticulture as a science, career choice and pastime saw a significant rise in the first half of the nineteenth century. Although country houses were among the most active centres of gardening, the craze was not limited to those who could afford their own gardens. Kew was opened to the public in 1840, as were the first dedicated public parks and gardens, beginning with Derby Arboretum. Institutions such as the Royal Horticultural Society, founded in 1804, encouraged people with gardens of all sizes to take an interest in gardening. The cultivation of vegetables and flowers was regarded as a wholesome, moral activity for the poorer classes, and encompassed Victorian ideals of self-improvement and self-sufficiency.

Chatsworth was directly and indirectly involved in the gardening craze at every level. The grounds had been central to Chatsworth's identity, and the landscape was altered by

Lancelot 'Capability' Brown in the mid-eighteenth century, but the nineteenth century has had the most lasting impact on the gardens. When the 6th Duke of Devonshire inherited the estate, the gardens had fallen into disrepair. In the household survey taken at Christmas 1811, only one gardener is listed.⁴⁸³ The understaffed and ill-situated kitchen gardens, next to the river, were prone to flooding. Reflecting in 1842 on his arrival at Chatsworth as head gardener almost twenty years earlier, Joseph Paxton wrote about their poor state:

3- 4 Pine Houses - bad[,] 2 Vineries (which contained 8 bunches of grapes)[,] 2 Peach Houses good and a few cucumber frames... and there was not a plant of any kind of in the premises of later introduction then 1800 or thereabouts⁴⁸⁴

Paxton's focus on the late introduction of plants hints to his central focus of modernising the garden through plant collecting abroad. In 1826 Paxton began work on altering the gardens. He improved the state of the kitchen gardens, restored the 1697 greenhouse and converted it to a hothouse, and realigned the Cascade. Once the existing garden had been improved, Paxton and the Duke set about making new additions. They travelled for inspiration, and found it in the water features at the Palais de Versailles, the mossy outcrops of the Alps and the gardens of European aristocrats in France, Italy, Malta and Constantinople. In 1829, Paxton began transforming eight acres of the southern park into a pinetum, one of the earliest, filled with rare conifers from China, Japan and North America. This was followed by an arboretum almost ten times the size. These two projects had been made possible by buying seeds and plants from plant hunters. In 1835, Paxton and the Duke decided to organise their own expedition to collect orchid specimens and a coveted *Amherstia Nobilis* tree. This was followed by another

⁴⁸³ Household Establishments (December 1811), L114/51, DC.

⁴⁸⁴ Letter from Joseph Paxton to the 6th Duke of Devonshire (1841), P/114.1 A, DC.

expedition to North America, which ended in tragedy when the two gardeners sent from Chatsworth were killed when their canoe capsized.

The garden projects conceived by Joseph Paxton and the 6th Duke were carried out in the context of an exclusive, elite world of competitive horticulture in which few people could afford to participate. In 1844, the land agent Sydney Smithers estimated that the Duke spent more than £10,000 per year (almost £1,000,000 today) on the maintenance and repair of his gardens and water features.⁴⁸⁵ Wealthy landowners and their gifted gardeners spent inordinate amounts of money in the race to reach horticultural milestones. Paxton and the 6th Duke failed in their aim to make their *Amherstia Nobilis* flower for the first time in Europe, but they succeeded elsewhere. The most significant trophy to be claimed at Chatsworth was the first flowering of the giant *Victoria Amazonica* lily outside of its native waters, in 1849. This was achieved by the construction of a dedicated glasshouse and tank, in which water moved gently around the plant in order to mimic its natural habitat. The *Amherstia*, and John Gibson's orchid collection had also been housed in their own bespoke glasshouses. The largest of Chatsworth's glasshouses was called the Great Stove, and was erected between 1836 and 1841 at the cost of over £36,000 (the equivalent of around £3,400,000 today).⁴⁸⁶ It was covered with 52,287 square feet of glass and was the largest glass building in England until 1851, when Paxton beat his own record with the Crystal Palace. The plants nurtured and propagated in these glasshouses were entered into competitions organised by the Royal Horticultural Society, of which the 6th Duke and Paxton were president and vice-president, respectively. Their prize specimens included the *Musa Cavendishii*, named after William Cavendish, which is now the most

⁴⁸⁵ Statement of the outstanding expenditure beyond income from 1817 to 1843, Sydney Smithers, June 1844, P/229, DC. Money conversion from S. Morley, 'Historical UK Inflation Rates and Calculator', inflation.stephenmorley.org [last accessed November 2017].

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

internationally-traded banana cultivar in the world. Paxton's other achievements included the Emperor Fountain, a gravity-fed fountain which produced the world's tallest jet of water.⁴⁸⁷

Although gardening at Chatsworth operated at a prestigious level, the Duke allowed his gardens to be appreciated by a large, varied audience. Following the opening of a train station at Rowsley in June 1849, one of the gardeners recorded the visits of thousands of tourists,

A large party of Teetotalers came from Sheffield to see the house and gardens. Scott stood at the conservatory door and counted 1686 but there must have been nearer 2,000 - they went through the gardens first.⁴⁸⁸

In addition to opening up Chatsworth's gardens, Joseph Paxton is associated with twenty-three parks and gardens, most of which he designed for public use. In their capacity as presidents of the Royal Horticultural Society, Paxton and the Duke were also partly responsible for opening Kew to the public.

Joseph Paxton and the 6th Duke's activities in the gardens at Chatsworth can be understood in similar ways to their contribution to the Great Exhibition of 1851, and many of their other peripheral projects involving parks and zoological gardens. By opening the Great Stove and its horticultural treasures to the public, Chatsworth played a role in facilitating public encounters with the British Empire at home. Peter Hoffenberg argues that these displays were 'at the heart of the "New" Imperialism dominating world affairs... Exhibitions represented the idealized relationships between groups with the nation and empire'.⁴⁸⁹ Although it was a

⁴⁸⁷ For a history of Paxton's alterations at Chatsworth see: J. Barnatt and T. Williamson, *Chatsworth: A Landscape History* (Macclesfield, 2005), pp. 127-181; T. Musgrove, *The Head Gardeners: Forgotten Heroes of Horticulture* (London, 2009), pp. 151-183; K. Colquhoun, *A Thing in Disguise: The Visionary Life of Joseph Paxton* (London, 2003).

⁴⁸⁸ Diary transcript in B. Harley and J. Harley, *A Gardener at Chatsworth: Three Years in the Life of Robert Aughtie, 1848-1850* (Hanley Swan, 1992), p. 155.

⁴⁸⁹ P. Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display: English, Indian and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (Berkeley, 2001), p. 2.

permanent, rather than temporary display, the Great Stove acted as an exhibition, bringing a diverse range of people into contact with a safe, tamed and artificial reconstruction of the Imperial landscape that they would never see in reality.

Fig. 3.1: A photograph of gardeners outside the Great Stove, c. 1900, DC.



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The Gardeners

The gardeners were key individuals in the development, maintenance and presentation of the gardens at Chatsworth. As the staff who mediated the visitors' interaction and understanding of this strange horticultural world, the gardeners played a key role in the processes of national and imperial identity-forming that were implicit in these encounters. Although gardeners, to some extent, were in a position of power over the parties of visitors in their care, in other respects their agency on the Chatsworth estate was limited by their liminal status. In order to investigate the authority and agency of the gardeners, the following section will first establish how many there were and what material evidence they left behind.

The accounts for the gardens at Chatsworth in the nineteenth century are sparse. Joseph Paxton was allocated the wages to distribute to the gardeners, but unfortunately it appears as though his accounts were lost, possibly in the demolition of Barbrook House. The vouchers for the gardens, like the household vouchers, are also lost between the years 1812 and 1860. The vouchers for 1861 onwards are the most complete record of the gardeners in the nineteenth century, and contain full lists of employees in each department, their day rates, and details such as the name of the foreman and those assigned to Sunday duty. The few accounts that do survive, along with the census returns for 1841 onwards, offer a partial picture of the garden workforce.

Letters, notebooks and diaries written by gardeners at Chatsworth in the mid-nineteenth century are remarkably abundant. They include the letters of head gardener Joseph Paxton and his wife Sarah, William and Edmund Wilson, and foremen John Gibson and Thomas Bailey, the notebook of James White, and the diary of Robert Aughtie. John Gibson began his career as a gardener under his father at Eaton Hall in Cheshire. In 1832 he was apprenticed to Joseph

Paxton at Chatsworth, and three years later, when he was twenty years old, the Duke sent him on a plant-finding expedition to India. Almost fifty of his unpublished letters from the expedition survive in the archive. Thomas Bailey worked as a foreman in the gardens at Chatsworth, probably in the arboretum department. One of his letters to Joseph Paxton survives, and he is frequently mentioned in Paxton's letters, mostly in relation to his alcoholism. James White moved from Chiswick to Chatsworth in 1837, and worked there until 1842. Over the five years of his employment, and for sixteen years afterwards, he kept a notebook. This unpublished document contains a jumbled assortment of handwriting exercises, coded alphabets, riddles, word puzzles, diary entries, lists of plants, poems and accounts. Robert Aughtie worked at Chatsworth from 1848 until at least 1850. The diary he kept during this time has been transcribed and published by his descendants, Basil and Jessie Harley.⁴⁹¹ The survival of these documents can partly be accounted for by the high literacy levels of the professional gardeners, and partly because the fame of Chatsworth's garden has led to their return to the archive through donations, such as James White's notebook, or has encouraged families to publish them, as in the case of Robert Aughtie's diary.

Another explanation for the survival of several documents written by the gardeners is that they were so numerous. The increasing interest in horticulture in the nineteenth century was met with an eager workforce. The popularity of gardening in the nineteenth century is evidenced in the census. In 1851 there were 4,450 domestic gardeners in England and Wales, constituting 0.029% of the population.⁴⁹² By 1911 this had risen to 118,842 domestic gardeners (including 103 women), constituting 0.35% of the population.⁴⁹³ This was higher than the number of coachmen, grooms, chauffeurs and gamekeepers combined, making gardeners the

⁴⁹¹ Harley, *A Gardener at Chatsworth*.

⁴⁹² M. Woollard, 'The Classification of Domestic Servants in England and Wales, 1851-1951' in S. Pasleau and I. Schopp (eds), with R. Sarti, *Proceedings of the Servant Project*, (Liège, 2005), 5 vols., vol. II, p. 13.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

most numerous outdoor servants in the beginning of the twentieth century. The actual numbers of garden workers are likely to have been higher, since they do not include the women, men and children who worked as part-time garden labourers.

A similar trend can be identified in the census returns for Chatsworth and its local communities. In total, 248 individuals listed in the census returns of 1841-1901 can be identified as gardeners or labourers, most of whom would have worked at Chatsworth. The number of gardeners and garden labourers living at Baslow, Edensor, Beeley, Pilsley and Chatsworth rises over the century:

Table 3.1: The number of gardeners recorded in the census at Baslow, Beeley, Chatsworth, Edensor and Pilsley ⁴⁹⁴					
1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891
32	49	34	39	45	54

Without the account books or vouchers for the gardens, it is difficult to conclude whether this is an accurate estimate of the number of gardeners working at Chatsworth. Several individuals mentioned in other sources are not accounted for in the census and may have been traveling or visiting family at the time. Although the numbers themselves may not be accurate, the overall trend is consistent with other sources. The increase of gardeners until 1851, followed by a fall recorded in 1861, and subsequent rise until 1901, are recorded elsewhere. The difference between 1851 and 1861 can be accounted for by the 7th Duke's staff reductions in 1858.

⁴⁹⁴ Data taken from 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891 and 1901 census returns for Baslow, Beeley, Chatsworth, Edensor and Pilsley, Derbyshire. Digital image Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> [last accessed October 2017].

However, as he found it difficult to prevent expenditure from creeping up again, the number increased steadily thereafter.

The reputation of Chatsworth's gardens prevailed long after its creators had died, and in 1884 the beleaguered 7th Duke complained that he alone had received between forty and fifty applications for a vacant gardener's position at Chatsworth (doubtless the head gardener had received even more).⁴⁹⁵ Domestic gardening, particularly at a house with a reputation like Chatsworth's, was considered a good route to social mobility. Gardening was a rare job which started with unskilled manual labour and had clear career progression to a position of professional respectability. While at Chatsworth, ambitious gardeners looked to secure the connections that would enable them to move on to a higher position elsewhere. Robert Aughtie makes a note in his diary of the head gardeners of each house he visited. Edmund Wilson married the daughter of a landscape gardener. James White visited Kingscote Park and noted down the 'regulations [and] fines' for the gardeners.⁴⁹⁶ The cultivation of professional networks was essential to the employment practices of domestic gardening. Similarly to household servants, gardeners were reliant on character references and connections to find and secure their positions. The competitive nature of garden employment is reflected in the *Gardeners Chronicle*, in the imbalance between the number of men advertising their services, and the scarcity of vacancies.⁴⁹⁷

The experience that some of Chatsworth's gardeners gained as servants led them to secure senior positions outside of domestic gardening. John Gibson, who was sent to India to collect orchids, became superintendent of St James' Park, Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park. William Wilson's letters record the journey of John Milner, one of his colleagues at

⁴⁹⁵ Letter from the 7th Duke to Lord Cavendish, 4th January 1884, CS2/4/794, DC.

⁴⁹⁶ The Notebook of James White, 1837-1858, CH14/7/3, DC, p. 49.

⁴⁹⁷ Scanned volumes of the *Gardener's Chronicle* from 1841 to 1922 are available to read online. Biodiversity Heritage Library, 'The Gardener's Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette', www.biodiversitylibrary.org [last accessed November 2017].

Chatsworth, to the East India Company's Botanic Garden at Saharanpur, and Aughtie's diary records the departure of Robert Scott, foreman of the great conservatory, also to India. Several gardeners also went to America. James Hogan went to work in America in 1849, and head gardener James Taplin left in 1864 to take a position in charge of the florist business of Mr. George Such in South Amboy, New Jersey. There he created numerous hybrids of tropical pitcher plants, which he displayed at Madison Square Garden in New York City for the New York Horticultural Society. Some of the gardeners who nurtured and interpreted Chatsworth's global collection therefore spread their expertise widely. They participated in an international knowledge exchange that was amplified and reinforced by the regular publication of Joseph Paxton's popular horticultural magazines, the content of which relied on this network of expertise. The gardeners at Chatsworth can be understood as accruing social capital through their association with the prestigious Chatsworth name, and cultural capital through their thorough practical education.

The Structure of the Gardens

Ambitious young gardeners hoping to replicate the success of men such as John Gibson were met with a hierarchical structure which both limited their agency by imposing strict limitations on their behaviour, but also offered a clear path to progression. Within this hierarchical structure of head gardener – foremen – gardener – trainee, there was a further social division between gardeners and labourers.

There does not appear to have been a 'typical' route to a gardening position at Chatsworth, but it is probable that many of the gardeners who were not local to the estate were

sourced from the Royal Horticultural Society gardens at Chiswick. The 6th Duke leased 33 acres of land adjoining the Chiswick House garden to the Society.⁴⁹⁹ This is how Robert Aughtie, James White and Joseph Paxton found their way to Chatsworth. There is no record of formal apprenticeships for gardeners at Chatsworth, although comparable training was available. One route for Chatsworth's gardeners was to begin work as garden boys or labourers, before carrying out some formal training with the Royal Horticultural Society at Chiswick and then being transferred to Chatsworth to experience work in each department of a large domestic garden. This transfer came as a surprise to Robert Aughtie, suggesting that he did not even apply for the position at Chatsworth, such was the strong affiliation between the two gardens. On the 17th February 1848 he wrote, 'Was much surprised on returning home to hear from Mr Edmonds that I was about going to Chatsworth'.⁵⁰⁰ He arrived there on the 10th April. Other gardeners were hired through a recommendation from friends and acquaintances of the Duke or of Joseph Paxton, in the same way as many of the indoor servants. The local men could become gardeners by working their way up from garden boy, to junior gardener, to gardener, although Edmund Wilson was the only local worker to reach the position of head gardener at the Cavendish properties.

When gardeners reached Chatsworth, they were sorted into one of the departments. According to the garden vouchers from the 1860s onwards, these were the Kitchen Garden, Pleasure Ground and Conservatory departments (each employing around 20 gardeners), and the Plant Department (employing around ten).⁵⁰³ This may have been a reduction from the number of departments in Joseph Paxton's time, when there seems to have been an additional Flower department and Arboretum department. Joseph Paxton was the chief woodsman as well as head gardener, so there was close collaboration between the work of the gardeners and that

⁴⁹⁹ Harley, *A Gardener at Chatsworth*, p. 17.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁵⁰³ Garden vouchers, 1861-1891, DE/CH, DC.

of the woodsmen. Every few months, the gardeners were moved to another department. In this way, Chatsworth provided a comprehensive training course in every area of garden management, and many of the gardeners left after having worked in each area. Although the garden staff were constantly in flux with staff coming and going, they were supported by a more stable group of labourers. The two groups were socially distinct. When Paxton wrote to the Duke that their *Victoria regia* lily had produced a flower bud 'like a peach in a cup', he added rather condescendingly that 'every body here is mad about it even the labourers take great interest in it'.⁵⁰⁴

The distinction between 'the labourers' and the professional gardeners is one that was formed with the arrival of Joseph Paxton. Before then, all of the workers in the gardens were local labourers who, while not necessarily 'unskilled', had not received formal training. The professional gardeners that Joseph Paxton introduced to the estate were a dynamic group of educated, ambitious young men, most of whom were born outside of Derbyshire. Although both gardeners and labourers carried out manual work, their separate social status is hinted at in a variety of documents. Gardeners were frequently called on for general manual labour, such as clearing rubbish and cleaning paths, particularly in the build up to important events. On these occasions, they often worked in teams, alongside labourers and other estate workers. This more informal work is hinted at in an undated list of 309 men, including 18 gardeners, divided into sixteen groups of 18-22 men with one manager for each team.⁵⁰⁵ The lists, although no context is provided for them, suggest what status the gardeners held among Chatsworth's manual workers. Just over half of the men, 167, are labourers, but only one labourer is a team leader. The 18 gardeners constitute only 5.8% of the listed workforce, but a quarter of the team leaders.

⁵⁰⁴ Letter from Joseph Paxton to the 6th Duke of Devonshire, November 1849, CS2/100/8, DC.

⁵⁰⁵ Lists of men and foremen, c.1838, DE/CH/6/1/23, DC.

This suggests that gardeners were more likely to be selected for general leadership positions on the estate than the other workers.

The Status of Gardeners

Gardening was a respectable and competitive occupation for middle-class, and aspiring middle-class professionals, but gardeners sit uncomfortably in Gerard's category of the 'career servant'.⁵⁰⁷ Gardeners often sought to become professionals in their own right, not in domestic service, but in the horticultural market. It was common for men to train in domestic gardens before moving to manage a public garden or park. Many of the gardeners at Chatsworth therefore held their status as servants secondary to their status as professionals. They were often just as selective about the positions they accepted as their employers were over who they hired. In October 1838, a gardener from Chatsworth called George Brown rejected an offer of employment from George Stephenson, the railway engineer, because he considered the salary too low. According to Sarah Paxton, 'George Brown went over to Tapton, but Mr Stephenson only offered him 17s per week [and] lodgings[,] George wanted a £1'.⁵⁰⁸ Conversely, Robert Aughtie records that he received a letter from the head gardener at Chiswick about a position in Sussex 'wages One guinea, with Cottage', but did not feel he could accept 'as I am not yet proficient in vine forcing'.⁵⁰⁹ The conflict of priorities between a gardener's professional ego, and their status as servants, could cause tension with other staff and individuals in the estate community.

⁵⁰⁷ J. Gerard, *Country House Life: Family and Servants, 1815-1914* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 162-165.

⁵⁰⁸ Letter from Sarah Paxton to Joseph Paxton, October 1838, P/51, DC.

⁵⁰⁹ Harley, *A Gardener at Chatsworth*, p. 164.

In 1835, a 20-year-old gardener named John Gibson was sent from the Chatsworth gardens to Calcutta on a plant-collecting expedition, to fill glasshouses specially-built by head gardener Joseph Paxton. The trip was an outstanding success, and Gibson returned with over three hundred species of plants, including eighty species of orchid that were new to England. Throughout the letters that Gibson sent to his employer, the Duke, and his manager, Joseph Paxton, he referred to the plants he had collected in India as ‘my collection’, ‘my harvest’ or ‘my plants’ (fourteen times in twenty-three letters).⁵¹⁰ Gibson knew what was at stake for himself and his employer by his trip to India, and he was aware of the value of his new expertise. The impact of cross-cultural and ‘ecological’ exchanges between Europeans and indigenous communities has been examined by historians such as Jennifer Newall and Eugenia Herbert.⁵¹¹ Gibson’s letters, particularly his relationship with his Indian assistants and his observations on local knowledge, merit further investigation in the context of this historiography on botanical imperialism. What is relevant to this thesis, however, is the way that Gibson’s agency and status on the Chatsworth estate were transformed on his arrival home.

After his return to England, and after his promotion to Foreman of the Plant Department, Gibson continued to claim ownership over the plants, which were both trophies in his professional portfolio and the property of his master. James White, while working under Gibson in the Plant Department, wrote out lists of the orchids at Chatsworth. Alongside handwriting exercises, recipes and poetry, the notebook contains long lists of orchids with Gibson’s name written next to each flower brought into the country as a result of his expedition.⁵¹² In 1838, Joseph Paxton and the Duke left England for a tour of Europe, leaving

⁵¹⁰ John Gibson’s correspondence from India, 1835-1837, DF37/1/1, DC.

⁵¹¹ See: ‘North’s Gardens: Redemption and the Return to Origins’ in J. Rosen, *Julia Margaret Cameron’s ‘Fancy Subjects’: Photographic Allegories of Victorian Identity and Empire*, (Manchester, 2016), pp. 266–301; ‘SEEING THE WORLD: Visuality and Exoticism’ in B. Schmidt, *Inventing Exoticism: Geography, Globalism, and Europe’s Early Modern World*, (Philadelphia, 2015), pp. 83–162; E. W. Herbert, *Flora’s Empire: British Gardens in India*, (Philadelphia, 2011); J. Newall, *Trading Nature: Tahitians, Europeans, and Ecological Exchange* (Honolulu, 2010), pp. 57–88.

⁵¹² Notebook of James White, pp. 6-22.

foreman Andrew Stewart in charge of the gardens. However, Paxton's wife reported to him that, 'Gibson considers himself master, and a precious puppy he is getting, what a pity it is'.⁵¹³ The responsibility conferred on Gibson while away in India emboldened his position in the gardens on his return.

Two years after Gibson's return, Robert Wallace and Peter Banks were sent across North America to the Columbia River on another expedition. They appear to have been sent as a pair both in order to increase their yield, and to give each other the company that Gibson had lacked in India. However, the intimacy of travel only fuelled a competitive attitude which appears to have driven Wallace and Banks apart. In the only letter to have survived from either of them, Wallace wrote to ask if he could be sent south to California,

I have every reason to think that Banks and I shall separate when we get to our ground on the Columbia... if you find the funds are not going to be sufficient to send us both to California, still you might probably have the means of sending one of us, so as to secure seeds of the pines at least, which are not to be met with anywhere but in that country; this I think is a most desirable part of the expedition, I volunteer myself to undertake this part, as well as the route to the south, during the first year⁵¹⁴

In addition to volunteering himself for the 'most desirable' part of the journey, Wallace requested a long list of articles to be sent to him, including tin boxes, shirts, cloaks 'of better material than those we have', writing paper, trinkets to trade with the native population, pens and pencils, matches, Loudon's catalogue, books 'that may be of service to us', and a portable leather writing desk.⁵¹⁵ Sarah Paxton's uncle, transcribing the letter for Joseph Paxton, described Wallace as 'rather extravagant and thoughtless'.⁵¹⁶ Sadly, although the items were

⁵¹³ Letter from Sarah Paxton to Joseph Paxton, 1838, P/63, DC.

⁵¹⁴ Transcript of letter from Robert Wallace to Joseph Paxton, July 1838, in letter from John Gregory to Joseph Paxton, October 1838, P/54, DC.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*

sent to Wallace and Banks, the two plant collectors drowned in the Columbia river before they could receive them.

The professional pride of the gardeners caused them to jostle for authority with each other, dictate the terms of their employment and assert ownership over the fruits of their labour, Chatsworth's gardeners sometimes conflicted with people who threatened this sense of pride. Jane Brown has suggested that country house gardeners were 'invisible slaves', but there is evidence that Chatsworth's gardeners had the confidence to exercise their agency, even at the expense of displaying deference to a person of social seniority.⁵¹⁷

In 1839, a gardener called George Nockett was interviewed by Joseph Paxton following a serious incident with a visitor. George had been showing a party of visitors around the gardens when a few of them split from the group to admire the 'temple' at the top of the Cascade. As they reached the top, he gave the signal for the garden boy to turn on the waterworks. According to George, the water spurted out with more force than intended, and one of the gentlemen in the party was splashed. Believing that the gardener had intentionally played a prank, the gentleman set off down the side of the Cascade at full speed, waving his walking stick above his head. On reaching George, the gentleman threatened to 'knock out his brains for playing tricks with him'. Not satisfied with the gardener's excuses, the man raised his stick again, at which point George Nockett pulled out a knife and threatened to stab him.

George protests that he was never treated in such a brutal dog like manner in his life, and never heard a man in any station make use of such brutal language. George has been at Chatsworth more than thirteen years and never heard the least complaint from any of the many thousand persons whom he escorted round the gardens. In nine cases out of ten when he is requested by one or more of the party to water the remainder he declines to do so having found that though it may create a laugh at the moment, it almost invariably creates ill will amongst the party.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁷ J. Brown, *The Pursuit of Paradise: A Social History of Gardens and Gardening* (London, 1999), p. 3.

⁵¹⁸ Statement of George Nockett, 1839, CH14/8/1, DC.

In this statement George suggests that he was unwilling to be treated with the contempt that many domestic servants would have been accustomed to at this time, even to the extent that he threatened to deliver potentially life-threatening wounds to a man of a higher status than him. George insisted that he had revealed his knife in self-defence, but his comments about the gentleman's 'brutal language' suggest that his pride had been threatened as much as his physical welfare. George's statement further implies that he habitually refused to comply with the wishes of the visitors that he escorted around the gardens. On occasion he followed through with orders to splash other guests with water, but at other times he refused, acting in accordance with his own judgement of the situation at the time.

Liminality in the Community

George Nockett's altercation with the visitor speaks to wider frustrations that the gardeners experienced in the liminality of their status. The visitor appears to have perceived Nockett as a social inferior, as a servant, but Nockett himself draws on language of professional pride, calling attention to the 'the many thousand persons whom he escorted round the gardens' as evidence of his capability. In the wider estate, gardeners experienced further tension in their status as outsiders to the community. They often shared an uneasy relationship of dependence on the tenants who begrudgingly lodged them, and some preferred to separate their home life from their occupational life by moving to lodgings in Baslow.

The gardening workforce significantly diversified the community at Chatsworth. Joseph Paxton and the 6th Duke's innovative ventures into horticulture and engineering

attracted aspiring gardeners from all over the country, and some from abroad. James White came to Chatsworth from Herefordshire and Robert Aughtie from London. Andrew Stewart, the foreman of the kitchen garden, came from Ireland. The letters between Joseph Paxton and the 6th Duke also mention gardeners from Germany and Hungary. The letter about the Hungarian gardener, Peter Knesz, hints at the cosmopolitan nature of the Chatsworth garden workforce in the 1840s,

The young Hungarian, Peter Knesz, is arrived today, and I find has set his heart on going at once to Chatsworth. Whats to be done. I have for the present sent him to Edmunds at Chiswick, but he cannot speak any English and at Chatsworth young Neumann [and] others will speak French with him.⁵¹⁹

If Knesz spoke Italian, Joseph Paxton would also have been able to converse with him, having learned conversational Italian during his tour of Europe with the Duke in 1838.⁵²⁰

Among the gardeners that can be identified in the 1841 census, about 60 percent were not local to Derbyshire.⁵²¹ Without a local network of family and friends, these gardeners relied on the local community for accommodation. Although tenants were not permitted to sublet rooms to their own friends and family members, they were obliged to lodge workers. Between 45 and 60 percent of the gardeners and garden labourers working at Chatsworth under Paxton lodged with tenants in the nearby villages.⁵²² This obligation seems to have fallen particularly to the widows of the estate whose children had grown up. The allocation of gardeners to tenants was sometimes decided by the Duke himself. In one letter he writes, ‘the gardener [and] wife

⁵¹⁹ Letter from the 6th Duke of Devonshire to Joseph Paxton, March 1840, P/89, DC.

⁵²⁰ Letter from Joseph Paxton to Sarah Paxton, February 1838, P/66, DC.

⁵²¹ Data taken from 1841 census returns for Baslow, Beeley, Chatsworth, Edensor and Pilsley, Derbyshire. Digital image Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> [last accessed October 2017].

⁵²² *Ibid.*

may live with Mrs Vickers'.⁵²³ Catherine Vickers was a 60-year-old widow living with her 25-year-old daughter and four-month-old granddaughter in the 1841 census.⁵²⁴ As discussed in the previous chapter, Ann Wilson also took in lodgers when she was widowed.

The impact of the diversification of Chatsworth's community and households through the introduction of gardeners is complex. Gardeners brought with them their own social networks and cultural outlooks. By coming into contact with gardeners from elsewhere in Britain and abroad, in their homes and in public, individuals and families on the estate were exposed to a diversity of worldviews. Gardeners such as Robert Aughtie were prolific letter-writers, receiving letters, newspapers and parcels from their correspondents on an almost daily basis in the homes of their landladies. Robert Aughtie brought into the community news and opinions of events in London, written to him by friends, and as well as the temperance ideas he had heard from attending a series of lectures on the negative effects of alcohol.⁵²⁵ James White brought recipes and medical knowledge, and his accounts show that he was paid for minor medical attendance in his household in 1836, for 'stitching and easing little master' and 'mend[ing] the maid'.⁵²⁶ The process of cultural exchange went two ways. Gardeners at Chatsworth also attended local events and learned local customs. Robert Aughtie noted that it was a tradition on the estate to fire guns on bonfire night.⁵²⁷ He also took part in a local new year tradition, and was persuaded by the Edensor schoolmaster's son to go 'a Guiseing', which involved dressing up in a disguise and going door-to-door collecting money, 'not having seen anything of the sort before, I complied'.⁵²⁸ Aughtie and James White both spent much of their free time exploring nearby villages, and visiting sites such as the caves at Castleton.

⁵²³ Letter from the 6th Duke of Devonshire to Joseph Paxton, October 1841, P/125.

⁵²⁴ Data taken from 1841 census return for Edensor, Derbyshire. Digital image Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> [last accessed October 2017].

⁵²⁵ Harley, *A Gardener at Chatsworth*, p. 83.

⁵²⁶ Notebook of James White, p. 22.

⁵²⁷ Harley, *A Gardener at Chatsworth*, p. 126. Since 'Guy Fawkes day' fell on a Sunday in 1848, the celebrations occurred on the Monday.

⁵²⁸ Harley, *A Gardener at Chatsworth*, p. 135.

The relationship that incoming gardeners shared with the local community, however, was not always cohesive. Robert Aughtie lodged with Mrs Wallace, Ann Wilson's neighbour, and shared an uneasy relationship with his landlady. He was regularly expected to share his bed with her visiting male relatives, which he tolerated, but when she informed him that she had taken on another lodger to sleep with him, 'I told her that I should leave'.⁵²⁹ Lodger and landlady each encroached on the other's privacy, leading to discomfort for both. In the summer of 1850 his sisters Emma and Emily came to visit, to the consternation of Mrs Wallace. After one night 'the Old Lady began to get figitty and wished Emma away'.⁵³⁰ The following week he wrote,

we went to Mrs and Mr Senior to tea - did not get home till past ten. This, together with sundry grievances put the old dame out of temper - she said nothing when we got home, but about 1 in the morning, she got out of bed and kicked up a downright shindig, which made poor Emily quite ill.⁵³¹

The mutual feeling of anger engendered by the limitations that lodger put on the agency of the tenant and vice versa are evident in Mrs Wallace's sudden outburst and Aughtie's condescending nick names 'old dame' and 'old lady'.

There was little that tenants could do about unwanted lodgers, due to their obligation to the Duke, but with their comparatively high status, gardeners had a choice whether to stay or move on. Around half of the gardeners appear to have lived at Baslow, a large village on the northern edge of the park. Baslow's population was around three times larger than Edensor. The Duke of Rutland owned much of Baslow, so although it was close to Chatsworth, it was not considered one of the estate villages and did not have the same culture of moral surveillance. James White left the house of Mrs Littlewood, a 76-year-old widow in Edensor,

⁵²⁹ Harley, *A Gardener at Chatsworth*, p. 114.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

after five months, and lived in Baslow for the remainder of his five-year employment at Chatsworth.⁵³²

The young men who worked in Chatsworth's gardens naturally gravitated towards Baslow for social gatherings, because unlike Edensor there were several pubs. The agency that gardeners may have felt they lacked in the strict hierarchy of the Chatsworth gardens, they were able to recuperate in the relative freedom of a personal life at Baslow. The village appears to have gained a bad reputation in the Chatsworth community for encouraging intemperance. James White, Ann Wilson and Robert Aughtie all mention social events at Baslow in somewhat disapproving terms. Ann Wilson wrote, 'they has been a Gardeners ball at Baslow Edmund [her son] did not go... I am pleased Edmund didnt go, thay is no good in Baslow balls'.⁵³³ James White wrote a poem inspired by his observations of 'the late dance at Baslow', in which he described a 'blagyard brood' of 'Hells choicest inmates, Earths most dambd crew', whose only wisdom was 'in taken snuff'.⁵³⁴ Robert Aughtie joined the Oddfellows Club at Baslow, but after speaking to a friend at Pilsley, 'I felt determined to have no more to do with it'.⁵³⁵

The majority of Chatsworth's gardeners appear to have treated their employment on the estate as a (sometimes disagreeable) rite of passage which offered the necessary training and prestige to move on to other places. Many others, however, integrated into the extended estate community and settled. William Chester, from Knipton in Leicestershire, stayed at the lodging house of Sarah Holmes in Baslow for at least twenty years.⁵³⁶ His relationship with his landlady was so positive that when he became head gardener and moved to Barbrook House (the

⁵³² Notebook of James White, CH14/7/3, p. 25.

⁵³³ Letter from Ann Wilson to Elizabeth Wilson, ~1867, DF33/5, DC.

⁵³⁴ Notebook of James White, CH14/7/3, p. 111.

⁵³⁵ Harley, *A Gardener at Chatsworth*, p. 162

⁵³⁶ 1871, 1881 and 1891 census returns for Baslow, Derbyshire. Digital image Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> [last accessed October 2017].

Paxtons' former residence) he employed Sarah Holmes' niece, Annie Prince, as his housekeeper.⁵³⁷

Mobility and Boundary Crossings

Perhaps more than any other worker on the country estate, gardeners were able to exercise agency by crossing physical thresholds at will, into the villages, into the park, into the gardens and into the house. The gardeners journeyed to-and-from work via the park, which became a site of regular spontaneous interaction. On Saturday 15th July 1848, for example, Aughtie met a Miss Milward in the park, went home with her, and 'had a chat with her brother'.⁵⁴⁸ This was probably James Milward, the house librarian, whom Aughtie frequently visited. Gardeners would have regularly met with charwomen, labourers and other live-out servants, as well as other locals and tourists, on their respective walks home. The outside spaces at Chatsworth were therefore a liminal space of spontaneous interaction between individuals coming and going from the house.

Gardeners were invited into the house on special occasions, such as for celebrations. In 1843, for example, the workmen and gardeners at Chatsworth were invited in to celebrate the successful visit of Queen Victoria. This group of assembled workmen included the gardeners, because much of the Queen's itinerary had been focused on the gardens.⁵⁴⁹ Her two-day visit included two visits to the conservatory, a walk by the rock work and west terrace, a

⁵³⁷ 1901 census for Chatsworth, Derbyshire. Digital image Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> [last accessed October 2017].

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 112

⁵⁴⁹ Programme for the Queen's Visit, December 1843, P/186, DC.

viewing of the tree she had planted as a child and an opportunity to plant another, a walk around the west garden, and a tour of the kitchen garden. In the evening of the second day, the curtains of the drawing room were opened ‘to shew the effects of the water works illuminated’.⁵⁵⁰ The Queen’s arrival had been announced at short notice, and the gardeners were required to work long hours preceding and during the visit. The programme stated that ‘Care is to be taken that from an early hour the Pleasure grounds shall be in its usual state’.⁵⁵¹ After the fireworks and illuminations on the second night, around three hundred labourers and gardeners worked until morning to clear away the evidence. The celebration at Chatsworth was a reward from the Duke for this extra work, and the success of the illuminations.

The festivities were prefaced by speeches and toasts. In one of the toasts, Joseph Paxton said,

I must first tell you how very anxious His Grace has been and is that you should be all happy and comfortable here today and had it been possible for you to have had your wives and sweethearts by your sides His Grace would have been still more pleased but large as Chatsworth is this could not possible be done But However I have the pleasure to inform from His Grace that they will all be invited to tea [etc.] this day week⁵⁵²

The suggestion that the Duke was ‘very anxious’ for the gardeners and other workmen to feel ‘happy and comfortable’ in the house implies that it was not a space they were used to entering, and therefore one in which they might feel uneasy. However, any uneasiness felt by the gardeners was more likely to be caused by the punctiliousness of the celebrations than an unfamiliarity with the house.

The celebration events in 1843 consciously reinforced social conventions on the estate, simultaneously reminding the gathered workmen of their place in the hierarchy of the estate,

⁵⁵⁰ Programme for the Queen’s Visit, December 1843, P/188, DC.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵² Speech by Joseph Paxton to Chatsworth Workmen, December 1843, P/194, DC.

and recognising their important contribution to promoting Chatsworth's national prestige. These social conventions were further reinforced by the separation of the men and women, and the nature of their respective celebrations. The men celebrated first, and with a great deal of ceremony. The women, who had laboured to prepare the house and supply the elaborate dinners, were gathered one week later for a suitably feminine tea party. The separation of the men and women also suggests a division of the indoor staff (predominantly female) and the outdoor staff (predominantly male).

The celebrations of 1843 at Chatsworth can be understood in the context of other formal celebrations organised for country house staff, such as Christmas parties. These events adhered strictly to protocol, separated the men from the women and the indoor staff from the outdoor staff, and acknowledged that the presence of workmen in the house was an unusual, and therefore potentially uncomfortable, occurrence. Events of this kind were, however, infrequent. The letters, diaries and other personal documents of gardeners at Chatsworth reveal that they are not characteristic of the spontaneous social encounters that occurred on a daily basis during the rest of the year.

Gardeners frequently entered the house in their occupational remit, to bring flowers to the housekeeper for distribution around the house, to bring vegetables and fruits to the kitchens, and for other miscellaneous tasks. In May 1849, Robert Aughtie, at that point a gardener in the conservatory, recorded in his diary that he had entered the house 'after dinner to see the maids to ask them Mr Binn's address'.⁵⁵³ However, gardeners also appeared to enter the house for personal and sociable reasons. In a list that records individuals who entered the cellars to take their beer allowance in 1898, four can be identified as gardeners.⁵⁵⁴ Contrary to Girouard and Ilkin's statements that gardeners did not eat in the servants' hall, there is also evidence at

⁵⁵³ Harley, *A Gardener at Chatsworth*, p. 148.

⁵⁵⁴ List of people drawing beer from the cellars at Chatsworth, 1898, DC.

Chatsworth of several gardeners eating in the house. This did not only happen while the Duke was away and the household staff were under less pressure. In a book of weekly accounts taken during the Duke's stays at Chatsworth between 1850 and 1852, two gardeners were recorded dining in the Servants' Hall.⁵⁵⁵

As well as dining with other staff members in the servants' hall, gardeners socialised and ate in areas of the house that were not designated for entertaining or the consumption of food. In September 1848, Robert Aughtie wrote,

The Duke and D[uches]s of Cambridge and the Duke of Wellington left Chatsworth. Went in the house in the afternoon and had tea in the still room with Henry Stark [a footman] and Jane - saw the dining and drawing rooms lighted up, also the library - saw the ale cellars⁵⁵⁶

This entry encompasses several examples of the flexibility of spatial and social boundaries at Chatsworth. An outdoor worker ate with friends in a room designed for a specific household function. The still room was located near the kitchen, and served as a storage room for perishable foods, and a place in which jams and jellies were made. Although historians such as Jon Stobart have identified changes and overlaps in the use of the still room, these changes have been confined to the room's role in the division of household labour.⁵⁵⁷ The still room has been identified as a place for the preparation of food for family and guests, not its consumption by servants and staff. The presence of two servants, one outdoor, in a room which they had no need to enter, and their consumption of a meal associated with polite social ritual, suggests that the uses and users of service spaces were more varied than has been previously understood. It also implies the power that servants had to use their workspaces for the purposes of leisure.

⁵⁵⁵ Book of extra expenditure during the Duke's stay, 1850-1852, DC.

⁵⁵⁶ Harley, *A Gardener at Chatsworth*, p. 121.

⁵⁵⁷ J. Stobart and M. Rothery, *Consumption and the Country House* (Oxford, 2016), p. 91.

In December 1843, Sarah Paxton wrote to her husband, the head gardener, that their daughter Toey (Victoria), ‘has a very smart supper to night in the Laundry, in honor of Mr. Ridgways birthday’.⁵⁵⁸ This offers another example of a meal being eaten in a room that was not designed for the purposes of consumption or entertainment. It is not known who else ate at the meal in the laundry, or how lavish the food was, since this short line is the only surviving reference to the meal. No tickets, programmes or menus were created, or preserved, for these occasions. The brevity of these fleeting mentions of social activities in the still room and laundry are suggestive of their regularity and mundanity, and signify the reason they have been forgotten.

Mr Ridgway was the steward at Devonshire House in London, so the meal in his honour held in the Laundry at Chatsworth hints at the social network that connected the Duke’s several households. This network was not confined to the senior servants, or even to the itinerant servants who travelled from house to house with the Duke. Robert Aughtie began his training in the Royal Horticultural Society gardens at Chiswick. Before he left to take up his position at Chatsworth in April 1848, he ‘bid Good Bye to all - also in the house’, suggesting that he knew and socialised with the indoor servants at Chiswick.⁵⁵⁹ In May 1850, Aughtie returned to London to visit his ailing sister. While there, he went to Chiswick to see ‘all the men’ and to have breakfast with Mr Edmonds, the head gardener.⁵⁶⁰ Later that day he went to Devonshire House, where he encountered Mr Edmonds again, ‘a large party being there, I went in among them and saw in the refreshment rooms - found Mr Edmonds there, who was surprised to see me’.⁵⁶¹ After the party had left, he slept in the footmen’s room. He got up at nine and left, after breakfast, at eleven.

⁵⁵⁸ Letter from Sarah Paxton to Joseph Paxton, December 1843, P/185, DC.

⁵⁵⁹ Harley, *A Gardener at Chatsworth*, p. 99.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*

The spontaneity of Aughtie's visits to Chiswick House and Devonshire House, and once again the off-handedness with which he records the event, suggest a normality to the gardener's mobility between the houses and within their interiors. It is perhaps unsurprising that he called in to see his former colleagues while in London, but it is notable that Aughtie, a low-level outdoor servant, additionally entered a household in which he had never been employed, apparently without giving prior notice, for the purpose of engaging in social activities. This easy movement between country and city, outdoor and indoor, public and private, parallels the mobility of the Duke, and his circle of friends, around their country houses and grand city residences. Mobility between aristocratic households is rarely associated with servants who worked in a fixed location (such as the gardens), particularly those travelling independently of their masters and for their own purposes. The presence of Mr Edmonds at both Chiswick and Devonshire House, on the same day, further suggests an active social network within and between the Duke's household staffs. Again, this points to the social capital that was on offer through employment in the vast Cavendish property network, and not only for gardeners.

Robert Aughtie essentially used Devonshire House as free accommodation, sleeping there overnight and eating breakfast after a leisurely start. The opportunity to stay at their master's city residence during periods of leave may have been one of the implicit benefits that country house servants enjoyed, but one that has not been remarked on by historians. Servants' titles suggest that their work was rooted in place, and this implied constancy is often reinforced by the names of rooms. The housekeeper's remit was confined to the house, and her particular associated space was the housekeeper's room. This pairing of servants to particular spaces exaggerates their lack of mobility, and reduces the rooms to those particular functions. Robert Aughtie's overnight stay in the footman's room at Devonshire House challenges these functions. The dislocation of a gardener from the gardens, and the appropriation of the footmen's room for another purpose, offer evidence of both the mobility and agency of

servants, and the flexibility of the spaces servants occupied beyond their allocated purpose. The 1861 Chatsworth census, which records two grooms and a coachman staying in the house rather than in the accommodation at the stables, offers further evidence of this flexibility.⁵⁶²

The threshold between house and garden was permeable in both directions. As well as outdoor servants, and their families and friends entering the house, Robert Aughtie's diary suggests that household staff frequently socialised with the gardeners, both in the gardens themselves and beyond. This interaction occurred in a variety of situations. In the 1870s, the household servants posed in front of Flora's Temple, between the Orangery and the Case (or Conservatory Wall), for a staff photograph.⁵⁶³ It is not known who chose the garden as the location for the photograph, or why. It could simply have been a matter of finding the best light, an attractive backdrop, or a large space, but it could also suggest that the garden was a natural gathering place for the staff, regardless of department.

Some of the servants' gatherings in the gardens were organised by the senior servants, although they tended not to be quite as formal celebrations such as those that occurred in the house. In August 1848, Joseph Paxton succeeded in his plans for a railway line to pass through Chatsworth.⁵⁶⁴ He 'arrived in triumph through Baslow from London, being drawn in by ropes in his carriage by the people... the Duke met him in the gardens'.⁵⁶⁵ In order to celebrate the news that a much-anticipated railway was to be built at Chatsworth, the Duke 'ordered some ale to be sent from the house to the gardens for the people - we were all ordered to be at the gardens at seven - there was Pilsley and Baslow bands and dancing'.⁵⁶⁶ It is likely that the household staff were present at this party, whether as attendees or serving the crowds. The

⁵⁶² 1861 census for Chatsworth, Derbyshire, R.G.9/2540. Digital image Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> [last accessed November 2017].

⁵⁶³ See fig. 4.1.

⁵⁶⁴ This plan never came to fruition, nor did the building of a station at Edensor.

⁵⁶⁵ Harley, *A Gardener at Chatsworth*, p. 116.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

following evening, Paxton's daughter 'came to Chatsworth... to ask the maids to a dance at the gardens in the evening'.⁵⁶⁷ While the household servants occasionally entered the gardens for organised events, their entry to the gardens was not restricted to invitation.

In one month, July 1848, Aughtie described three occasions on which house servants had socialised informally with the gardeners, and several others on which they may have been present. On the 3rd July, six of the housemaids had walked into the gardens after a busy day showing a group of Teetotalers from Sheffield around the house.⁵⁶⁸ Robert Aughtie persuaded the band who had been entertaining the visitors to stay and play one more song. The gardeners danced with the housemaids for one song with the band, then with two violinists until ten o'clock at night. Two days later, on the evening of Wednesday 5th July, 'all the maids came from the house' to dance in the village, and Aughtie writes that they, 'enjoyed ourselves till about half past two'.⁵⁶⁹ Arrangements were made for another dance the following Saturday, but it was cancelled due to bad weather. On Friday 7th July he went to a dance in the ballroom at Haddon Hall, another on the evening of the 11th at Pilsley Wakes (a village festival), and another on the evening of the 12th.⁵⁷⁰ On Sunday 30th July, Aughtie recorded that 'the lodge porter and family with five of the house girls came to the conservatory in the afternoon'.⁵⁷¹ When Paxton visited the gardens on the 28th July 1848 there was a 'todo' about the gardeners neglecting their work.⁵⁷² Here we see another conflict between the strict structures of the gardens, as a workplace with a prestigious reputation at stake, and the limitations this placed on the gardeners' personal social lives.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁸ Harley, *A Gardener at Chatsworth*, p. 110.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 110-111.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 113.

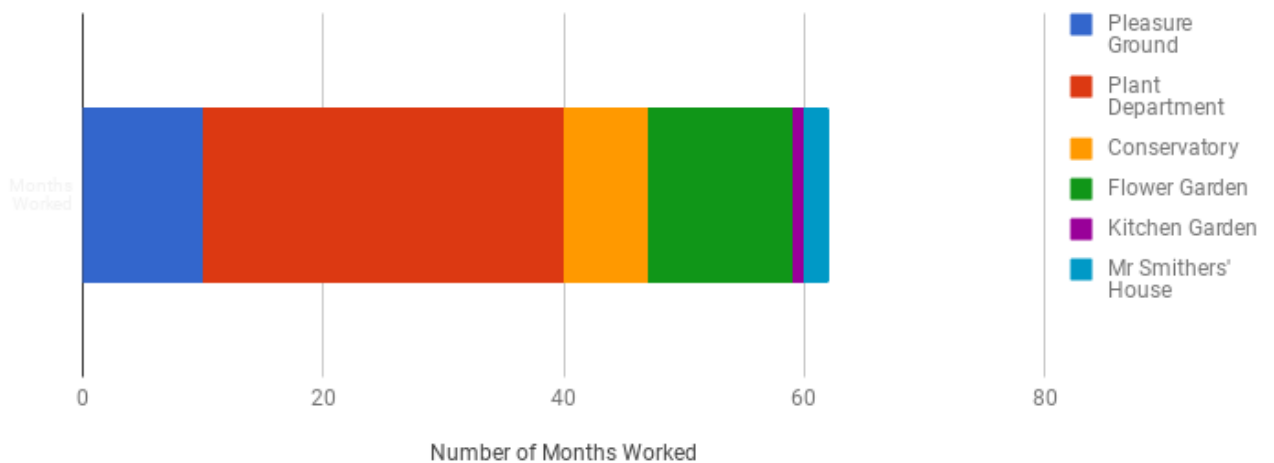
The gardeners seem to have socialised with the housemaids in particular. There are several mentions in the diary of the housemaids coming to 'look through' the gardens and conservatory. The unmarried housemaids were natural dance partners for the gardeners. Robert Aughtie's diary does not indicate whether any of these interactions were romantic, or whether they were always observed and approved by the senior servants. However, the daily encounters recorded in diaries, notebooks and letters suggest that the boundaries between house/garden, indoor/outdoor, male/female and professional/social, were not upheld as stringently as other documents suggest. Even the separate garden departments recorded in the garden vouchers overlapped.

Although in theory the experience of garden work at Chatsworth was highly structured, in practice these structures were flexible. James White's diary shows that his five years at Chatsworth were unevenly distributed between the different areas of the garden.⁵⁷³ He spent only one month at the Kitchen Garden, but over a year 'in the Plant Houses' (Plant Department). He also spent time gardening at the house of the land agent, Mr Smithers, which was not one of the garden departments.

⁵⁷³ The Notebook of James White, 1838-1858, CH14/7/3, DC, pp. 25-27.

Chart 3.1: Chart showing the number of months James White spent working in each garden department at Chatsworth between 1837 and 1842. *The Notebook of James White, 1838-1858*, CH14/7/3, DC, pp. 25-27.

Number of Months James White Spent Working in Each Garden Department, 1837-1842



Even when assigned to a specific department, the gardeners did not necessarily stick strictly to their areas. Robert Aughtie, although allocated to the Conservatory, recorded in his diary on the 7th May 1849 that he ‘went to hoe over the Kitchen Gardens’ with a friend called Dumbrill.⁵⁷⁴ James White, too, kept an eye on activities occurring in other departments, and recorded plants that were put into the Great Conservatory before he began working there.⁵⁷⁵ There was also some overlap and interaction between the gardeners and the lower-ranking labourers, who sometimes went to admire the garden.

To summarise, the high status of the gardeners in the community was reflected in their ability to cross boundaries on the estate and to take advantage of the extensive professional network connecting the Cavendish properties. However, the spatial freedom and professional status enjoyed by gardeners was limited somewhat by the complex tensions that arose from cultural differences with other members of the estate community, and by the limitations placed on their behaviour by the strict culture of the gardens.

Gender and Authority

The structure of the garden departments was reflected in a clear hierarchy of roles. The head gardener occupied the most senior position and delegated managerial responsibilities to the foremen of each department. They in turn presided over the gardeners, who were of a higher social status than the labourers. However, this hierarchical structure was not comprehensive in its daily governance of work in the gardens. As Joseph Paxton’s attention turned to projects

⁵⁷⁴ Harley, *A Gardener at Chatsworth*, p. 148.

⁵⁷⁵ The Notebook of James White, p. 27.

outside of Chatsworth, the men were frequently without a head gardener, sometimes for months at a time. One of the foremen was usually chosen to take charge, but they shared authority with another figure who did not appear on any of the staff accounts: Sarah Paxton. The few scholars that have made use of Sarah Paxton's letters, most notably Margaret Flanders Darby, have focused on the triangular relationship she shared with her husband and the Duke.⁵⁷⁶ Her relationship with the tenants, workers, and servants on the Chatsworth estate is another interesting power dynamic that is worthy of analysis.

Violet Markham wrote of her grandmother Sarah,

She was a first-rate woman of business ; for years she held in her hands all the threads of the Chatsworth estate. If, nominally, he was the Agent, she in fact did the work. Stocks and shares and investments she took in her stride. During the railway boom of the 'forties Sarah speculated coolly and shrewdly and made money when others lost their heads and their fortunes. She was in other respects a remarkable woman.⁵⁷⁷

Sarah's management of the estate finances was recorded in the letters she sent to her husband.

In one letter, for example, she refers to the estate accounts as 'my accounts':

The pay[ment]s have gone on as usual quite the same as if you were home, I have been able to attend to all my accounts, the wood Books went to Churchdale yesterday Mr Wade was here last week. I paid him £377.8.0 I have not received Mr Orrs bill yet⁵⁷⁸

In addition to the accounts, Sarah dealt with disgruntled foremen in the Woods department, disagreements between tenants about the laying of water pipes and set about finding work for idle labourers working on the roads. Her authority in the gardens is less prominent in the letters than on the estate more widely, but nonetheless remarkable for the period.

⁵⁷⁶ M. Flanders Darby, 'Joseph Paxton's Water Lily' in M. Conan (ed.), *Bourgeois and Aristocratic Cultural Encounters in Garden Art, 1550-1850* (Washington D.C. 2002).

⁵⁷⁷ V. Markham, *Paxton and the Bachelor Duke* (London, 1935).

⁵⁷⁸ Letter from Sarah to Joseph Paxton, November 1838, P/59, DC.

The gardens at Chatsworth were ostensibly a masculine space. There were no female gardeners, and the handful of women who were employed in the gardens occupied menial roles, such as carting coke to the conservatories.⁵⁸⁰ Sarah Paxton and her sustained authoritative presence in the gardens challenge the status of the gardens as a masculine sphere. Sarah and Joseph Paxton married six months after his arrival in 1826. Although he later described their encounter as love at first sight, it was a prudent match for them both. Sarah was the daughter of a fairly wealthy manufacturer from Matlock, and had a dowry of £5,000.⁵⁸¹ She was also the niece of Chatsworth's housekeeper, Hannah Gregory, and of the housekeeper at Hardwick, Ruth Gregory. The marriage cemented Paxton in his new community, and the status of head gardener's wife put Sarah firmly in the upper realms of the estate hierarchy. Sarah did not know that she would become Lady Paxton, but she may have suspected that the 23-year-old head gardener had a bright future. Joseph Paxton, too, might have identified the qualities of pragmatism and cool judgement that would enable him to travel frequently from home with the knowledge that all his Chatsworth duties would be managed competently in his absence.

Sarah frequently acted as Joseph's proxy in the gardens, following instructions that he sent by letter. These were both instructions to be conveyed to the other gardeners, and instructions for Sarah herself,

pray get all the men from the woods and have both gardens put in the best order you can for the time, the gravel had better be laid down on the East front and if it does not set well tell George [probably Nockett, a foreman] to water it⁵⁸²

The flowers that I brought with me to London we much admired particularly the Rhododendrons. pray send all the Rhododendrons you can⁵⁸³

⁵⁸⁰ Garden Vouchers, payments to Melissa Holmes for carting coke to the gardens, 1881, DE/CH, DC.

⁵⁸¹ Flanders Darby, 'Joseph Paxton's Water Lily', p. 268.

⁵⁸² Letter from Joseph Paxton to Sarah Paxton, May 1834, P/12, DC.

⁵⁸³ Letter from Joseph Paxton to Sarah Paxton, April 1836, P/27, DC.

Ask Geo[rge Nockett] for 40 kinds of good common Dahlias for Mr R and send them by coach on Sunday Pray send by Brune if you have not done so some Peaches grapes and strawberries to Mr Korleys.⁵⁸⁴

Pray tell Gibson [foreman of the Plant Department] immediately that when he writes to Mr Hammond at Mr Clows he is to say we have no plant of *Huntleya vinlaria*[?]⁵⁸⁵

Pray tell Andrew [foreman of the Kitchen Garden] all the garden walks must be in the most perfect order a little new gravel to be got for the Orchard and scattered over the old and every part to be perfect. Richard [Ashwell, a foreman] is to let the cutting[?] road sides from Baslow and some small gravel must be put on any bad places. he may take on 10 extra men on Saturday for this and other purposes of the Park the Lime Trees at Edensor must be cut immediately and every part of Edensor made perfect.⁵⁸⁶

Joseph's requests to Sarah are remarkable for the extent of responsibility he confers to her. In most cases he asks her to order the foremen to delegate tasks to the men, but he also asks her to order 'all the men from the woods' herself, and to personally send fruits and plants. These requests explicitly place Sarah in the head gardener's role, and indeed the linguistic features of his letters suggest an almost equal relationship between husband and wife. Joseph rarely uses direct language, and usually uses the speech act verb 'pray', as in the quotes above.⁵⁸⁷ According to Kohnen's classification of directive verbs, 'pray' falls into the category of second class 'ask verbs' - between first class 'order verbs' such as 'I require', and third class 'suggest/advise verbs' such as 'I recommend'.⁵⁸⁸ The use of second-class 'ask verbs' implies

⁵⁸⁴ Letter from Joseph Paxton to Sarah Paxton, June 1837, P/39, DC.

⁵⁸⁵ Letter from Joseph Paxton to Sarah Paxton, October 1840, P/101, DC.

⁵⁸⁶ Letter from Joseph Paxton to Sarah Paxton, November 1843, P/179, DC.

⁵⁸⁷ A speech act is an utterance which performs an action in itself, such as a declaration. See A. H. Jucker and I. Taavitsainen, *English Historical Pragmatics* (Edinburgh, 2013), pp. 92-112.

⁵⁸⁸ T. Kohnen, 'Corpora and Speech Acts: The Study of Performatives' in C. Mair and M. Hundt (eds), *Corpus Linguistics and Linguistic Theory* (Amsterdam, 2000), p. 180.

an equal or subordinate position of the addressor (Joseph), and they ‘are usually not connected with any strong obligation on the part of the addressee’ (Sarah).

Unfortunately there are few surviving letters written by Paxton to his gardeners to suggest if he also directed his gardeners using ‘ask verbs’, but his letters to Sarah can be compared to the Duke’s requests to Paxton,

Tell L[or]d B[urlington] about the Nice grafts and shew them to him [and] tell him about the stoneless fruit.⁵⁸⁹

If you have time and opportunity talk to Bailey about trees and shrubs⁵⁹⁰

When you write tell me about the white leaves on Camellias, whether they are a disadvantage.⁵⁹¹

Make up a box of fruit for Lady Granville, but take care that it arrives on a Friday or Tuesday in London.⁵⁹²

I shall be at C[astle] Howard on Thursday Send me there any thing very remarkable if such you have in flowers or fruit.⁵⁹³

Although the Duke occasionally used the verb ‘pray’, his directives rarely contain any auxiliary verbs at all. The Duke’s forthright requests to Joseph imply a strong obligation and social distance between addressor and addressee. By contrast, the language Joseph uses to direct his wife recognises their status as equal partners in the management of estate affairs.

⁵⁸⁹ Letter from the 6th Duke of Devonshire to Joseph Paxton, July 1834, P/14, DC.

⁵⁹⁰ Letter from the 6th Duke of Devonshire to Joseph Paxton, January 1835, P/15, DC.

⁵⁹¹ Letter from the 6th Duke of Devonshire to Joseph Paxton, November 1836, P/35, DC.

⁵⁹² Letter from the 6th Duke of Devonshire to Joseph Paxton, May 1840, P/91, DC.

⁵⁹³ Letter from the 6th Duke of Devonshire to Joseph Paxton, September 1843, P/169, DC.

Although it was her husband's position which afforded Sarah her authority in the gardens, she was able to exercise it independently of her husband's instructions. In 1845 she wrote to him,

I just had a walk round the garden, and indeed when the cats are away, the mice do play, for the garden was nearly deserted at 5 o'clock. I found 4 or 5 in the dark shed at the bottom in the Orchidea house I found a bunch of Stanhopes [orchids] ready to carry off[f], and a brace of cucumbers, a distance of[f]. I went round, when I got back the cucumbers had vanished. I found them hidden in a pot, [and] Moss said they were for Gibson, he had told him to take them.⁵⁹⁴

Sarah Paxton, suspicious that the gardeners were idling, searched for the men and interviewed them. As well as demonstrating the extent of Sarah's authority over the gardeners, the letter hints at the extent of her own horticultural knowledge. Sarah Paxton's letters suggest that she was knowledgeable in her own right, although gardening may have been an academic rather than practical skill. In several letters she refers to plants in the gardens by their Latin names,

Amherstia is making another growth! His Grace will scarcely know it, when he returns, it has grown so luxuriantly of late, Ornithidium Albium is now the most beautiful plant in the Orchidae house it has 25 lovely blossoms open at this time⁵⁹⁵

There has been some splendid Orchidae in flower lately *Caeloglyne Gaidnerianum* [and] *Wallichiana*, beautiful, and many others equally so⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹⁴ Letter from Sarah Paxton to Joseph Paxton, 1845, P/338, DC.

⁵⁹⁵ Letter from Sarah Paxton to Joseph Paxton, October 1838, P/51, DC.

⁵⁹⁶ Letter from Sarah Paxton to Joseph Paxton, November 1838, P/61, DC.

These letters express both personal judgement and technical knowledge. Sarah's report of the progress of the plants mimics the language of Joseph Paxton's professional gardeners, such as in this letter by foreman Thomas Bailey,

Brownea grandiflora is breaking at the top quite strong and a side shoot near the top is 5 inches long and the cassia obovata underneath it is growing beautifully⁵⁹⁷

As well as adopting some of the responsibilities of head gardener in relation to the workers, therefore, Sarah performed some of the roles expected of the foremen in her correspondence to her husband. In one letter Joseph Paxton acknowledges Sarah's understanding of the plants and even hints that, in his absence, she has acquired more knowledge of them than him,

I dare say the Orchidea will have grown quite out of my knowledge, I was delighted with your last acc[oun]t of them and so was The Duke⁵⁹⁸

Sarah's relationship with her husband, and with the other gardeners frequently intersected the spheres of the domestic and professional, public and private, recreation and vocation. This overlap was sometimes physically manifested in their correspondence. Sarah Paxton hid packets of her affectionate letters in the boxes of fruit and vegetables that Joseph asked to be sent for display at horticultural competitions.

Sarah displayed an uneasy self-awareness at her dual identity as wife and proxy head gardener. Joseph Paxton's various enterprises in horticulture, railways, politics and architecture could not have succeeded without the support of his wife, and she was quick to correct him when this support went unrecognised,

⁵⁹⁷ Letter from Thomas Bailey to Joseph Paxton, September 1841, P/124, DC.

⁵⁹⁸ Letter from Joseph Paxton to Sarah Paxton, March 1839, P/72, DC.

I know I have a great love for money, as regards scraping it together but that has been a great blessing for you, you should not find fault with me for that, how many men have to complain of the reverse, but you never shall ~~of me~~ [and] you know no person on earth is ever so happy as I am, when fadding about you, [and] attending to your wants. if I have but your smile I am richly repaid.⁵⁹⁹

As her expressed satisfaction at ‘fadding about’ after her husband and attending to his wants suggests, Sarah Paxton should not be understood as an opponent of the nineteenth-century domestication of women and the rise of the ‘angel in the house’. She was by no means making a political statement by taking such a prominent managerial role on the Chatsworth estate. In fact, quite the opposite. Sarah was conscious to subsume her extra-domestic work into her duties as diligent wife. As Margaret Flanders Darby has argued, Sarah Paxton subsumed her power and control over Joseph’s professional and entrepreneurial activities, including management of the men in the gardens, into the respectable culture of the Victorian bourgeois wife, ‘nurturing the domestic circle’.⁶⁰⁰ She reconciled the masculine nature of her authority in the gardens, by embracing it in the feminine sphere of her duties as devoted wife.

Sarah’s letters to Joseph expose the difficult paradox of her activities at Chatsworth. By taking on Joseph’s duties on the estate in her capacity of supportive wife, she enabled him to spend increasingly less time at home with the family. Her distress is evident in the following letter from January 1846,

My own blessed love, I could not sleep last night for anticipating a letter to fetch you home today, and when I did receive it, it filled me with dismay, not so much the disappointment (as I am pretty well broken in now,) but to find you are so dreadfully harrassed, and I am sure your expectations, with this paper are not realized, which is an awful worry to me... Mr Condell said sometime since, that at the rate you were going on, must end in a brain fever, or something equally bad. The Railways have harrassed you for years, and I certainly think you are acting improperly in giving up so much of

⁵⁹⁹ Letter from the 6th Duke of Devonshire to Joseph Paxton, August 1844, P/242A, DC.

⁶⁰⁰ Flanders Darby, ‘Joseph Paxton’s Water Lily’, p. 270.

your time to them, if you did just half as much as you do, you would be quite as well thought of, or perhaps better, nobody works like you, [and] what for, your expenses are very, very great [and] who pays them, why yourself, come home for a little rest, [and] things will go on just as well without you, when they know you are out of the way, besides, things want looking after at home. I never was so oppressed with things in my life, as I am now.

This letter demonstrates that the weight of maternal and domestic responsibility on Sarah's shoulders during her husband's frequent absences had an effect on her mental health. In this extract alone, she speaks of her insomnia, dismay, disappointment and worry, and that she was 'never so oppressed with things in my life'.⁶⁰¹ Sarah was burdened with the double workload of a Victorian mother's domestic duties, and her husband's job at Chatsworth. Floor plans of Barbrook House, the Paxtons' home at Chatsworth, show that much of the ground floor was devoted to business.⁶⁰² Home and work merged in the space of Barbrook House, and business encroached on Sarah's domestic comfort. She complained to Joseph,

more than one half of the people who come here are such as want information [and] gratification, such folks I shall never put myself out of the way to accommodate beyond bare civility, on the other hand, if I know them to be your friends, I never spare any trouble to make them comfortable, [and] many a time have I suffered for it by over exertion⁶⁰³

Violet Markham envisioned her grandmother at this time 'suffering from constant headache, sitting late at night with a handkerchief on her head, at a table covered with papers; a woman who drank strong cups of coffee to keep herself awake'.⁶⁰⁴ Sarah Paxton was not an opponent of the domestication of women, but nonetheless she suffered from it. Her arduous labour as housewife, mother to seven children, courteous host, accountant and proxy head gardener and land agent brought social prestige to the family, but not personal recognition to her. While the

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰² Plans for Barbrook House, 1851, DE/CH/5/1/6/3, 4, 10 and 11, DC.

⁶⁰³ Letter from Sarah to Joseph Paxton, 1 August 1844, P/242/A, DC.

⁶⁰⁴ Markham, *Paxton and the Bachelor Duke*, p. 283.

liminality of Sarah's position afforded her more power and authority in the community, in many ways it placed limits on her individual agency.

The Indoor/Outdoor Boundary

The widespread popularity of gardening as a private, leisure pursuit is just one of the factors that has made it a difficult profession for historians to categorise. Sarah Paxton had a personal interest in the gardens at Chatsworth, and visited them in the varied guises of admirer, student, manager and supportive wife. Her contribution to the management of the gardens was unpaid, and therefore she cannot be categorised as one of the gardeners despite assuming some of the responsibilities of the role. The gender-based tensions inherent in Sarah's domestic and professional authority are paralleled in the physical space of the glasshouse. Boundaries between indoor and outdoor spaces were complicated by the popularity and prevalence of glass constructions onto middle- and upper-class homes and gardens. The largest glasshouses were used to house the largest collections, at institutions such as Kew and houses such as Chatsworth. Bringing plants back from the far-flung reaches of the British Empire was only half of the battle. Heated glasshouses were necessary to shelter them from the British cold and provide the conditions for their survival and propagation. Over the second half of the nineteenth century, glasshouses were adapted to a more domestic use. The low cost of glass and iron, following the abolition of the glass tax in 1845, made glasshouses affordable to a wider segment of society.

While the great horticultural conservatories were intended to be autonomous spaces for public education, smaller glasshouses began to be attached to houses. The influential botanist

John Claudius Loudon recommended that ‘a Green-house, Orangery, or Conservatory, ought, if possible, to be attached to every suburban residence’.⁶⁰⁵ Failing that, the ‘window-sill’ was an acceptable substitute.⁶⁰⁶ These spaces were seen to be particularly beneficial to women. Gardening was predominantly a masculine activity (there were no female domestic gardeners recorded in the national census until 1881), so indoor plants allowed women to play at gardening within the safety and warmth of the home.⁶⁰⁷ They encouraged women to participate in the nurturing aspects of gardening while removing the unpredictability of the weather, and the dirtiness of the soil.

The Victorian woman tending to her indoor plants was strongly associated with motherhood, for which the conservatory was either a space in which maternal instincts could be practiced before the arrival of children, or in which children could be educated by their mother. Loudon wrote, ‘The enjoyments afforded by a green-house, however small, to the female part of the family are very considerable ; and, where there are children, these enjoyments might be mingled with useful instruction’.⁶⁰⁸ According to Margaret Flanders Darby, the conservatory was also a metaphor for marital relationships, the hothouse lily compared to the ‘privileged Victorian woman, beautiful, delicate, protected, enclosed, and controlled through a special kind of nurture’.⁶⁰⁹ Although half-connected to the protection and enclosure of the household, the indoor garden was also half-connected to the wildness of the nature outside. Flanders Darby argues, therefore, that it was ‘the perfect locale for boundary transgressions, especially sexual seduction’.⁶¹⁰ The hothouse in politics, literature and art came

⁶⁰⁵ J. C. Loudon, *The Suburban Gardener, and Villa Companion* (London, 1838), p. 108.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁶⁰⁷ M. Woollard, ‘The Classification of Domestic Servants’.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁹ Flanders Darby, ‘Joseph Paxton’s Water Lily’, p. 255.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

to be a symbol of precarious control and heated emotion, and a metaphor for marital tension, female subjugation and the battle to domesticate nature.

As well as incorporating an aspect of outdoor masculine activity into the indoor realm of bourgeois femininity, the addition of greenhouses, orangeries and conservatories to the domestic space obscured the physical lines between inside and outside, visible and invisible, public and private. The fragility that glass structures introduced to the domestic space was a source of anxiety. In 1841, Augustus Pugin despaired at the juxtaposition between the robust castellated mansion designs favoured by the Victorian landed classes, and the conservatories appended to them,

On one side of the house machicolated parapets, embrasures, bastions and all the show of strong defence, and round the corner of the buildings a conservatory leading to the principal rooms through which a whole company of horsemen might penetrate at one smash into the very heart of the mansion! For who would hammer against nailed portals when he could kick his way through the greenhouse?⁶¹¹

Pugin's criticisms applied to Chatsworth, where the 6th Duke of Devonshire had added a large orangery to the house as a last-minute decision in his North Wing extension in 1827. He wrote that the orange trees 'perfum[ed] the whole of Chatsworth with their blossoms'.⁶¹²

The orangery brought the remit of the gardeners physically into the house, thereby blurring the physical and social boundary between indoor and outdoor. In 1846, this ambiguity fuelled one of the greatest conflicts in the 6th Duke's household, when the housekeeper Elizabeth Bickell was investigated for misconduct. The case revolved around boundary transgressions, both spatial and social. Although most of the evidence centred on the interior of the house, the orangery, conservatory and other glasshouses were also backdrops for Bickell's misconduct. Orange blossoms, cut from the orangery, feature particularly

⁶¹¹A. W. Pugin, *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* (London, 1853), p. 49.

⁶¹²W. S. Cavendish, 6th Duke of Devonshire, *Handbook of Chatsworth & Hardwick* (London, 1844), p. 109.

prominently. When Sarah Paxton first brought the misbehaviour to her husband's attention, this was the first thing she mentioned, 'Will you believe when I tell you that Miss B has had all the orange flower blossoms cut to day and other fine Flowers out of the Conservatory for some dirty trumpery wedding at Manchester'.⁶¹³ The statement that Bickell 'has had' the blossoms cut implies an inappropriate exertion of authority, and the guilt of other individuals. The witness statements gathered from gardeners and servants support this suspicion:

Gathered flowers for Miss B for a Manchester party. Miss B particularly asked Northcote for orange flowers [and] Northcote cut them for Miss B. No[ckett] says if flowers were refused Miss B. he found out other people cut them

-Witness statement of George Nockett, foreman in the gardens⁶¹⁴

Peter Holmes cut flowers in the orangery. Scott in the Conservatory, [and] George carried them into the House⁶¹⁵

-Notes taken by the interviewer

Abraham says Miss. B. very frequently asked him to cut the flowers. Abraham refused always, but Abraham has seen all the maids bring flowers to Miss B. Abraham says he has often fetched the flowers from the Conservatory [and] [Hot?] Houses. cut by George [Nockett] [and] Walton.⁶¹⁶

-Witness statement of Abraham Wheeldon, steward's room man

The witness statements suggest that the flower cutting had been occurring for some time before the incident involving a wedding at Manchester. They implicate a range of individuals, from the housemaids and steward's room man (Abraham), who brought flowers into the house from the conservatory and hot houses, to the gardeners and foremen (Nockett, Holmes, Scott and Walton) who actually cut them.

The witness statements highlight the role of glass in eliciting boundary transgressions.

The dual identity of Chatsworth's glasshouses as both indoor and outdoor spaces engendered

⁶¹³ Letter from Sarah Paxton to Joseph Paxton, May 1846, in DF4/1/8/1, DC.

⁶¹⁴ Witness statements and notes, May 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC. Northcote is almost certainly an alternative spelling of 'Nockett'.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*

uncertainty over whose authority they fell under: that of the garden staff or that of the household staff. The produce of the conservatories crossed the boundary daily, as fruits and vegetables were taken to the kitchen and flowers were arranged and displayed in the rooms. This passing-between departments followed certain social codes. Abraham, an indoor servant, did not feel comfortable cutting the flowers himself, but he carried them into the house after they had been cut by the gardeners. The cutting itself, therefore, fell into the remit of the gardens. This raised something of a moral quandary for the gardeners, who were liable to be fined or even dismissed for cutting plants inappropriately. The rules for the gardeners stated, ‘If aney one guathers aney kind of vedgatables fruits flowers speciments or cuttings of any plants without permition he will be fined five 5 shilings.. If repeted discharged [*sic.*]’.⁶¹⁷ While gardeners Nockett, Holmes, Scott and Walton were following the orders of the housekeeper, they evidently did not have the permission of the head gardener, or his wife.

Chatsworth’s departments were each structured around their own specific hierarchies, but these overlapped in the glasshouses. The gardeners’ responses to Miss Bickell’s requests for flowers and plants, therefore, were inconsistent. Andrew Stewart, the foreman of the kitchen gardens, refused a request for hothouse fruit ‘which [he] did not think proper to send’, while Nockett, another foreman, obliged.⁶¹⁸ The ambiguity over the authority of the household staff in the inbetween-zones of the garden and glasshouses was even perpetuated by Paxton himself. In 1843, he wrote a hasty letter to his wife containing some of the details for Queen Victoria’s visit. Part of the letter was addressed to the housekeeper, ‘To Mrs Bickle tell George Richard to have plenty of gravel (calver) prepared for mending the road to the conservatory’.⁶¹⁹ With Sarah Paxton’s long-standing managerial presence, female authority was not unknown in the gardens. However, the housekeeper seems an unusual choice to convey the head gardener’s

⁶¹⁷ Notebook of James White, CH14/7/3, DC, p. 2.

⁶¹⁸ Letter from Sarah Paxton to Joseph Paxton, May 1846, in DF4/1/8/1, DC.

⁶¹⁹ Calver was the name of a local village near to limestone quarries.

instructions to the labourers. It may have been due to the nature of Paxton's relationship with the previous housekeeper, his aunt-in-law, with whom he had conversed and corresponded on a variety of subjects besides the household. Lines of communication at Chatsworth were generally fluid, and sometimes depended on the fastest or most convenient method of relaying information. The 6th Duke, for example, wrote to Joseph Paxton in 1845 with instructions for the house porter.⁶²⁰ Although this communication followed a social hierarchy - Duke to senior servant to lower servant - it did not uphold the separation between the indoor and outdoor, garden and household staff.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that both the gardens at Chatsworth and the gardeners themselves occupied a liminal status. The space of the garden was a nexus between the private indoor realm of the house and the public spaces of the estate village and the world beyond. It was a space in which spontaneous interactions occurred between different members of staff and between visitors of all classes. This atmosphere of social spontaneity was contrasted with the highly structured nature of the garden as a site of horticultural prestige. In this curated space, visitors encountered a diverse botanical landscape which implicitly encouraged them to consider their relation to a national and Imperial identity. This process was mediated by the professional expertise of the gardeners, who were both bound to the structure of the garden and motivated to exercise their agency beyond the limitations of the hierarchy.

⁶²⁰ Letter from the 6th Duke of Devonshire to Joseph Paxton, 1845, P/342, DC.

Gender was investigated as a site of contention in the liminality of the gardens. Sarah Paxton's important role as proxy head gardener was revealed as a double-edged sword, offering a power and authority that complicated her status as a middle-class, and therefore not working, wife and mother. The ambiguous space of the glasshouse, as neither an indoor nor outdoor space, was also found to engender issues with gender and masculine authority. These tensions of ambiguity in authority and space are explored further in the next chapter, which moves from the gardens to the household.

Chapter Four

Salmon, Silk and Sacred Songs: Conspicuous Consumption “Below Stairs”

The history of the country house is intimately connected to the history of elite consumption, which has seen increased interest from historians in recent years. Country houses, uninhibited by the spatial restrictions of the city, were lavish statements of wealth and taste, from their architecture, to their decoration, to their contents. Jon Stobart and Andrew Hahn’s 2016 edited volume *The Country House: Material Culture and Consumption* is divided between five key areas of country house consumption: motivations, identity, the everyday, reuse and recirculation, and supply and acquisition.⁶²² The book acknowledges Georg Simmel’s theory of ‘trickle-down’ consumption, which suggests that elite fashions were driven by new goods produced to replace those which had been over-imitated by the middle classes.⁶²³ It also engages with Jan de Vries’ more recent argument about a switch to ‘New Luxury’, driven by a consumerist middle class which usurped the role of the country-house elites in spearheading fashion.⁶²⁴ Although the middle classes feature in each of these theories, they are defined as a distinct urban group, separate from the aristocratic rural country house. However, this chapter seeks to challenge the assumption that the country house was exclusively a site of upper-class consumption. Regulations and transgressions surrounding consumption, it argues, are also an essential part of understanding how the country house staff curated their own identities within the estate community.

⁶²² J. Stobart and A. Hahn (eds.), *The Country House: Material Culture and Consumption* (Swindon, 2016).

⁶²³ G. Simmel, ‘Fashion’, *International Quarterly* (vol. 10, 1904), pp. 130-155.

⁶²⁴ J. de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution. Consumer Behaviour and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2008).

In narratives of elite consumption, servants and estate workers feature as facilitators – growing, preparing and cooking food, serving meals, dressing their employers, cleaning the furniture, transporting goods, maintaining the building and so on. Some servants have problematically been identified as objects of consumption in themselves, in particular liveried male servants, whose conspicuous presence in a household and on a carriage indicated an ability to pay the male servant tax.⁶²⁵ The history of consumption in the country house, then, is one that tends to reduce employees to their occupational functions and physical characteristics, as perceived and curated by their employers. Servants are assumed to have been classless, bound to the aristocratic world of their employers but not participants in it, and likewise separate from their middle- and working-class communities of origin. Even histories that have considered servants as agents of consumption in their own right have focused predominantly on how this consumption reinforced the master/servant relationship and the wider household hierarchy. This chapter builds on the emerging history of consumption in the country house by exploring how servants expressed agency through their own cultural and material consumption, and how the community responded to deviations from accepted practices. In particular it focuses on the figure of the housekeeper.

Both historians and contemporary observers have identified the housekeeper as a woman of low status in society, despite her high status among the other servants. An advice manual to young mistresses and their servants in 1852 stated,

the office of housekeeper is one of great importance, she being the representative of the mistress, and having the servants and the entire domestic arrangements under her direction. This situation requires a superior kind of woman, and is in many instances filled by one who has known better days, but who by some misfortune has been reduced in the world.⁶³⁵

⁶²⁵ J. Stobart and M. Rothery, *Consumption and the Country House* (Oxford, 2016), p. 40.

⁶³⁵ *The Young Housekeeper's Essential Aid to the Thorough Understanding of the Duties of her Maid Servants* (London 1852), p. vi.

The 'reduced' woman who regained some of her respectability through employment as a housekeeper is included in Jessica Gerard's definition of the 'distressed gentlewoman' - one of four main categories of country house servants.⁶³⁶ Gilly Lehmann has analysed the origins of professional housekeeping in order to answer 'why women servants, even the most highly placed, were apparently so under-valued, both in terms of image and reward'.⁶³⁷ She concludes that housekeeping was devalued at the same time as domestic work underwent a process of feminisation and it was no longer respectable for a mistress to do her own housekeeping. The housekeeper thus lived in the shadow of her mistress, deferential and grateful to her higher-status employer but removed from the other servants, and therefore condemned to a life of isolated social stagnation. Tessa Boase's book on 'the women who really ran the English country house' likewise suggests that the common factor between housekeepers was 'the great hardship of their lives'.⁶³⁸ However, both Boase and Lehmann acknowledge 'the diversity one meets when examining a particular servant group'.⁶³⁹ Housekeeping was a profession which changed significantly over the course of the nineteenth century, and there was no such thing as a universal experience.

Rather than repeating the story of downward social mobility and the deferential mistress-servant dynamic, this chapter focuses on how one housekeeper emulated elite consumption in the country house for the purposes of upward mobility. Although Elizabeth Bickell's appointment as housekeeper at Chatsworth was to some extent charitable, it was also a step up in her career trajectory, and she embraced the opportunity for material and social gain. This chapter also explores the influence of middle-class values of restraint and self-sacrificial

⁶³⁶ J. Gerard, *Country House Life: Family and Servants, 1815-1914* (Oxford, 1994), pp.11-12.

⁶³⁷ G. Lehmann, 'The Birth of a New Profession: The Housekeeper and her Status in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries' in I. Baudino, J. Carré and C. Révauger (eds.), *The Invisible Woman: Aspects of Women's Work in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London and New York, 2016), p.9.

⁶³⁸ T. Boase, *The Housekeeper's Tale: The Women Who Really Ran the English Country House* (London, 2014), prologue.

⁶³⁹ Lehmann, 'The Birth of a New Profession', p. 24.

womanhood in an institution which is perceived to have been distinctly upper-class in its culture. In the absence of a mistress, Elizabeth Bickell's conspicuous consumption was policed by self-appointed moral arbiters in the estate community, whose influence reveals the complex interpersonal dynamics at play in the management and enjoyment of the country house.

Hierarchy and Consumption

Before analysing how Chatsworth's housekeeper overstepped the boundaries of what was perceived as acceptable consumption, it is important to establish how consumption was managed in the household. In keeping with the majority of country houses, Chatsworth's staff practised dining rituals which performed the hierarchy of the household and the wider estate.⁶⁴⁰ Some weekly account books for the years 1850-52 show that senior servants (referred to by their surnames) ate in the Steward's Room, while the rest (referred to by their first names or occupational titles) ate in the Servants' Hall.⁶⁴¹ As well as these daily practices, there were one-off events designed to reinforce and restore social order which featured the consumption of food and drink. When the Marquis of Hartington (later 6th Duke of Devonshire) came of age in 1811, parties were thrown for the tenants at each of the estates. At Chatsworth, tenants were arranged in groups according to their status, with the highest status guests seated inside the house and the rest outside. Around 100 local gentlemen and 'principal tenants' dined together in the painted hall.⁶⁴² They were allowed to drink as much ale, wine and punch as they liked.

⁶⁴⁰ See A. Gray, 'Broccoli, Bunnies and Beef: Supplying the Edible Wants of the Victorian Country House' in Stobart and Hahn, *The Country House*, pp.171-172.

⁶⁴¹ Book of Extra Expenditure, 1850-52 (uncatalogued), DC.

⁶⁴² Letters from Thomas Knowlton to Marquis of Hartington and John Heaton, 1811, L/95/38 and CS5/1999-2006, DC.

Over 500 ‘2nd class tenants’ were seated in the quadrangle, and could drink ale and punch (but not wine). In the park, over 20,000 people were supplied with beer. As well as reasserting the inter-community hierarchy, such occasions were designed to reinforce the position of the Duke and improve general feeling towards him.

Certain consumption rituals were more spontaneous and informal performances of deference. A song written in the notebook of a gardener encourages estate workers to raise a glass to the Duke, whether at Chatsworth or elsewhere,

The Duke of Devonshires health in a bumper drink round
For of all men he merits their praises
If 20 such Dukes in this country could be found
Theyd find work for our joiners and glaziers...
So let this be the to[a]st Boys wherever you go
Duke of Devonshire health & God bless him⁶⁴³

The call on the ‘boys’ to raise a toast illustrates how the consumption of alcohol was a unifying social activity which cultivated a sense of belonging, masculine camaraderie and community identity. This was a particularly important in a community with such an unstable population, in which staff came from a wide geographical area and often left after a few years.

While most consumption rituals centred on food and alcohol, material and cultural consumption also played a role in maintaining social order. Uniforms for the female servants were not introduced until later in the nineteenth century, but even before the iconic black-and-white dresses, caps and aprons, an element of uniformity was introduced through the accessories worn by female servants. In a photograph taken in the 1870s or 1880s, the female servants are wearing a similar style of clothing and many are wearing the same necklace. The status of male servants in the house and stables was distinguished by their liveries. Little else

⁶⁴³ Notebook of James White, 1838, CH14/7/3, DC.

is known about the material goods that servants wore and used on a daily basis, but the inventories state that each servant's bedroom contained a Holy Bible displayed on a bracket. This demonstrates how the prescription of material and cultural consumption extended into the servants' private spaces within the household.

Fig. 4.1: Photograph of the 7th Duke's household servants outside Flora's Temple, c.1880, DC.



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Although many rituals of consumption and goods provided to servants were designed to uphold the position of the Duke, he played little part in their conception and performance. Some were the societal expectation at the time and stated in many household guidance books. The arrangement of the servants in the Steward's Room and Servant's Hall at meal times, for example, was an established country house tradition and not unique to Chatsworth. In the majority of cases, however, it was a select handful of trusted senior servants who organised and enforced the appropriate consumption of food, drink and clothing. The stewards and land agents organised this at large events, for example the 1811 Chatsworth party was organised by Thomas Knowlton, the steward. The rest of the time the male servants, most of whom lived with their own families in the stables or on the estate, were paid a board wage which gave them a degree of financial independence. All that was supplied to them were liveries and beer.

The mediation of the beer allowance was particularly important to order in the household. While table beer brewed in the stables was provided to all servants as a matter of course, drunkenness was prohibited. In 1811, when the new Duke inherited Chatsworth, his agent John Heaton recommended that a new servant should be appointed for the sole purpose of monitoring behaviour and alcohol consumption in the Servants Hall,

There should be one Man in the Servants Hall who should have a governing power over the rest, and be responsible to the House Steward for the good management of the provision's and Liquor committed to his care, as well as for the conduct of the Servants in the Hall. When the Family are in the Country it will also be the duty of this Man, to see that all those who may have occasion to call at Chatsworth [etc.] upon Business, are treated with proper attention ; and that Drunkenness on all occasions be avoided as much as possible⁶⁴⁴

The phrase 'as much as possible', as well as the choice of 'avoided' instead of a stronger word such as 'forbidden', appears to acknowledge that some drunkenness in the household was

⁶⁴⁴ Household Establishments for Mr Heatons Perusal & Consideration, 25 December 1811, L/114/51, DC.

inevitable or even acceptable. The connection of drunkenness with visitors to the house suggests that the priority was not to forbid servants from indulging in drunkenness at all, but to maintain an appearance of sobriety in order to protect the household's reputation to outsiders. Drunkenness inside the house, therefore, was a less serious affair than in public. According to Pamela Sambrook, coachmen were particularly prone to alcoholism.⁶⁴⁵ The long hours coachmen had to wait for employers to call for the carriage after a ball were often spent in the refuge of a warm inn, or enjoying the hospitality of the host's Servants' Hall. Coachmen were some of the most conspicuous servants, dressed in the grandest liveries on top of a carriage which usually identified their employer. This may explain why, in 1833, the Russian Coachman Peter Wisternoff was denied his beer allowance at Chatsworth. His wife wrote on his behalf to the Duke,

I am taking the Liberty in writing to your Grace to say that Mr Ridgway [the Devonshire House steward] as left word the Russian Coachman is not to have any more Beer allowed him which he as had every since he come to England that is 6 years last june the Contract made at St Petersburg by the Directions of His Grace the Duke of Devonshire express that your Grace would allow and cause to be given a sufficient quantity of table Beer that give me reason to think it was not your Graces orders it should be taken off I hope your Grace will not be angry with me for taking the Liberty of writing to you on this Ocation. I hope your Grace will grant my request and say that Peter may have his Beer forward it hurt his feellings verrey much when he sent down and was denied of it not knowing that he was not to have any⁶⁴⁶

Whether Peter was denied his beer allowance due to previous behaviour, or a personal grudge, this letter demonstrates the importance of the beer allowance to the master-servant contract, and to the happiness of the servant. It also shows the control that senior servants exerted over the lower servants' consumption on a day-to-day basis.

⁶⁴⁵ P. Sambrook, *Country House Brewing* (London, 1996), p. 236.

⁶⁴⁶ Letter from Sarah Wisternoff to the 6th Duke of Devonshire, 17 November 1833, CS1/70, DC.

Although the male servants' clothing and beer allowance were closely monitored, they enjoyed greater financial independence than the female servants. Their wages were in general much higher than those of the female servants (the lowest-paid male servants, the porters, received almost double the wage of the housemaids), and they received a board wage with which to arrange their own provisions in their own homes.⁶⁴⁷ At the time of the 1841 census, there were eleven indoor live-in servants at Chatsworth, eight of whom were women.⁶⁴⁸ The numbers were periodically increased by around fourteen women who lived in the local villages and worked part-time as cooks, charwomen and laundry maids. The live-in female servants had little freedom to decide what they consumed. Instead of board wages, the housekeeper was responsible for providing them with food, and they received a small 'sugar allowance' for any extra luxuries. The housekeeper was expected to judge what to buy, and in what quantities, and claimed back this expenditure every week from the household accounts. The household at this time, therefore, was familial in its organisation. The female servants lived in the house and were dependent on the maternal figure of the housekeeper to provide for their basic needs.

Consumption and Misconduct

The exposure and investigation of misconduct centring on consumption were usually underpinned by ulterior motives, prejudices and inter-cultural tensions in the community. They are rich ground, therefore, for investigating agency within the structures of class, status and gender which governed the country estate. On 21 August 1837, the 6th Duke of Devonshire

⁶⁴⁷ Household accounts for Chatsworth, 1825-1846, C/165, DC.

⁶⁴⁸ 1841 census returns of England, Derbyshire, Chatsworth and Edensor, H.O.107/184/7, digital image Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> [last accessed 10 March 2017].

made the journey from Chatsworth to Bolton Abbey, where the head gamekeeper had been accused of misconduct.⁶⁴⁹ A renewed spirit of paternalistic interest had led him to tour his estate villages and make new designs for Edensor in the same year, and it now inspired the Duke to travel to his Yorkshire estate and personally interview the staff. Thomas Burgoine, the young head gamekeeper who had been trained by his father at Chatsworth, was accused by the head woodman, Mr Dickson, of misappropriating parcels of game and fish. According to Mr Dickson, Burgoine had sent 'great quantities' to his friend Mrs Boaler, an innkeeper at Harrogate.⁶⁵⁰ Game and fish were still highly-prized meats which were almost exclusively available to the upper classes, both in sport and consumption. Bolton Abbey's rugged moorland setting and deep, fast-moving river made it one of the Duke's favourite sites for fishing and shooting. Its gamekeeper, therefore, was in a position of great responsibility, which had been further inflated by the Night Poaching Act of 1828 and the Game Act of 1831. Game theft by the head keeper, if found to be substantiated, would have been a sackable offence or worse.

To the Duke's surprise, he found that the accusations levied against Thomas Burgoine were easily invalidated. The testimony of the waggoner who was supposed to have transported the game parcels indicated that the quantities had been modest, and were sent to appropriate recipients including one of the Duke's senior agents. The Duke found that Mr Dickson was not simply a loyal servant wishing to inform his master of a colleague's transgression, but an opportunistic bigot. Mr Dickson was fourteen years older than Mr Burgoine, who was only 22 at the time of the investigation, and despite their equal rank he felt himself in a superior position. Dickson complained that Burgoine, 'did not consider himself as being under him'.⁶⁵¹ Even more offensive to Dickson than Burgoine's refusal to defer to him, were his religious beliefs. Thomas Burgoine was a Wesleyan Methodist, who had 'lately become very serious-

⁶⁴⁹ Letters and memoranda concerning Thomas Burgoine, August 1837, L/83, DC.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*

might be going into ultraism... I am sorry to say my L[or]d that I have not a good opinion of him'.⁶⁵² The Duke visited Burgoine at his home, where he saw a portrait of the head gamekeeper holding a bible and used it as an opportunity to quiz him about his religious beliefs. He found that they differed only very slightly from the established church. Overall, the Duke 'saw nothing unconnected with true Xtian humility', and concluded that the whole thing was a 'vexatious' and 'lame affair'.⁶⁵³ Cases such as this, centring on consumption, were rarely straightforward breaches of the master-servant contract. They were usually far more indicative of social tensions within the estate community.

High Life 'Below Stairs'

Since the majority of servants were from the local area, social status inside the house could reflect that of their families outside. The 6th Duke's housekeeper, Hannah Gregory, came from a family of watch manufacturers in nearby Matlock. She was a wealthy woman in her own right, leaving an estate of over £6000 when she died.⁶⁵⁵ Hannah Gregory was related to Ruth and John Cottingham, who served the Duke as housekeeper and agent at Hardwick Hall, another of the Duke's properties nearby. The family was well-established locally, therefore, and might explain why a young Joseph Paxton, freshly arrived as an inexperienced and untested head gardener with no local family connections, began making plans to marry Sarah Bown on his first day at Chatsworth in 1826.

⁶⁵² *Ibid.*

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁵ Will of Hannah Gregory, Spinster of Chatsworth, October 1843, PROB 11/1986/370, National Archives.

It may have been the Duke's success with Joseph Paxton that inspired him to hire an unconventional replacement for Hannah Gregory when she died in 1843. The Duke's diary records how he left alone and drove 'through wind and storm' to Buxton, and offered the position to a woman called Elizabeth Bickell.⁶⁵⁶ The appointment was short-lived and Bickell was turned out of the house only two and a half years after she arrived, after it was revealed that she had entertained her friends in the Duke's private apartments. The few accounts written thus far about Miss Bickell (usually misspelt 'Bicknell'), and her ill-fated employment at Chatsworth, paint a picture of a 'silly woman' with delusions of grandeur. Most are based on the story told by Violet Markham, granddaughter of Sarah and Joseph Paxton, who adopted Sarah's dim view of the 'upstart' 'barmaid from Buxton'. In her retelling of the dismissal of Elizabeth Bickell, Markham writes,

Miss Bicknell was a silly woman. A little brief authority soon went to her head. Sarah, when writing to Paxton, refers increasingly to her unsuitable behaviour. An acid pen was used to some purpose in detailing various incidents. The housekeeper is ordering fruit and flowers for her friends ; she aspires to lead society at Edensor ; she has taken a party to Hardwick with servants to wait upon them ; actually she and her friends used napkins and silver forks. The Hardwick adventure was serious, but while disciplinary action was under consideration in London, news arrived of a crowning enormity. Sarah reported that Miss Bicknell had held a musical party in the Duke's private rooms... The Duke and his entourage at Devonshire House were shattered by the news. A punitive expedition of agents and house stewards, headed by no less a personage than Mr. Currey, advanced on Chatsworth. The criminal was confronted, duly charged with her sins and summarily ejected.⁶⁵⁷

Kate Colquhoun's biography of Joseph Paxton repeats the same story,

Hannah Gregory, who had died just before the Queen visited Chatsworth three years earlier, had been replaced as housekeeper by Elizabeth Bicknell, previously a barmaid

⁶⁵⁶ The 6th Duke's diary, 1843, DF4/2/1/23, DC.

⁶⁵⁷ V. Markham, *Paxton and the Bachelor Duke* (London, 1935), p. 146.

at Buxton. Sarah had written to her husband that the ‘upstart’ Bicknell was reported to be eating off silver and entertaining her friends at the Duke’s expense during his absences from the house. This was an affront of no mean proportions, tongues wagged and the workers in the villages around the estate twittered and trembled at the explosion they expected. The Duke duly flew into a rage and Paxton into such a passion that he felt his hair standing on end and had to restrain himself from flying to Derbyshire to throw Bicknell, physically from the house. Ridgway and Currey were galvanised, meetings and recriminations followed, and the housekeeper was smartly dispatched.⁶⁵⁸

Both accounts are entirely based on a handful of the letters of Sarah and Joseph Paxton, and neither author read the notes and witness statements connected to the incident, which were only discovered a few years ago. The simplification of the investigation and the responsibility that Colquhoun and Markham confer to the (male) Duke, agents and house steward, disguise the nature of the investigation and the key motivations and actors behind it. This was not a black-and-white case of a breach of contract between a master and servant. It was a case that revolved around inter-hierarchical tensions on the estate and in the household, in particular tensions bound up in class and gender.

The Duke and his agents had little to do with the matter until the die had already been cast, yet they have been credited with organising the ‘punitive expedition’, while Sarah was merely the informant. Although Elizabeth Bickell was eventually dismissed by the Duke for entertaining friends in his private rooms, he was oblivious until Sarah Paxton chose to raise the matter with him. The investigation says less about the upper-class Duke’s relationship with his servants than it does about an edifying middle-class presence in the household. The Duke’s role in promoting subversive behaviour in his servants have likewise been inflated. James Lees-Milne, in his biography of the 6th Duke, writes, ‘Domestic troubles relentlessly harass people who spoil their employees’. Lees-Milne’s assumption adopts a paternalistic view, infantilising the servants by assuming they stepped out of line due to a lack of boundaries and authority on the part of the Duke, rather than acknowledging the diverse motivations on the part of the

⁶⁵⁸ K. Colquhoun, *A Thing in Disguise: The Visionary Life of Joseph Paxton* (London, 2003), p. 143.

servant.

The investigation and dismissal of Elizabeth Bickell is told through the scribbled notes of the agents, witness statements of indoor servants and gardeners, the diary of the 6th Duke, the letters of Sarah and Joseph Paxton, and the letters of Elizabeth Bickell herself. Bickell's investigation was a seismic event in the Chatsworth household which resulted in the departures of nine further members of staff (half the household) and set in motion drastic alterations to the household management. A revisionist approach to the documents is therefore necessary to understand the nature of the Chatsworth household community in the nineteenth century.

The first detail that has been omitted from the stories by Markham and Colquhoun is that Bickell was not a whimsical choice, but was already acquainted with the Duke before he hired her in 1843. The 'barmaid from Buxton' was actually the housekeeper of the Great Hotel, which opened in the upmarket Buxton Crescent sometime before 1811 as part of the 5th Duke's regeneration of the spa town. It was a grand enough establishment that the Duke of Devonshire took the Duke of Sussex there for luncheon in September 1842.⁶⁵⁹ According to the 1841 census, Elizabeth Bickell managed twelve female servants and two male servants at the Great Hotel, four more servants than Hannah Gregory managed at Chatsworth in the same year.⁶⁶⁰

The Duke presumably met Elizabeth at the Great Hotel while she was acting in her prominent front-of-house role. He appears to have been taken with her personality, referring to her in one letter as 'no less a woman than Miss Bickell'.⁶⁶¹ In 1843 she applied to him for a £30 loan, calling him her 'only friend in the world', and he obliged.⁶⁶² Contrary to Markham's description of the whimsical Duke 'slipping off' to Buxton, when the pieces of the story are pulled together from the census and from letters, his motivations for employing her become

⁶⁵⁹ P. Hembry, *British Spas from 1815 to the Present: A Social History* (Madison, 1997), p. 120.

⁶⁶⁰ 1841 census returns of England, Derbyshire, Buxton, H.O.107/183/8, digital image Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> [last accessed April 2018].

⁶⁶¹ Fragment of a letter from the 6th Duke of Devonshire to Benjamin Currey, 1844?, L/83, DC.

⁶⁶² Letter from Elizabeth Bickell to the 6th Duke, 16 January 1843, CS2/128/0, DC.

clearer. He had witnessed her ability to run a successful establishment with a large staff, liked and trusted her enough to lend her his money, and knew that she was in a difficult financial position in the summer of 1843. When his housekeeper died in October that year, the Duke's thoughts naturally turned to his friend in need.

Hannah Gregory's death in October 1843 came at a busy time. Chatsworth was about to receive Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and several other nobles in December. The house, therefore, was in desperate need of a keeper to manage the servants through the winter period. The Duke hired Elizabeth Bickell in a temporary capacity as housekeeper for the Queen's visit. It was a significant responsibility, but he had already seen her manage the visit of the Queen's uncle at the hotel. As well as serving the royal party, there was an influx of traveling servants to consider, for which hotel management experience would have been useful. One newspaper reported,

As may be readily supposed, so great has been the influx of visitors to Chatsworth that beds are at a premium in this neighbourhood. Although several are made up in the passages of the mansion, some of the servants are compelled to sleep in the adjoining village of Edenso[r]. The Chatsworth Inn, where I am now staying, has beds in every room.⁶⁶³

The visit of Queen Victoria was hailed as a great success, and following this trial period, the Duke invited Bickell to take up the permanent position of housekeeper in April the following year.

⁶⁶³ 'HER MAJESTY'S VISIT TO CHATSWORTH', *The Morning Chronicle*, 4 December 1843 (London, England).

The decision was controversial, and Sarah Paxton soon decided that the Duke had made the wrong choice. She wrote to Joseph Paxton that Miss Bickell had become flustered with some visitors a couple of months into her role,

We have not had so grand a day today, about £3. You will be surprised to hear how fast Miss Bickell, is getting on, there was a large party today of 7 or 8 mostly women, respectable tradespeople they looked, she run about [and] found Lane, told him to take them round the Conservatory [and] she would send an order she then found Blanche, [and] got an order from her for a parson at Taddington the first party were quite surprised at her conduct, 6 of them asked her name, [and] if she [and] her husband did not keep and Inn!!! I never knew a woman so thoroughly wanting of ballast in my life. poor Duke, he has made a bad job of it I fear.⁶⁶⁴

As well as suggesting that Sarah meant that Bickell was lacking in ballast in the same manner as a ship, to keep her from haphazardly rushing around in front of visitors, the *Oxford English Dictionary* database suggests that Sarah may have meant that Elizabeth was wanting of ‘stability or steadiness... of a moral or intellectual kind’.⁶⁶⁵ This indicates the beginning of a common feature in the case of Miss Bickell, that she was not judged on her actions but on a sense of inherent personal unsuitability. Sarah repeatedly intimates Elizabeth’s inferior class by emphasising her invented association with bars and inns.

Sarah’s relationship with Elizabeth was not entirely negative over the subsequent two years, however. On several occasions they took tea together, and once Bickell settled into her responsibilities as housekeeper and tour guide, Sarah began to admire her ability to make money from visitors. In August, she wrote,

⁶⁶⁴ Letter from Sarah to Joseph Paxton, 27 June 1844, P/228, DC.

⁶⁶⁵ ‘Ballast’, *OED Online*, Oxford University Press (June 2008) [last accessed April 2018]

Oh dear we had a busy day yesterday but Miss B. managed capital. Mr. Elgin second porter Henry Bland [and] Milward assisting the maids in the house, [and] she says she made £10-!!! they were all decent people, no boys, or rubbish as it used to be, I got £6.5.0, which was very good.⁶⁶⁶

Although Sarah had a distaste for careless spending, she approved of an industrious entrepreneurial spirit, if applied respectably. Her assumption of the role of gatekeeper for Chatsworth, which would later drive the investigation of Elizabeth Bickell, is further demonstrated in this quick judgement of the social class of visitors entering the house. In addition to praising the housekeeper's ability to generate income from visitors, on another occasion Sarah commended how Bickell handled an illness in the house. A maid caught typhus fever while visiting her family.⁶⁶⁷ Elizabeth summoned two doctors and ordered the other maids to stay in the same room while the carpets were taken away and burned. When Elizabeth herself later became ill, Sarah was unsympathetic. During Elizabeth's illness, Sarah again appears to have seen her as a disruptive force to social order in the household.

Madam going on as usual Mrs. Wright has sent her a nurse from Wirks[wor]th she does not like her, [and] it has made her worse, I dare say the woman would stop some of her fooleries, a charwoman lays the stewards room cloth. [and] waits of dinner. Abraham cannot leave Miss B. the whole house is in a ferment, L[ad]y Georgiana went to see her again yesterday⁶⁶⁸

The steward's room was usually a space reserved for the senior servants, and the presence of a charwoman, the lowest-status servant, seemed to Sarah to undermine the prestige of the room and by extension the entire household.

⁶⁶⁶Letter from Sarah to Joseph Paxton, undated, P/248, DC.

⁶⁶⁷ Letter from Sarah to Joseph Paxton, undated, P/247, DC.

⁶⁶⁸ Letter from Sarah to Joseph Paxton, 24 October 1844, P/269, DC.

Sarah's letters are quiet on the subject of Miss Bickell until April 1845, when she confided to Joseph that Elizabeth had been caught preparing to entertain friends at Chatsworth,

Emily [and] Miss A. went to Chatsworth yesterday, they called in her room to see her, but found her table set out for 14, a sort of cold collation [and] they ran out again. I have not heard who they were. but from Buxton they heard.⁶⁶⁹

Nothing appears to have come out of this revelation. It is odd, then, that a similar event one year later led to the housekeeper's dismissal. On the 19th May 1846, Sarah decided to send an explosive letter to Joseph Paxton, who was in London with the Duke. It contained three serious accusations: that Elizabeth had ordered flowers to be cut for her own use, that she had taken servants to wait on her and friends during a picnic at Hardwick, and that she had accommodated these friends in the bachelors rooms at Chatsworth.⁶⁷⁰

As Sarah probably intended, Joseph showed the letter to the Duke, who was (according to Joseph) infuriated by it. It was agreed that Mr Currey, the chief agent, would investigate the matter and decide whether to send her away or give a final warning. Sarah stoked the fire with a further accusation on the 26 May,

I have heard something today which I consider the Coup d'oeil of Madams folly. it is neither more nor less than her making use of the Dukes private apartments, for her company last Sunday week!! a soirée musicale, if this sort of foolery is to go on, why the Duke is no longer master of his own house.⁶⁷¹

This final accusation was the most serious, and both Joseph Paxton and Benjamin Currey travelled to Chatsworth to interview the servants.

⁶⁶⁹ Letter from Sarah to Joseph Paxton, 13 April 1845, P/308, DC.

⁶⁷⁰ Letter from Sarah to Joseph Paxton, 19 May 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

⁶⁷¹ Letter from Sarah to Joseph Paxton, 26 May 1846, P/446, DC.

On the basis of the evidence collected by Currey, Ridgway and Paxton, the Duke decided to dismiss Elizabeth Bickell. This evidence included the statements and contributions of twenty-seven different people encompassing the whole range of the household hierarchy, indoor, outdoor and traveling staff as well as outsiders to the community, people in support of the housekeeper and people against her, and men and women. The statements and letters mention incidents and observations spanning several months or years. In order to discover the key issues at the heart of these complex documents it is helpful to use corpus linguistics.

Elizabeth Bickell on Trial

Transcripts from Old Bailey cases from the same time period, made available through the Old Bailey Online project, offer an extensive comparable corpus. By uploading transcripts of fifty court sessions from the years 1835 to 1857 (the two decades either side of the investigation at Chatsworth) into the corpus linguistic software AntConc, it is possible to generate a key word list.⁶⁷² This methodology can be used to filter out words that may appear significant to a modern reader but were in common parlance at the time, and identify words that are of particular significance to a set of transcripts according to the language of the period. The 8,000-word corpus of documents pertaining to the case of Elizabeth Bickell contains a vocabulary of 1473 unique words. A list of 200 key words, generated from a comparison with the Old Bailey transcripts suggest several themes were important to the investigation. Unsurprisingly, many of the words relate to people's names and points in time. This reflects the number of different

⁶⁷² T. Hitchcock, R. Shoemaker, C. Emsley, S. Howard and J. McLaughlin, *et al.*, *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online, 1674-1913*, www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 24 March 2012 [last accessed April 2018].

people involved in the case, as well as the emphasis on ascertaining who was implicated in the events and when these events occurred.

A significant number of key words relate to place names, such as Buxton and Chesterfield. These partly reflect Elizabeth Bickell and her social circle's outsider status. By far the most significant place words, however, relate to interior spaces at Chatsworth. The words 'rooms' and 'room' appeared 121 times overall. There was a particular emphasis in the investigation on which rooms had been entered, and by whom. Historians have argued that the nineteenth century was a time of particularly acute paranoia surrounding privacy. David Vincent has argued that the sensationally popular character of Paul Pry epitomised a society in which 'policing the boundaries was a constant challenge'.⁶⁷³ The issue of servants encroaching on privacy in the home has been assumed to have been a particular concern for the middle classes, who shared close quarters with their servants. Many middle-class mistresses felt spied on and judged by their maids, which fed their preoccupations with 'petty distinctions of rank'.⁶⁷⁴ Although owners of great houses like Chatsworth had the option of avoiding interaction (the 5th Duke of Portland famously took this to extremes at Welbeck with his subterranean suites and carriage tunnel), they were less able to monitor their servants' movements. The Duke of Devonshire was not obliged to cross paths with his servants in the corridor or to fear them overhearing his private conversations, but they could violate his privacy in other ways, through entering his rooms or rifling through his possessions. The Duke relied on his senior servants to police these areas for him, as well as to keep them clean and orderly. Elizabeth Bickell had a master key, so the problem was not her presence in his rooms in itself, but the activities she carried out within them and the access she allowed to others.

⁶⁷³ D. Vincent, *I Hope I Don't Intrude: Privacy and its Dilemmas in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2015), p. 239.

⁶⁷⁴ P. Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant* (Dublin, 1975), p. 13.

The specific rooms that are mentioned most frequently in the notes and witness statements are the ‘bachelors rooms’, ‘leather room’, ‘red velvet room’ and the ‘billiards’ room. The significance of each of these rooms can be gleaned through the 6th Duke’s *Handbook of Chatsworth and Hardwick*, finished in 1844, and a thorough household inventory taken in the same year. The leather room is mentioned the most, fourteen times. Although none of these rooms are specifically described by the 6th Duke as ‘private’ in the *Handbook* (others are), the Leather Room appears to have been a private space.⁶⁷⁵ According to the inventory it contained two writing desks and a waste paper basket, suggesting that the Duke used the room for writing, and therefore may also have stored documents there.⁶⁷⁶ The gravity of bringing outsiders into these spaces can therefore be inferred from their contents.

In addition to the issue of privacy, the witness statements hint to an association between spatial and sexual transgressions. In Elizabeth’s own statements she claimed that ‘Mr Wright [and] Mr Lees never slept in the House’, and that ‘No man [was] ever in the Leather room’, suggesting that inappropriate liaisons between men and women had been implied in the questioning.⁶⁷⁷ The only statement that explicitly accused Miss Bickell and her friends of sexual transgressions was that of John Gregory Cottingham, the land agent at Hardwick. He stated that Abraham Wheeldon, the steward’s room man, ‘keeps Company’ with housemaid Ann Hall, and that Ann’s sister Mary, also a housemaid, was ‘indecent’.⁶⁷⁸ Ann and Mary Hall were two of Elizabeth’s closest allies in the case, and when asked to describe her role in the household Ann answered, ‘Look after the Linen [and] give out all the stores. entirely devout myself to Miss B’.⁶⁷⁹ The housemaids’ support of the housekeeper appears to have been invalidated by their own improbity. Intermingled with the accusations of Mary and Ann’s

⁶⁷⁵ 6th Duke of Devonshire, *Handbook of Chatsworth and Hardwick* (privately printed, 1844), p. 44.

⁶⁷⁶ Chatsworth Household Inventory, 1844, CH36/7/3, DC.

⁶⁷⁷ Benjamin Currey’s notes, May 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

sexual misconduct are observations of spatial transgressions, in particular that they had shown visitors through the library.

Elizabeth Bickell and her housemaids were not entirely unjustified in believing they could invite guests to the house. Chatsworth welcomed thousands of tourists, who were allowed to enter the house and see many of the rooms. They were given a ticket to ‘present to the housekeeper’, suggesting that the housekeeper had authority over the admittance of visitors.⁶⁸⁰ Elizabeth also appears to have believed that she had permission to entertain her friends at Chatsworth. James Elgin the bookbinder remembered her saying, ‘my private friends I can take them when I like [and] where I like I have the Duke’s authority to do [so]’.⁶⁸¹ Likewise, Elizabeth’s friend Mrs Wright wrote in the housekeeper’s defense, ‘I always understood that Miss Bickell was at liberty to ask a friend occasiona[ll]y’.⁶⁸² The issue with Elizabeth Bickell’s friends was not their presence in the house, but the rooms they entered, and the nature of their presence. Bickell was using the house in the same way that the Duke used it - for her own entertainment and social advancement.

This use of the space extended into the gardens, and as the previous chapter argued, engendered tensions of authority in the predominantly masculine garden.

Northcote further says that Miss B told him about a fortnight ago she had a master Key of the Conservatory and the Duke allowed her to take her Miss B friends thro the Conservatory whenever Miss B liked. she Miss B said she had friends there [and] probably would take them thro[ugh] in the cart of the Even[in]g after the men had left⁶⁸³

⁶⁸⁰ Admission tickets for Chatsworth, 1849, DF4/3/1/1/2, DC.

⁶⁸¹ Benjamin Currey’s notes, May 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

⁶⁸² Letter from Anne Wright to unknown, June 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

⁶⁸³ Witness statements and notes, May 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

Elizabeth Bickell was at Chatsworth when Queen Victoria rode through the Conservatory in a carriage in 1843. Nockett's claim implies that Elizabeth was using the conservatory, as the house, to play out her upper-class fantasies. Two rooms frequently mentioned in the documents are the Red Velvet Room and Billiards Room. According to the 6th Duke's *Handbook*, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert used the Red Velvet Room as their breakfast room during their visit in 1843.⁶⁸⁴ The Billiards Room had a similarly political significance. The Duke remembered that 'here Charles Fox, Sheridan, Hare, Lord John Townshend, Fish Crawford and many other celebrities conversed' in his mother's day.⁶⁸⁵ Rooms that had been used as private entertaining spaces for royalty and politicians were now being used by the housekeeper for her own social advancement. People speculated that by using the physical space of the Duke's social world and mimicking his gatherings, Elizabeth hoped to be elevated into higher social circles. John Gregory Cottingham claimed that she tried to 'make herself out D[uke of] D[evonshire's] mistress', and others commented that she 'renders herself ridiculous' by talking of the Duke.⁶⁸⁶ Elizabeth Bickell's few supporters disputed these motivations and downplayed the activities that took place in the Billiards, Red Velvet and Leather Rooms. Anne Wright wrote in a long supportive letter that 'if she has done any wrong it has been from her anxiety to oblige her friends' by allowing them to see rooms that they wished to see, and had not invited them to musical parties.⁶⁸⁷

Music is a particularly contentious subject in the statements. The Leather Room, according to the inventory and the 6th Duke's *Handbook*, contained a piano.⁶⁸⁸ Sarah Paxton wrote that Bickell had held a 'soirée musicale' in this room, and the upholsterer George Munns

⁶⁸⁴ 6th Duke, *Handbook*, p. 64.

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

⁶⁸⁶ Benjamin Currey's notes, May 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

⁶⁸⁷ Letter from Anne Wright to unknown, June 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

⁶⁸⁸ 6th Duke, *Handbook*, p. 44.

similarly spoke of ‘music parties’.⁶⁸⁹ James Elgin testified, ‘the pianos have been very often discussed which was the best instrument’.⁶⁹⁰ Music is a common feature in cartoons depicting ‘high life below stairs’. Servants aping their employers by playing the piano, smoking cigars and reading the paper in the servants’ hall were regular caricatures in magazines such as *Punch*. Music was particularly dangerous to the harmony of the household. If it was loud enough it could disturb the household, and ‘kitchen music’ was derided as poor taste by employers. It might also mask the sound of the door bell or servants bells, and cause servants to neglect their duties. Finally, although songs such as the ‘Song to the Duke of Devonshire’, written in the notebook of the gardener, could unite employees in appreciation of their master, music and verse could also be a means of expressing grievances, and was a common means of doing so among eighteenth-century servants.⁶⁹¹

⁶⁸⁹ Letters and witness statements, May 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

⁶⁹⁰ Witness statement of James Elgin, *Ibid*.

⁶⁹¹ C. Steedman, *Master and Servant: Love and Labour in the English Industrial Age* (Cambridge, 2007), p.14.

Fig. 4.2: The caption of this cartoon, 'Music at Home' from Punch, or the London Charivari (1874) is inspired by the low cultural status of 'kitchen music'. 'Punch', The Internet Archive, www.archive.org [last accessed February 2019].



The use of the piano in the Leather Room was taken as evidence of Elizabeth Bickell's engagement in upper-class activities to the neglect of her other duties. Rather than planned 'parties' or 'soirées', however, the witness statements of the people present in the room suggest that the music occurred spontaneously, and Elizabeth Bickell is not even mentioned as a participant. Her friend Anne Wright admitted to listening to music, but claimed that her friend, Miss Laxon, 'sang a sacred song or two'.⁶⁹² The music was also attributed to a little girl, Elizabeth Bickell's niece, who was staying with her aunt at Chatsworth. She is the only person who was witnessed playing the piano, and Anne Wright claims that it was the little girl who asked Miss Laxon to sing. The implication of the little girl, and the description of the music as 'sacred' both serve to emphasise the innocence of the gatherings in the Red Velvet and Billiards rooms.

Equal to the significance of the rooms as private and upper-class spaces were their masculinity. Billiards was a men's game which the Duke played frequently with his male friends and personal servants. The Leather Room, as the name suggests, was furnished according to masculine tastes. This room also contained part of the library, bringing it under the authority of the librarian James Milward. In his statement, Milward complained that Elizabeth Bickell had not asked for his permission to retrieve books from the Leather Room, 'Miss B for a long time past has never asked him for any book that she might want, but has fetched them out and used them as she liked'.⁶⁹³ She had also 'had books from the upper Library- without Mr. M[ilward's] permission'.⁶⁹⁴ Elizabeth herself claimed that she had been given the Duke's permission to use the libraries, but Milward's statements suggest that Elizabeth, despite her senior status and master key, was expected to defer to her male colleagues. A similarly gendered conflict of authority occurred in the bachelors' rooms, the

⁶⁹² Letter from Anne Wright to unknown, June 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

⁶⁹³ Statement of James Milward, *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

masculine nature of which can be inferred by their name. The upholsterer, George Munns, claimed that Elizabeth had ordered his men to furnish the Bachelors' Rooms for her friends to stay in,

After the Duke left last time, he had the silk hangings [etc] taken down from the Bachelors Rooms. Miss B without speaking to Mr Munns, ordered one of his men to furnish the rooms again, they have all been used at once by Miss Bickells friends, and they are all furnished now.⁶⁹⁵

When the Duke left last time the furniture was taken down from these rooms about Easter, Miss B. ordered one of Mr Munn's men to furnish them [and] they are furnished now.⁶⁹⁶

Again, Elizabeth was criticized for failing to obtain permission from a male servant to use a room in a certain way, and furthermore she had ordered one of 'his' men to do something. This demonstrates how gendered spaces 'above stairs' were also gendered among the servants, and although the housekeeper ostensibly had the authority of the 'house', there were still complex social boundaries to negotiate within this domestic space.

The complaints about the books and the silk hangings demonstrate how the use of certain objects was just as significant as the use of certain spaces. Elizabeth Bickell did not only threaten Elgin and Munns' masculine authority by giving orders to the male servants under their authority, or using the rooms in their care. She also disrupted the principles of class and gender which underpinned the household hierarchy by using napkins and silver forks at dinner, while 'Munns [and] Elgin have steel forks and no Napkins'.⁶⁹⁷ Elizabeth Bickell's emulation

⁶⁹⁵ Statement of George Munns, *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁶ Statement of Catherine Tomlinson, *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁷ Letter from Sarah to Joseph Paxton, 19 May 1846, *Ibid.*

of upper-class culture and domestic rituals extended from the rooms she occupied to the objects she used and took possession of.

A copy of Heath's Book of Beauty was said by several servants to have been in Bickell's room for a fortnight, and was 'very much soiled and injured the plates loosened and one of them quite out'.⁶⁹⁸ Heath's Book of Beauty was an annual compilation of idealised portraits, fashion plates, short stories and poems written by and for upper-class women. It was edited by the Countess of Blessington, and a copy of the 1846 volume was presented to Queen Victoria by her daughter as a gift.⁶⁹⁹ The injury to one of the fashion plates may reflect Bickell's interest in upper-class dress. This was an interest which she also projected onto the maids in her charge, and one of the servants noted that in her first year 'she gave all the girls a silk dress'.⁷⁰⁰ Silk remained an expensive symbol of luxury and status, and although Bickell might have intended the gift to begin a positive relationship with her new subordinates, it was a highly unusual action for a housekeeper. Usually only male servants were provided with clothing. This gift exposes Elizabeth's inexperience with the particular customs of the country house. It might also have been an attempt to alter the appearance of the household. In addition to upgrading the clothing of the maids, Elizabeth bought new tablecloths for her room and ordered 'new porcelain', despite being ordered not to by the Devonshire House steward.⁷⁰¹ As well as emulating the tastes of the upper classes, Elizabeth put her own taste on display at Chatsworth. Country house servants, and the housekeeper in particular, were expected to appreciate the value of objects in the house and explain their provenance to visitors. Their own tastes, however, were irrelevant. Although taste was perceived to be something that could be cultivated and acquired, this was only possible through a classical education and the completion

⁶⁹⁸ Statement of James Elgin, *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁹ 'Heath's Book of Beauty', *Royal Collections Trust*, www.royalcollection.org.uk [last accessed May 2018].

⁷⁰⁰ Notes by Benjamin Currey, May 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid.*

of a grand tour, both of which were inaccessible to all but the most privileged. When Joseph Paxton went travelling through Europe with the Duke in 1839, he wrote back to Sarah,

you will be astonished at my knowledge of Sculpture, Pictures and other things belonging to the fine arts; I know a good picture or a fine piece of sculptor at first sight and in 9 cases out of ten can tell the master who executed them, I have likewise acquired considerable knowledge and taste in various other matters⁷⁰²

While the Duke educated his head gardener in fine arts, he despaired at the insistence of his house steward, George Spencer Ridgway, on employing his own taste in furnishing Chatsworth. One day he was ‘disgusted at finding an enormous gold lantern, in the worst taste covered with arms and a great red coronet’ at Chatsworth.⁷⁰³ On another occasion, Ridgway ordered tables for the bachelor rooms, ‘not wanted and of a kind so inconvenient and in such bad taste that no gentleman would like to use them’.⁷⁰⁴ Servants were supposed to understand elite taste, but not to emulate, covet or alter it.

The consumption and production of food also feature in the investigation as evidence of Elizabeth Bickell’s unsuitability. While the cook’s realm was the kitchen, the housekeeper had charge of the still room, and she was expected to be able to make a variety of preserves. However, George Munns claimed that Elizabeth had lied to the Duke about her culinary qualifications and had been buying produce for the still room rather than making it herself, ‘Miss. B never makes preserves, damson cheese, pickles [and] never did make them tho’ led DD to think she did so. Thinks bought them out of her own Pocket’.⁷⁰⁵ While the jams and pickles smuggled into the still room may have been paid for by Elizabeth, the dinners she

⁷⁰² Letter from Joseph Paxton to Sarah Paxton, 3 January 1839, P/65, DC.

⁷⁰³ Letter from the 6th Duke of Devonshire to unknown, 30 August 1837, DF4/1/8/3, DC.

⁷⁰⁴ Letter from the 6th Duke of Devonshire to Benjamin Currey, 11 March 1841, DF4/1/8/2, DC.

⁷⁰⁵ Notes by Benjamin Currey, May 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

served to her friends were paid for by the Duke. The details of the food served to Miss Bickell's friends from the Chatsworth kitchens were obtained from the cook and scrutinized, 'Beef for Do, [and] Lamb, Salmon, 2 fowls [and] piece of Bacon, Mould of Jelly [and] Custards [etc] Supper- for 9 persons. Miss B. friends [and] pudding'.⁷⁰⁶ Each of these foods were either expensive or time-consuming to prepare. At Hardwick she and her friends drank 'a bottle of champagne', which had been given as a gift by the innkeeper whose wife accompanied them, but was included as evidence of Bickell's extravagance.⁷⁰⁷

Elizabeth Bickell's dining habits were not only seen to constitute behaviour 'above her station', but they were damaging the household budget and distracting the other servants from their usual duties. Sarah Paxton suggested that Elizabeth Bickell had begun to see herself as the mistress of the other servants, rather than their manager. She wrote, 'if this sort of foolery is to go on, why the Duke is no longer master of his own house'.⁷⁰⁸ In the letter to Joseph Paxton that began the investigation, her main points of concern were flowers that had been cut from the gardens for her friends, the furnishing of the bachelor rooms, and most significant of all judging by the three exclamation marks, the presence of two servants at Hardwick to wait upon Elizabeth and her company,

Will you believe when I tell you that Miss B has had all the orange flower blossoms cut to day and other fine Flowers out of the Conservatory for some dirty trumpery wedding at Manchester, now what do you say to that, I am perfectly disgusted. Munns [the upholsterer] had furnished the Batchelors Rooms for her company [and] yesterday they went to Hardwick, took their Dinner with Abraham and Ann Hall to wait upon them!!!⁷⁰⁹

⁷⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁸ Letter from Sarah Paxton to Joseph Paxton, May 1846, P/446, DC.

⁷⁰⁹ Letter from Sarah to Joseph Paxton, 19 May 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

Abraham and Ann both denied that they had waited upon Elizabeth at all. Abraham explained that he had gone along ‘to take care of [the] women’, and Ann had visited her parents who lived at Hardwick.⁷¹⁰ However, by the time this explanation arose, the fat was in the fire and the investigation was underway.

There were conflicting accounts on all sides. While the cook claimed that Miss Bickell has had ‘so much [company] that she has had much difficulty to get thro the work’, the housekeeper’s friends claimed that their dinners were ‘very plain... never had wine’.⁷¹¹ There are even inconsistencies within the chief agent’s notes. While the neat copies of the witness statements that Benjamin Currey presented to the Duke contained only damning evidence against Bickell, his scribbled pages of notes were conflicted. Currey confessed in his notes that James Elgin (the bookbinder) and James Milward (the librarian), two of the primary witnesses, were ‘prejudiced against her’.⁷¹² Bickell and Milward had argued about a key, and she had threatened to write to the Duke about it. On another occasion, Elgin had become ‘violently angry’ at Elizabeth when she caught him snooping around the wine cellars. When Currey asked Bickell about this incident she could not answer his questions ‘without sobbing’.⁷¹³ Currey noted that Elgin spent his evenings at the Peacock at Baslow, and was ‘taking great liberties- Certainly given to drinking’.⁷¹⁴ Milward, too, was noted as a dubious character, ‘keeping company with Bar maid at Inn’.⁷¹⁵

It is possible that Elgin and Milward, having heard of Sarah’s letter about Bickell’s trip to Hardwick, conspired to escalate the investigation for their own benefit. On the 22nd May, Joseph Paxton wrote the following letter to the Duke,

⁷¹⁰ Notes by Benjamin Currey, May 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

⁷¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁷¹² *Ibid.*

⁷¹³ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*

My Lord Duke

The arrangement when I left London was for Mr Ridgway to come to Chatsworth about next Thursday and Mr Curry on the Saturday, however I think it sensible that Mr Ridgway should come at once for I met Mr Elgin yesterday who gave me such an account of what is going on at Chatsworth that I was almost inclined to go and take charge of it myself⁷¹⁶

When Ridgway, Paxton and Currey came together to discuss their lines of enquiry, they concluded that any wrongdoing by the other servants in the household was caused by the housekeeper ‘setting a bad example to ~~there~~ servants and also by inducing them to do what they ought not’.⁷¹⁷ This reflects nineteenth-century perceptions of the edifying role of women and their domestic work in the home. Like Lord Palmerston’s vision of the labourer’s wife, who must keep the cottage ‘decent and respectable’ in order to keep her husband away from the beer shop, the housekeeper is seen to be responsible for ensuring the moral health of the other servants.⁷¹⁸ Despite her status as a single, employed woman, Elizabeth Bickell is held to the same expectations as married women, as a moral influence over the entire household.

While some of the key words from the documents relate to the specifics of the investigation, such as names, places and times, others such as ‘says’, ‘thinks’ and ‘admitted’ reflect the interrogative process. There are also adjectives such as ‘liar’ and ‘prejudiced’, which indicate the contentious nature of the questioning. Strong arguments were posed by both sides, but the case against Miss Bickell fills far more pages. Many of the letters and witness statements, particularly those which made their way to the Duke, were written in the hand of Joseph and Sarah Paxton. By the time Elizabeth Bickell and her friends wrote to the Duke with their defense, the investigation was over and she had been dismissed. The following section

⁷¹⁶ Letter from Joseph Paxton to the 6th Duke of Devonshire, 22 May 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

⁷¹⁷ Notes by Benjamin Currey, May 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

⁷¹⁸ ‘Cottagers’, *The Gardeners’ Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette*, 23 (1863), p. 1046.

will show how it was Sarah and Joseph Paxton who were the main actors in shaping the course of the investigation and deciding the fate of Elizabeth Bickell.

It is apparent that even before the incident at Hardwick Hall, Sarah and Joseph had been making plans for Bickell's downfall and planting seeds of doubt in the house. Sarah writes in one letter that she has an 'informant, [and] he appears to know every transaction in the house'.⁷¹⁹ This implies that she had been monitoring events in the house as a precaution, using her influence over the indoor (male) servants. When Joseph informs Sarah that an investigation is about to begin, he writes, 'so you see matters are now ripened'.⁷²⁰ 'Ripened' is a particularly positive term for a gardener to use, and suggests that the Paxtons had been curating the conditions for the housekeeper's expulsion for some time, or were at least enjoying the events.

In cases of servant disobedience, the Duke typically went through the same cycle: uninhibited and involuntary emotion, a period of reflection, and resolution. The longer the Duke spent reflecting, the less emotionally-charged his resolution was. While travelling alone with his servants one day the Duke misplaced his money and strongly reprimanded Robert Meynell and Reinhard Kilbek, his valet and butler. The Duke wrote in his diary afterwards that he 'lost [his] temper and was all that was odious', reflected that 'life [is] too short to compensate for Meynell', and resolved never to forget what he had done, 'or cease to atone'.⁷²¹ Without the input and calming influence of an advisor, or distance from the situation, his brief and emotional period of reflection results in an extreme speech act, a promise which he later broke when both servants were dismissed.

In more serious cases when Joseph Paxton was consulted or felt obliged to intervene, he manipulated the Duke's resolution by speeding up or slowing down the preceding period of

⁷¹⁹ Letter from Sarah Paxton to Joseph Paxton, 22 May 1846, P/443, DC.

⁷²⁰ Letter from Joseph Paxton to Sarah Paxton, 21 May 1846, P/442, DC.

⁷²¹ 6th Duke of Devonshire's diary entry, 13 August 1846, DF4/2/2/5, DC.

reflection. In the case of Mr Smithers discussed in chapter two, the Duke described himself as feeling ‘disgusted’, ‘astonished’, and ‘very strong inclination [to] desire that an immediate stop should be made to the whole thing’ upon seeing the agent’s house covered in scaffolding.⁷²² The Duke felt so strongly about the incident that at one point he apparently suggested that Smithers and his family are transported to Australia, but in typical reluctance to come to an independent conclusion he consulted widely on how best to proceed. In a long letter to his London agent Mr Currey he wrote, ‘O I hope you will come before long and assist me in settling and defining what is to be done’.⁷²³ Paxton, sensing that the Duke was racing towards a resolution of the ‘affair’, wrote to Mr Currey, ‘I do believe His Grace may be properly brought round in time what I strongly advise is delay, time will temper it all down, and I hope Mr Smithers may be brought to stand in a good position again’.⁷²⁴

In the case of Miss Bickell, Paxton used the opposite tactic, attempting to speed up proceedings to prevent the Duke from changing his mind. As before, the Duke flew into ‘a terrific rage’ upon hearing of the housekeeper’s behaviour, and decided an immediate course of action,

the matter has ended thus, Ridgway is to go to Chatsworth next week to collect all the evidence he can and Mr Currey is to be down on wit Saturday or Monday to go into the matter, it will then be decided whether to send her away or to put her under such written instructions signed and dated that if she ever commits another [illeg.] no further notice is to be taken but she must go at once.⁷²⁵

This is reported by Paxton, but also confirmed by the Duke in a note. Anxious to keep this momentum going, Paxton wrote to Sarah, ‘you will have to prepare your witnesses, dont heath this those who has given you the information must be called up’.⁷²⁶ According to the *Oxford*

⁷²² Letter from 6th Duke of Devonshire to Benjamin Currey, 11 March 1841, DF4/1/8/2, DC.

⁷²³ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁴ Letter from Joseph Paxton to Benjamin Currey, 24 March 1841, DF4/1/8/2, DC.

⁷²⁵ Letter from Joseph Paxton to Sarah Paxton, 21 May 1846, P/442, DC.

⁷²⁶ *Ibid.*

English Dictionary, ‘to heath’ something in this period was the equivalent of allowing it to ‘grow moss’.⁷²⁷ In appropriately horticultural terms, Joseph was urging Sarah not to delay in gathering her evidence for the Duke.

In addition to speeding up the witness statements, Paxton allowed the Duke to come to independent conclusions. The Duke wrote, ‘I determined that Miss Bickell should no longer stay a moment that I c[oul]d help at Chatsworth, and made Meynell write to her to come to London directly... I may be wrong, but I have nobody to consult’.⁷²⁸ As opposed to encouraging trusted advisors to reason with the Duke, as Paxton did in the case of Mr Smithers, here he concentrated his efforts on gathering statements as quickly as possible, even going up to Chatsworth to do it himself when the other agents failed, and encouraging the Duke to come to an independent conclusion,

I thought it right to see the servants at Chatsworth this morning... I have not heard from Mr Ridgway to say that he is coming or any thing about Mr Curreys coming this information I have sent your grace today is so astounding that no further enquiry I should think is necessary, but of this your grace is the best judge.⁷²⁹

Taking advantage of the Duke’s indecisiveness, Paxton used positive politeness tokens to make him more amenable to reaching the same conclusion, calling him ‘the best judge’ of the situation. By contrast in the other case when the Duke had determined to punish Smithers, Paxton emphasised the health of the agent’s family to stir feelings of guilt and uncertainty. The Duke wrote, ‘Paxton gave me such an account of the condition of poor Mrs Smithers that I had not courage to continue’.⁷³⁰ The use of the word ‘courage’ suggests that the Duke still believed

⁷²⁷ ‘Heath’, *OED Online*, Oxford University Press (March 2016) [last accessed May 2016].

⁷²⁸ Letter from the 6th Duke of Devonshire, May 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

⁷²⁹ Letter from Joseph Paxton to the 6th Duke of Devonshire, 4 June 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

⁷³⁰ Letter by the 6th Duke of Devonshire, March 1841, DF4/1/8/2, DC.

that prosecuting the agent was the proper course of action, but that his lenient character would not allow him.

This internal conflict arose again at the conclusion of the Miss Bickell case. Paxton succeeded in persuading the Duke to dismiss Bickell, despite his hesitation evidenced in concerns that ‘I may be wrong’, ‘I may have been hasty’ and calling her ‘the poor woman’.⁷³¹ Paxton and the other agents predicted this uncertainty and self-doubt, and mediated it by presenting their evidence to him as follows,

The questions put for ~~our~~ a calm and unprejudiced answer are, Is Miss B. a fit person to be housekeeper If her misconduct is such as deserves dismissal we are desirous so to state it to you. The calm review is that Miss B is not a fit person⁷³²

The word ‘unprejudiced’ and the repetition of ‘calm’ imply objectivity. As well as removing the burden of decision-making from the Duke by advising that dismissal is the only logical course, they attempt to allay any suspicion of prejudice against the housekeeper.

Although the evidence was presented to the Duke by Joseph Paxton and the other agents, Sarah’s influence is evident in the questions that were posed to the servants. The interviews were structured around nine questions based on Sarah’s letters:

1. Ordering or sanctioning gathering orange flowers—Blossoms to be cut from Conservatory.
2. Furnishing Batchelors rooms for her Company to sleep.
3. The party to Hardwick with Abraham [and] Ann Hall to wait upon them.
4. 14 to dinner on Sunday the 17th May
5. Party on Friday the 28th when the arabesque West front rooms were used for music [and] singing.
6. ~~A fortnight The same thing the 27th and~~
7. Danger of ~~at~~ to Chatsworth from indiscriminate Visitors brought about it.

⁷³¹ Letters by the 6th Duke of Devonshire, 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

⁷³² Notes by Benjamin Currey, May 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

8. Miss B. from home all Tuesday the 26th and Thursday the 28 May... Is Miss B. a fit person to be housekeeper⁷³³

Although the Duke was persuaded to dismiss Elizabeth Bickell based on these interviews, the matters raised were evidently not as offensive to him as they were to Sarah and Joseph Paxton. Despite her short service, the Duke and his successor paid Elizabeth a substantial pension of £100 per annum until her death in 1865.⁷³⁴ The size of this pension, and its continuance by the 7th Duke, might suggest an element of guilt over the circumstances of her departure from Chatsworth.

The ‘calm and unprejudiced’ case put to the Duke by Paxton and the other agents was no such thing. Throughout the documents, it is clear that Sarah and Joseph Paxton disapproved of the housekeeper on a highly personal and emotional level. Her actions are considered as subsidiary to her general character, which Sarah had decided from an early stage was unsuitable for Chatsworth. A key word comparison between the cases of Elizabeth Bickell and Sydney Smithers demonstrates how the extent of Bickell’s misconduct was emphasised through temporal exaggerations such as ‘never’ (used six times) and ‘always’ (used eight times). In the case of Mr Smithers, on the other hand, Paxton emphasises the brevity of the land agent’s misdemeanour. In one letter, he uses the word ‘affair’ five times to describe what has happened.⁷³⁵ The main *OED* definitions of ‘affair’ encompass its meanings as a matter to be dealt with and an event, both of which suggest a finite beginning and end.⁷³⁶ Two of the uses of ‘affair’ in this letter are preceded by the word ‘unfortunate’, further framing Smithers’ active decision to extend his house without permission, as a passive and unavoidable stroke of bad luck. In the conclusion to the investigation of Miss Bickell, the ‘calm and unprejudiced’

⁷³³ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁴ Household accounts and the 7th Duke’s personal accounts, 1846-1865, C/165 and DF5/2/2/2, DC.

⁷³⁵ Letter from Joseph Paxton to Benjamin Currey, 24 March 1841, DF4/1/8/2, DC.

⁷³⁶ ‘Affair’, *OED Online*, Oxford University Press (March 2016) [last accessed May 2016].

presentation of facts quickly slides into opinion, and ends with the summary, ‘Her extravagance... Thoughtlessness and indiscretion and also her constant habit of ~~speaking~~ not speaking the truth which seems to be the universal opinion of her, insomuch as to amount to a proverb’.⁷³⁷ Positive opinions of Elizabeth Bickell were discounted due to the poor character of the interviewee, or the agents determined that they were said ‘with great hesitation’.⁷³⁸

Elizabeth Bickell was aware of the influence that Sarah, through the mouthpiece of her husband, had over the Duke. In her letters to the Duke she entreated, ‘that your own good, and most noble heart, be alone consulted, in this my earnest prayer to you’.⁷³⁹ Elizabeth may also have been referring to the Paxtons when she wrote, ‘you cannot imagine [sic] the feelings that reign in those, who under the appearance of Friendship, work ruin from unguarded words and actions’.⁷⁴⁰ Elizabeth and Sarah had taken tea together on several occasions, and had shared in the success of profitable open days. Sarah and a few other individuals had known about the flower cuttings and the dinner parties for over a year. Why, then, did the Paxtons, and Sarah in particular, turn against Elizabeth Bickell in May 1846?

On the 22nd May, after having sent the first accusatory letter about Miss Bickell’s escapades at Hardwick, Sarah wrote to Joseph,

Miss B never was, nor never will be a proper person for Chatsworth, and it would be to the Dukes interest, and every servants comfort about the place, to see her again settled at Buxton, in the bar of an Inn, where she came from.⁷⁴¹

⁷³⁷ Notes by Benjamin Currey, May 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

⁷³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁹ Letter from Elizabeth Bickell to the 6th Duke of Devonshire, 16 June 1846, CS2/128/4, DC.

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴¹ Letter from Sarah to Joseph Paxton, 22 May 1846, P/446, DC.

It was this quote which began the enduring myth that Elizabeth Bickell was a barmaid at an inn before the Duke hired her at Chatsworth, rather than the housekeeper of the Great Hotel. This exaggeration reflects Sarah Paxton's preoccupation with class. Sarah Paxton denied the success that Elizabeth Bickell had earned through her hotel career by degrading her from a hotel housekeeper to a barmaid. The focus on the bar, and by extension on the consumption of alcohol, further hinted at Elizabeth Bickell's inherent unsuitability. The frequent association with Buxton has also emphasised her status as an outsider to the estate community. Although Sarah herself attributes her disapproval of Elizabeth's character to class, implied intemperance and outsider status, these are insufficient to explain her determination to get rid of the housekeeper. Sarah Paxton's own husband was the son of a farm labourer, and together they had transcended class barriers to achieve wealth and status. Secondly, although Sarah and Joseph were opposed to excessive drinking they were not entirely teetotal themselves. There were also many other intemperant servants whom Joseph and Sarah do not appear to have made attempts to dismiss. Finally, Buxton was not much further away from Chatsworth than Matlock, where Sarah's family originated. Sarah's dislike of Elizabeth can be better explained by the threat that Elizabeth posed to her values of domestic responsibility and familial duty.

The Housekeeper's Place

The case of Elizabeth Bickell centred on conflicting ideas about the nature of the authority associated with the position of housekeeper, and in what capacity it was appropriate to assert this authority. A week before sending the letter which triggered the investigation of Miss Bickell, Sarah had sent a letter to Joseph complaining of two incidents which had occurred that

week. Mr Swaffield, the estate bailiff, had called on Sarah to donate some money to buy a gift for the village vicar.⁷⁴² Sarah had offered a guinea, but after being urged to donate three guineas she had settled on two guineas ‘but not more’. Mr Swaffield then went to Miss Bickell, ‘who has made herself the laughing stock of the neighbourhood by giving 3 guineas, determined to outdo me’.⁷⁴³ Sarah interpreted Elizabeth’s donation as a social coup- an attempt to embarrass the Paxtons and destabilise their position in the community. Furthermore, she had heard that Miss Bickell was going to have her sister placed at Hardwick, and ‘ask the Duke for a presentation to the blue coat school!! for her nephew’.⁷⁴⁴ The notion of Elizabeth’s sister being placed at Hardwick must have brought to mind uncomfortable parallels with Sarah’s aunts, of the Gregory dynasty which had straddled Chatsworth and Hardwick before Hannah Gregory’s death in 1843.

It would have been impossible for Sarah, and for the rest of the estate community, not to draw comparisons between Elizabeth Bickell and Hannah Gregory. Mrs Gregory had held the position of housekeeper for fifty years and was immortalised in local guide books.⁷⁴⁵ Like Pemberley’s housekeeper in *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs Gregory was the friendly face of the Chatsworth to visitors. She mediated their consumption of the art and history of the house and acted as the hostess when the Cavendish family were away. There are few mentions of Mrs Gregory in letters in the archive, other than instructions addressed to her to prepare the house for the Duke’s arrival, and reports on her health towards the end of her life. Her absence in the archives in itself is indicative of Hannah’s character and the expectations of a housekeeper. She evidently did not do anything worthy of note; protecting the house against scandal and

⁷⁴² Letter from Sarah to Joseph Paxton, 14 May 1846, P/437, DC.

⁷⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁵ See W. Adam, *The Gem of the Peak ; Or, Matlock Bath and its Vicinity* (London, 1840), p. 108.

gossip rather than generating it. This is echoed in a description of Mrs Gregory by the Devonshire House steward George Spencer Ridgway when she died,

You will regret to hear of the death of Mrs Gregory which occurred last night without a pang, she was really a good [and] careful servant to His Grace for nearly 53 Years [and] I sincerely hope she is happy and in heaven where her days are unclouded [and] her nights undisturbed⁷⁴⁶

Ridgway's hope that Mrs Gregory's days are now unclouded and her nights undisturbed hints to the personal sacrifices expected of the housekeeper.

In taking up the position of a housekeeper, a woman forfeited her right to a family of her own. She was additionally expected to keep as little company as possible. An advice guide for mistresses and their servants published in 1852 stated that servants should avoid 'a large connexion', and that housekeepers in particular 'should have but few visitors, and should not be out, except on particular occasions'.⁷⁴⁷ Like governing, housekeeping was understood as a last resort for women in financial difficulty. The advice manual states that the role of housekeeper, 'is in many instances filled by one who has known better days, but who by some misfortune has been reduced in the world'.⁷⁴⁸ Although the role brought a certain degree of respectability and financial stability, it was not a role to be enjoyed or striven for. The housekeeper carried a heavy weight of responsibility, 'it is seen that the domestic interests and property of her employers are completely in the housekeeper's care; therefore it behoves her to feel this at all times'.⁷⁴⁹ This meant that the housekeeper was expected to put the interests and comfort of her employers before her own at all times, in gratitude for elevating her from

⁷⁴⁶ Letter from George Spencer Ridgway to Benjamin Currey, 5 October 1843, L/83, DC.

⁷⁴⁷ *The Young Housekeeper's Essential Aid*, p. vi.

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. vii.

reduced circumstances. Anne Wright drew on this rhetoric of self-sacrifice in her defence of her friend Elizabeth Bickell, writing, 'she has to the uttermost done her duty in her situation and had the Duke's interest at heart more than her own'.⁷⁵⁰ However, the simple fact of Elizabeth Bickell's friendships was enough to invalidate any idea of her devotion to her employer.

Mrs Gregory, in contrast to Miss Bickell, was defined by others by her self-sacrifice and familial duty. Although Hannah Gregory was a single, employed woman of considerable means, she was able to conform to a respectable image of domesticated womanhood. The honorary title 'Mrs' bestowed her the seniority that was traditionally conferred to a woman through marriage. It prevented the suggestion of a future romantic attachment and implied a state of dormant widowhood. Elizabeth Bickell is invariably referred to as 'Miss'. The title 'Miss' is used over 150 times in the documents relating to the case, and appears to have been used to emphasize Bickell's inexperience, lack of commitment and sexual availability. John Gregory Cottingham, the Hardwick agent, wrote that 'Miss B tries to make herself out D[uke of] D[evonshire's] mistress'.⁷⁵¹ Sarah Paxton likewise refers to Elizabeth exclusively as 'Miss B'. However, it is likely that the title 'Miss' transferred over from how she was addressed in the hotel industry which, as commercial rather than domestic setting, relied less on familial structures than the country house. The frequency with which she is referred to as 'Miss' before the investigation, including in newspaper reports about royal visits, suggests that it may have been a title she chose to be known by.

While Elizabeth Bickell was defined by her unattachment and irresponsibility, Hannah Gregory was defined by sacrifice and suffering. During her life, several sources mention her distress at building works occurring at Chatsworth. In 1839 Joseph Paxton wrote to the Duke,

⁷⁵⁰ Letter from Anne Wright to unknown, June 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

⁷⁵¹ Notes by Benjamin Currey, May 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

‘I never saw Chatsworth in such a rubbishy state, Mrs Gregory is in great trouble about it’.⁷⁵² Similarly in the Duke’s *Handbook*, he remembers ‘the housekeeper’s despair at another wall broken through!’.⁷⁵³ As well as the difficulty of keeping the house presentable during building works, Chatsworth was Hannah Gregory’s permanent home, and the 6th Duke’s extensive construction works may have troubled her on a personal as well as professional level. In recognition that Chatsworth was his housekeeper’s home as well as his own, the Duke delayed altering her rooms, ‘from unwillingness to disturb Hannah Gregory’.⁷⁵⁴ Elsewhere in the *Handbook*, Hannah is referred to as ‘poor dear Mrs Gregory’.⁷⁵⁵ The adjectives ‘poor old’ and ‘poor dear’ were so closely associated with Hannah that in Sarah Paxton’s letters it became abbreviated to ‘p-d’, for example, ‘I opened another from him this morning informing P-d Aunt Gregory that the King of Wirtembergs son would call to see Chatsworth but did not say when’.⁷⁵⁶ ‘Poor old’ Mrs Gregory had to live with the anxiety of the prospect of European royalty arriving at the doorstep at any moment. As George Spencer Ridgway implied, her nights were prone to disturbance.

Despite suffering from illness for several years, Hannah Gregory’s continued to serve the Duke in her old age with the help of her two nieces, Sarah and Mary. In 1839 Sarah wrote to her husband,

my aunt is poorly with influenza, she is very weak [and] feeble. I hope nothing will prevent your coming on Saturday she talks much about you, she was taken suddenly on Tuesday with shivering she is much better this morning/ [and] had a good night, we were considerably alarmed about her yesterday, perhaps you had not better say any thing about it, she is so vexed for any one to think she is ill, and I much hope she will rally again⁷⁵⁷

⁷⁵² Letter from Joseph Paxton to the 6th Duke of Devonshire, May 1839, CS6/4065, DC.

⁷⁵³ 6th Duke, *Handbook*, p.143

⁷⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.112.

⁷⁵⁶ Letter from Ruth Bown to Sarah Paxton, June 1843, P/151, DC.

⁷⁵⁷ Letter from Sarah Paxton to Joseph Paxton, 9 May 1839, P/79, DC.

Four years later, Elizabeth Bickell also fell ill. The Duke wrote in his diary, ‘A bad account from Holmes of poor Miss Bickell, I thought her appearance dreadful’.⁷⁵⁸ Sarah Paxton did not express any such sympathy for the new housekeeper. In contrast to her self-effacing aunt, Miss B was ‘carrying on her farce, with a vengeance 5 people day [and] night to attend upon her... Oh dear she is a perfect D[evil]’.⁷⁵⁹ Sarah Paxton observed with horror as Elizabeth Bickell defied the personal and professional conventions followed so meticulously by Hannah Gregory, and gained the sympathy and attention of the household as a result.

Sarah’s middle-class attitude to domestic responsibility can be glimpsed in the inventory taken in 1865 of the Paxtons’ house Rockhills, in Sydenham. The house was situated next to the Crystal Palace, and is where Paxton resided and conducted his business for most of the decade before his death. The entertaining rooms contained ornate Chinese screens, marble-topped tables and Boule cabinets.⁷⁶⁰ Behind closed doors, Sarah Paxton’s personal sitting room was far more modestly furnished. It contained only a table, a couch and a suite of chairs, including a prie-dieu chair for kneeling on to pray. The Paxtons believed that material wealth was a necessary of demonstration class and taste, but it was not something to indulge in privately. They prided themselves on their ability to furnish their houses cheaply and tastefully, and Joseph’s letters often contain references to his thrifty purchases,

the Bill enclosed will shew you the extent of the purchase, the things bought are quite beautiful and you will go off your head when you see the china and to see how cheap I bought to[o]⁷⁶¹

⁷⁵⁸ 6th Duke of Devonshire diary entry, 3 November 1844, DF4/2/1/24, DC.

⁷⁵⁹ Letter from Sarah to Joseph Paxton, 23 October 1844, P/268/A, DC.

⁷⁶⁰ Inventory of Rockhills, 1865, P/1726, DC.

⁷⁶¹ Letter from Joseph to Sarah Paxton, undated, P/148, DC.

I have bought (very cheap) some beautiful stones which I am sure you will like and also some chamoize [chamois] horns in the far famed Chamonni.⁷⁶²

I have bought a beautiful Turkey carpet that will do for either of our rooms and two Persian rugs they are very cheap and I am sure you will like them.⁷⁶³

I am just going to the cheap shop to see if I can purchase you something⁷⁶⁴

By exercising restraint in all areas of their consumption, Sarah and Joseph Paxton were able to retain the wealth they had worked hard to accumulate. This restraint was not only a conscious effort for the sake of their finances, but an integral part of Sarah's identity as a middle-class wife.

Elizabeth Bickell did not appear to think that housekeeping necessitated a sacrifice. She embraced the opportunities presented by her position. For her, being a housekeeper did not signify a step down in the world, but a step up. She refused to be lonely as she surrounded herself with friends and family, and set about making friends of the maids under her care by buying them each a silk dress. She did not set her income aside for her family, but spent it on clothes. She enjoyed frequent trips away from the house. Elizabeth refused to be blind to the material wealth surrounding her, and made full use of the rooms, produce and objects available. This behaviour was a personal affront to Sarah's values. In 1839 Sarah had written to Joseph Paxton, who was abroad travelling with the Duke, 'I cannot tell you what is doing in Chatsworth house, I have only been there once since you left home [six months previously] I long to see the drawing rooms, but must wait till I am invited'.⁷⁶⁶ Elizabeth Bickell's brazen

⁷⁶² Letter from Joseph to Sarah Paxton, 13 October 1838, P/52, DC.

⁷⁶³ Letter from Joseph to Sarah Paxton, 2 April 1839, P/73, DC.

⁷⁶⁴ Letter from Joseph to Sarah Paxton, 12 August 1841, P/121, DC.

⁷⁶⁶ Letter from Sarah Paxton to Joseph Paxton, March 1839, P/71, DC.

departure from the principles established by Hannah Gregory, and the benefits she reaped as a result, were taken by Sarah Paxton as a personal affront.

In her letters to Joseph Paxton, Sarah calls Elizabeth the ‘Tigress’. According to the *OED*, the meaning of this word in the mid-nineteenth century was primarily ‘a vulgarly or obtrusively overdressed woman’.⁷⁶⁷ However, the comparison to a wild Indian animal seems notably specific. Although it ‘others’ Bickell like many of Sarah’s other descriptions, it also exoticises her. The gardens that Sarah and Joseph presided over at Chatsworth were filled with plants collected throughout the British Empire. The gardens embodied Britain’s mastery over its imperial landscape, while Miss Bickell represented the wildness, resistance and disorder that threatened it. The metaphor of the tigress might also indicate the threat that Sarah perceived in ‘Miss’ Bickell’s sexuality.

The intense dislike that Sarah Paxton held for the new housekeeper can be understood in the context of Sarah’s outlook on domestic authority and appropriate class and gender roles, but her personal circumstances also offer essential context. Elizabeth Bickell arrived at Chatsworth during a difficult period in Sarah Paxton’s life. As well as mourning her aunt, Sarah was preoccupied in 1845 and early 1846 with fluctuating success in railway shares, an absent husband, and concerns for the ever-worsening behaviour of their son George, who was becoming violent. She also felt overworked in her role as host to Joseph Paxton’s business associates, writing in one letter that ‘many a time have I suffered for it by over exertion’.

Sarah’s experience of being called upon by her husband’s friends and associates had parallels with the housekeeper’s duty to accommodate the Duke’s friends at Chatsworth. Elizabeth Bickell and Sarah Paxton were in similar circumstances, both entrusted with the responsibility of running a household. They were also a similar age, with a similar level of

⁷⁶⁷ ‘Tigress’, *OED Online*, Oxford University Press (March 2016) [last accessed May 2016].

education and strength of personality. In other circumstances they might have found refuge in each other's company. However, while Sarah drowned in anxiety about her absent husband, financial strains and wayward son, the single Miss Bickell had the freedom to visit friends in Manchester and entertain them at Chatsworth. She was not burdened with maternal duty and familial responsibility, or so Sarah thought.

A 'Fallen Woman'?

Unbeknownst to Sarah, Elizabeth Bickell, too, was struggling with family problems. Her brother-in-law died in February 1846, and it was revealed on his death that he was over £600 in debt.⁷⁶⁸ Her sister was in a desperate state, and Elizabeth helped by giving her an allowance and buying clothes for her children.⁷⁶⁹ She also asked the Duke to find her nephew a place at a blue coat charity school, and to find her sister a position at Hardwick.⁷⁷⁰ What Sarah had interpreted as a threat to the Gregory dynasty was actually an attempt by Elizabeth to alleviate her sister's suffering. Elizabeth also sent an allowance to her elderly mother.

Following her dismissal, Elizabeth sent two letters to the Duke, which are imbued with the rhetoric of familial duty. She begged him to reinstate her at Chatsworth, or if that was not possible, to find another position for her so that she might help her family, and even appealed to the Duke's memory of his own mother, 'My dearest Mother is suffering severely, and I cannot aid or comfort her, Oh! my Lord for the sake of your own good Mother, enable me to

⁷⁶⁸ Notes by Benjamin Currey, May 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

⁷⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷⁰ Letter from Sarah to Joseph Paxton, 14 May 1846, P/437, DC.

convey some consolation to mine'.⁷⁷¹ Although the prevailing view of Miss Bickell was that she had lost her money through extravagance (as Benjamin Currey's notes say, 'Buys [and] gives to her friends. Chaises in going out. Clothes. Has spent all her money'), a large amount of her income went to repaying her debt to the Duke, and to helping her sister and mother.⁷⁷² Mariana Verde argues that frivolous spending on clothes was a common narrative in discourse surrounding the 'fallen woman'. The moral meaning attached to clothing, she argues, 'played a key role in the moral regulation of working-class women' and helped to legitimize their oppression.⁷⁷³ It is unsurprising, then, to see Elizabeth's moral character so closely tied to her expenditure, particularly on clothes. Perhaps aware of avoiding stigma, Elizabeth strove to keep her financial burdens a secret, and asked the Duke 'with the most implicit confidence' never to tell anyone about the loan he had given her.⁷⁷⁴

Elizabeth also had another secret which it seems nobody knew, even the Duke. There is persuasive evidence to suggest that Elizabeth's 16-year-old 'niece' Louisa, who had been staying at Chatsworth and playing the pianos, was actually her daughter. Although the girl was told that her mother was Elizabeth's sister, no such sister can be found in any birth, marriage or death registers in the complete records of the Bickell family's parish in Plymouth, and Louisa's baptism record states that her mother's name is 'Elizabeth'.⁷⁷⁵ The circumstances of Louisa's birth were kept a secret by the family because she was born out of wedlock to a Portuguese father who left the country before a marriage could take place. Louisa Elizabeth Augusta Viera dictated her memoirs to her daughter-in-law in the 1890s. It appears that even

⁷⁷¹ Letter from Elizabeth Bickell to the 6th Duke, 8 June 1846, CS2/128/3, DC.

⁷⁷² Notes by Benjamin Currey, May 1846, DF4/1/8/1, DC.

⁷⁷³ M. Valverde, 'The Love of Finery: Fashion and the Fallen Woman in Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse', *Victorian Studies* (vol. 32, 1989), p. 168.

⁷⁷⁴ Letter from Elizabeth Bickell to the 6th Duke, 16 January 1843, CS2/128/0, DC.

⁷⁷⁵ Baptism Record for Louisa Elizabeth Augusta Viera, Stoke-Damerel, Devon, 11 September 1830, www.ancestry.com [last accessed February 2019]; I am grateful to Bickell's descendants Andrew Ellis, Bill Jager, Emilie Hance and Pat Bird for making their meticulous research into their ancestor available online and for sending me their family's memoirs.

she did not know the true circumstances of her birth, or at least decided to preserve the more respectable family story, that her mother (also Louisa) had married the Portuguese Antonio Josepphus Viera (in the story he is a Spanish count) before dying in childbirth. Louisa's memoirs were summarised and typed by her daughter-in-law, including reminiscences of her time at Chatsworth,

It was at this home Aunt Betsy [Elizabeth Bickell] had asked if Louisa had musical talent. Here she had fine clothes, fine work box--did not sew--and a great change in elegancy. Louisa was fifteen. She was to be sent to Germany to a boarding school, but Aunt Betsy suddenly left Duke of Devonshire's household, so--that ended that. (Story of the Duke's secret piano room).⁷⁷⁶

The revelation that Louisa was secretly Elizabeth's daughter, and the attention Louisa remembers her aunt lavishing on her, rewrites Elizabeth Bickell's motivations for acting 'above her station' while housekeeper at Chatsworth. A new story can be written of a mother who risked her professional reputation by buying new clothes for her daughter, allowing her daughter to cultivate her musical talent on the Duke's 'secret piano' and pushing her familiarity with the Duke in order to win his support in finding a place at a boarding school. Elizabeth Bickell therefore defies the narrative of the fallen woman, overcome by her circumstances and rendered powerless.⁷⁷⁷ Through employment at the country house, Elizabeth was able to avoid the stigma of her child's illegitimacy and, although she was unable to disclose her secret, to personally supervise her child's education and upbringing. Ironically, the risks that Elizabeth took in trying to care for Louisa gave others the impression that she lacked the maternal responsibility expected of a housekeeper. Five years after leaving Chatsworth, Elizabeth was

⁷⁷⁶ 'Granny's Story', oral history by Louisa Vincent Gibson dictated to Emilie Martin Gibson, 1890s, publicly available on www.ancestry.com [last accessed April 2018].

⁷⁷⁷ See G. Braun, "'Untarnished Purity': Ethics, Agency, and the Victorian Fallen Woman', *Women's Studies* (vol. 44, 2015), pp. 342-367.

able to care for her daughter again when she obtained a position as a housekeeper at the Queen's Hotel in Manchester.⁷⁷⁸ She sent for Louisa to join her in 1851 and they worked together as housekeeper and bookkeeper for several years until Louisa married.

Whether Elizabeth's behaviour was motivated by motherly care or by careless self-indulgence, she was guilty of being seen to enjoy, through conspicuous consumption, the advantages of an occupation that was considered to be a 'job for the desperate'. In a period which saw an increasing veneration of the self-sacrificing wife, a woman who took pleasure in her employed spinsterhood, apparently claimed to be the Duke's mistress and advertised her sexual availability by using the title 'Miss' instead of the customary 'Mrs', was a destabilising force to a country house hierarchy which mirrored the patriarchal foundations of society more widely. Indeed, Elizabeth's rejection of the behavioral and linguistic shackles of demure widowhood does appear to have inspired a spirit of independence in the other female servants. When Elizabeth was dismissed, three of the maids handed in their notice and left in protest. She had won their affections by deviating from the cold detachment that housekeepers were supposed to display towards their inferiors. Elizabeth's predecessor Hannah Gregory had enjoyed some social esteem and financial independence as a housekeeper, leaving over £6,000 when she died, which she may have gained by speculating in railway shares. However, the relative independence experienced by 'poor old Mrs Gregory', whose days were clouded and nights disturbed, was subsumed in the language of marital attachment, self-sacrifice and suffering.

⁷⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, confirmed in the 1861 census returns of England, Lancashire, Manchester, R.G.9/2945, digital image Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> [last accessed 01 May 2018].

The New Housekeeper

The occupation of female housekeeper was still relatively new when Hannah Gregory took on the position. Chatsworth's housekeeper in the early eighteenth century had been male. As Gilly Lehmann has written, until the late seventeenth century, the majority of servants were male, and the roles that would later be carried out by the housekeeper were taken on by the mistress of the household herself.⁷⁷⁹ As domestic service shifted from a predominantly male to a female occupation around the beginning of the eighteenth century its value and status decreased, and whereas before mistresses who participated in domestic work were praised for their skill, they were now presumed to be impoverished.⁷⁸⁰ Lehmann suggests that the mistress's role in the household was consequently divided between two servants - the cook and the housekeeper. Until this shift, the still-room had been 'the domain of the mistress of the house, where she prepared distilled waters and preserves and sweetmeats'.⁷⁸¹ This is how Tessa Boase identifies the realm of the housekeeper in the early nineteenth century,

She started the century a more subordinate, explicitly feminine figure-pickler, preserver, sweet maker, distiller; in charge of all store cupboards and material things, a large bunch of keys clinking at her waist as she checked her housemaids' work.⁷⁸²

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the housekeeper became separated in her appearance and demeanour from the mistress whose role she had taken on. The housekeeper shifted from

⁷⁷⁹ Lehmann, *The Birth of a New Profession*, p. 9

⁷⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.13

⁷⁸¹ *Ibid.*, P. 12

⁷⁸² Boase, *The Housekeeper's Tale*, prologue.

being an extension or proxy of the mistress, to a distinct managerial servant, the female equivalent of a steward, distinguishable from her employer by her clothing,

She ended the century in a black silk dress, a senior management figure of absolute authority, whose wages might outstrip both cook and butler.⁷⁸³

At Chatsworth, Elizabeth Bickell served as the unwitting nexus between these two stages in the evolution of the nineteenth-century housekeeper. When she arrived at Chatsworth the household was organised around the subordinate, maternal and economical housekeeper. Hannah Gregory was paid £20 a year, and the maids were only paid slightly less at £18 18s each, with no distinction between their roles in title or wage.⁷⁸⁴ None of the female servants received board wages, instead the housekeeper paid for provisions from the housekeeping account. This was the same system inherited by Elizabeth Bickell in 1843. Following her departure new systems were put in place to restrict the power of the housekeeper. The ‘Case of Miss Bickell’ was a seismic event in the management of the household servants at Chatsworth. When it came to choosing Miss Bickell’s replacement, the Duke made the safe choice of Mary Hastie, who had been a housemaid for the Duke for over twenty years. The housekeeper’s salary was decreased, and a new assistant housekeeper introduced. This added an extra tier in the household, between the housekeeper and maids. The housekeeper’s power was further reduced by the introduction of board wages.⁷⁸⁵ From September 1846, shortly after Bickell’s departure, all of the indoor servants received board wages, instead of the housekeeper buying the necessary food.

⁷⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸⁴ Chatsworth household accounts, 1842, C/165, DC.

⁷⁸⁵ Note in the household accounts, 1846, C/165, DC.

Twelve new servants were introduced to replace the ten servants who left with Elizabeth Bickell. With the railway boom it was quicker and easier than ever to acquire new staff from elsewhere, and most came from beyond the estate. While in the 1841 census all servants had been born in Derbyshire, in 1851 half were born in other counties.⁷⁸⁶ This marked the beginning of a trend that continued throughout the century, and by 1901 the full-time indoor staff were born on average over 100 miles away. Employing servants from outside the local area had two main advantages. Firstly, employers could be more selective of skills and experience. Secondly, the servants did not have ‘followers’ nearby to distract them. The household vouchers for the late nineteenth and early twentieth century demonstrate how the female inter-servant hierarchy developed at Chatsworth from measures taken following Elizabeth Bickell’s departure. A particularly-detailed voucher from 1908, for example, shows that the six laundry maids were numbered from one to six, with corresponding gradations in pay. The first laundry maid received £35 per annum, while the sixth received £14, less than half. The housekeeper by this point received a substantial salary of £110.

Conclusion

Elizabeth Bickell’s story offers an interesting new case study of the agency of the ‘fallen woman’, and the ways in which women were able to escape stigma and regain status through a career in domestic service. The new system of household management implemented at Chatsworth following the dismissal of Elizabeth Bickell, and which developed in the second

⁷⁸⁶ 1841 and 1851 census returns of England, Derbyshire, Chatsworth and Edensor, H.O.107/184/7 and H.O.107/2149, digital image Ancestry.com, <http://www.ancestry.com> [last accessed March 2017].

half of the nineteenth century in the majority of country houses, reflected a change in attitudes towards domestic servants. It recognised and rewarded women's career ambitions, and gave women the option of financial independence without marriage. Without the housekeeper controlling their consumption, maids were given the ability to participate in the individualistic culture of mass consumption that had emerged from industrialisation. However, these new freedoms were counterbalanced by the strict demarcations of class which continue to define perceptions of country house service. While at their employer's house, late-Victorian and Edwardian servants were expected to wear uniforms which masked their identities and defined them by their job titles.

This chapter explored the concept of servants as conspicuous consumers of luxury in the setting of the country house, in which they have previously been understood only as facilitators of consumption, or as consumers in the context of hierarchy-enforcing rituals. Through the case study of Elizabeth Bickell it considered how country house servants were agents in the accrual of their own social, cultural and economic capital, not only objects or facilitators of consumption for the benefit of their employers. These arguments speak to a growing interest in the roles and experiences of servants as agents of consumption which has not yet been able to challenge the presumed power dynamics between masters and servants.⁷⁸⁷ The agency of servants is not only to be found in the power that they had over the management of their employer's household, but also in the power they had to cultivate their own status.

⁷⁸⁷ See J. Stobart, 'Senior Servants: Managing the Household' in Stobart and Rothery, *Consumption and the Country House*, pp. 187-194.

Conclusion

I began this research with the assumption that nineteenth-century country houses were insular, hierarchical institutions in which an ‘army’ of servants lived to serve an elite family. As Pamela Horn writes, ‘the Victorian and Edwardian country house formed a closed world, in which employer and servants were bound together in mutual interdependence’.⁷⁸⁸ My perspective of the social history of the country house was confined to the domestic interior of the servants’ wing, and rooms like the kitchen, laundry and servants’ hall. However, these spaces have featured little in this thesis. I found through research in the Devonshire Collections archive that the history that has been termed ‘below stairs’ by most historical property curators, and by many historians, spills out far beyond its spatial boundaries, into the ‘upstairs’ rooms, the gardens and the estate beyond.

These observations in my archival research were strengthened by the time I spent walking through the landscape at Chatsworth while writing my PhD. On one or two days a week for three years, I walked through the estate from Baslow every day, through the park, past the old kitchen gardens, through the porters’ lodge and made my way through the servants’ entrance, past the kitchens to the study room. As I traced the steps of the many gardeners, estate labourers and charwomen who made this same journey, I imagined boundary crossings and spontaneous interactions that occurred on a daily basis. The more I focused on these themes, the more the orderly nineteenth-century country house presented itself as messy. Alongside the official protocol and regime that has come to define the social life of country houses and estates like Chatsworth, there was a quotidian reality which responded to necessity and was defined by individual agency.

⁷⁸⁸ P. Horn, *Life in the Victorian Country House* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 46-47.

This thesis does not intend to suggest that all country houses were like Chatsworth. On the contrary, it has sought to emphasise the individual personalities and local contexts which made it unique. It has, however, suggested ways in which fresh relevance can be drawn from archival sources, and how country houses can be recontextualised in a broader sociocultural sense. I have argued that there was a particularly powerful middle-class influence at nineteenth-century Chatsworth. This was in part due to the unusual laxity that the 6th Duke displayed towards his staff, and in part due to the wider power that the middle classes were gaining in Britain more generally. Other country house owners had different approaches all together. Walter Ralph Bankes, owner of Kingston Lacy, for example, refused to communicate with any servant except through notes.⁷⁸⁹ However, this thesis has also shown that the landowning family was not the absolute power that they are thought to have been. As FML Thompson has argued, country estates were often owned by absent or disinterested landowners.⁷⁹⁰ Country house staff and tenants had social lives beyond their service to the family, and boundaries of the estate, particularly if they were born elsewhere.

It was in part my focus on the letters of Sarah and Joseph Paxton from the beginning of the research that led me to be interested in the social life of the country estate in the absence of, and in indifference to, the landowner. Many of the letters between Joseph and Sarah were written while Joseph was away travelling with the Duke. Sarah's descriptions of events and people blurred the boundaries of the household, the gardens and the wider estate. I found it compelling how she wrote of 'the people' as one community. With this in mind, my main research questions became centred on how the landowner could be understood not as above this community, but as part of it. How did power operate beyond the established binary master-

⁷⁸⁹ Horn, *Life in the Victorian Country House*, p. 25.

⁷⁹⁰ F. M. L. Thompson, 'Landowners and the Rural Community' in G. E. Mingay (ed.), *The Victorian Countryside: Vol. 2* (London, 1982), p. 457.

servant, landowner-tenant, upstairs-downstairs relationships that have been questioned by recent historiography, for example on land agents?

In answer to these questions I suggested that the household was part of a wider local community, connected through management processes and principles that applied to both. On large country estates like Chatsworth, it was not possible for the landowner, or indeed the land agent, to manage every individual person in detail. The people were not controlled through coercive power, but operated as individual agents within the estate *doxa*. Like in the horticultural glasshouse, conditions were put in place in the household, gardens and villages, and within this environment the people were encouraged to manage themselves. This thesis has argued that this element of organised freedom, however contrived, can be understood in terms of collective and individual agency, and even in terms of staff and tenants accruing their own social and cultural capital. The chapters have investigated the nature of agency within the country estate following the specific themes of comfort, gender, occupational status and consumption.

Chapter One argued that change was driven at Chatsworth by countless competing influences, among which conscious intervention by the landowner was only one factor. Household management in particular has been assumed to be controlled by the landowning family, but the Dukes of Devonshire did not have the capacity or, in the case of the 6th Duke, the confidence to dictate all changes relating to demography and employment at Chatsworth. The Dukes relied on a circle of advisors whose power to influence relied on their successful negotiation of a psychological contract. At stake here was the opportunity to gain considerable social and cultural capital in their own right. Individual ambition can also be understood as one of the factors motivating servants such as Elizabeth Wilson to change the household by leaving their positions, or in the case of Elizabeth Wilson by choosing to work elsewhere in the first place. The servants' transformative capacity in this sense can also be seen in the events

discussed in chapter four, when ten of the indoor staff left, at least three of them by their own volition. With so many complex influences, it can be concluded that power was not only exercised by the landowner over his dependents. It was accessible in some form to every individual through their transformative capacity on the estate and in the household.

Chapter Two focused in on issues of agency and authority in the reconstruction of the estate village, Edensor. This chapter demonstrated how the concept of architectural determinism that drove the construction of model villages was more actively promoted by the middle-class senior staff at Chatsworth than by the upper-class landowner. Joseph Paxton saw Edensor as a valuable site of experimentation, and his findings formed part of a larger national reassessment of policy relating to public health and housing. Paxton's significant influence over the Duke, on the estate, and in the world beyond complicates assumptions about the limitations of power dynamics in the master-servant relationship. Some aspects of Paxton's ambitions for Edensor, however, failed in the long term. The morality of the tenants was called into question as soon as the village was completed. It was found that the bourgeois culture of the new village was more effective in encouraging an influx of middle-class families than in moralising the existing tenants. Labourers were displaced and moved to Pilsley or left the estate altogether. The gentrification of the village was catalysed after the death of the 6th Duke by the introduction of higher rents.

The letters of the Wilson family offered a valuable new insight into the power dynamics of the model village. In particular, they were used to challenge the idea that model villagers exchanged their independence for bodily and monetary comfort. Ann Wilson's letters suggest that the domestic labour generated by the grand architecture and spatial reconfiguration of the village was unsustainable for a single working woman. This limited her agency by causing more of her time to be occupied in labour and walking, thereby bringing

on illness through physical stress and isolation. At the same time, Ann was empowered by some aspects of the village's culture. Through her proximity to the Cavendish family she was able to keep up with the latest fashions, but other than this the landowners impacted little on her daily autonomy. She accrued social and cultural capital through her own professional specialism, mobility and social networks. This chapter added a critical new perspective to a historiography which has thus far emphasised the power of landlords and the state, by highlighting both the authority of middle-class individuals and the agency of working-class tenants.

Chapter three moved into the gardens, Chatsworth's most famous attraction in the mid-nineteenth century. This chapter explored the liminal status of both the gardeners and the outdoor space in which they worked. As the nexus between the private indoors and the public outdoors, the gardens were a space in which spontaneous interactions occurred between a wide variety of people. This social spontaneity was contrasted with the highly structured management of the gardens on which their prestigious reputation relied. Themes of Empire, power and identity were discussed in relation to the gardeners' relationship with visitors. Through their interpretation of exotic botanical curiosities, the gardeners mediated visitors' encounters with the imperial landscape in a safe, curated environment. This relationship was one in which the gardener was both subordinate in his status as a servant, and powerful in his expertise. The frustrations arising from this liminality sometimes led to altercations such as George Nockett's fight next to the Cascade. Gender was also an area which invited investigation into issues of liminality, authority and agency. Sarah Paxton's role as proxy head gardener was both empowering and debilitating, as it complicated her status as a domesticated middle-class mother, a status which she was anxious to cultivate.

Gender-bound tensions of spatial liminality were also explored in Chapter Four. Elizabeth Bickell's perceived abuse of her authority was complicated by the ambiguity of the glasshouse as neither an indoor nor outdoor space. This chapter contributed a new angle on consumption in the country house by considering servants as conspicuous consumers of luxury, not just as facilitators of their employer's lifestyle. It explored the inter-household tensions of class and gender that were implicit in cases of misbehaviour that centred on misappropriation and excessive consumption. It also focused on the motivations behind such behaviour. Elizabeth Bickell can be, and was, interpreted as a servant who abused the trust of her master. However, she also demonstrates how domestic service offered some women an opportunity to escape social duty or stigma surrounding spinsterhood, sexuality and in her case a bastard child, through the legitimacy of a career. As a further case in point, Elizabeth Bickell's replacement, Mary Hastie requested to be joined at Chatsworth by Phoebe Radley, a colleague she had worked together for over twenty years in the Duke's property network. She was 'delighted' when he agreed and together they shared the title and salary of housekeeper until 1858.⁷⁹¹ When the 6th Duke died they retired to a house in London together. Their close relationship might also point to a need for further research into domestic service as a path for women to escape marriage and live with other women, whether romantically or otherwise.

The agency of servants, this thesis concludes, is not only to be found in the power that they had over the management of their employer's household, but also in the power they had to cultivate their own status. The field of country house studies is moving in a more socially-engaged direction which explores the relevance of these cultural institutions to wider societal issues such as class, gender, sexuality, protest and slavery. This thesis has done necessary groundwork for this burgeoning field by re-treading an old subject, asking what new

⁷⁹¹ Letter from Sarah to Joseph Paxton, June 1846, P/456, DC.

significance the country house community might have in this branch of social history going forward.

Implications for Heritage Interpretation

The implications of the conclusions of this thesis extend beyond academia to the ways in which the social history of the country estate is interpreted by curators. The public's appetite for the social history of the country house, which has seen many country houses reporting year-on-year growth at a time that has been marked by economic uncertainty for most other cultural heritage institutions, has brought new challenges to the ways in which the history of life in and around the country house is displayed to the public.⁷⁹³ Increasingly properties are expected to offer their visitors an insight into life 'backstage', 'below stairs' and 'behind the scenes'. As Oliver Cox writes,

The country house now holds potent sway over the visiting public through the personal stories of those who lived upstairs and down rather than the tactical deployment of an enfilade suite of rooms, or a particularly fine collection of paintings and porcelain.⁷⁹⁴

This expectation has led to consternation among curators and academics who fear that the 'real' history of the country house, its paintings and porcelain, is being displaced in favour of a soap opera, or Disneyfied version which forefronts human stories.⁷⁹⁵

⁷⁹³ O. Cox, 'The "Downton Boom": Country Houses, Popular Culture and Curatorial Culture', *The Public Historian* (vol. 37, 2015), p. 113.

⁷⁹⁴ O. Cox, 'The "Downton Boom", pp. 118-119.

⁷⁹⁵ Cox, 'The "Downton Boom"', p.119

Conversely, other critics have expressed concerns that this social history, rather than rewriting the traditional narrative of great families and their achievements, has succeeded in reinforcing its conservative undertones. In 2009, Laurajane Smith wrote,

heritage is a cultural process or performance, concerned ultimately not with the management of things, but with the management and regulation of social value and cultural meanings.⁷⁹⁶

These social values and cultural meanings, she explained, are distinctly middle-class,

The English middle class conserve the English past. What of course, they are conserving, however, is not simply ‘a house’, but the social values that underpin middle-class deference, social position and place, and, by inference, the social and political position of the elites.⁷⁹⁷

The connection that Smith draws between country houses and social identity is certainly a theme that I have observed in my many interactions with family history researchers. Since the project began, I have lost count of the number of people eager to prove their ancestral links to Chatsworth, and even the revelation that an ancestor was born in a village twelve miles away has been sufficient grounds for a researcher to contact me and ask if they worked in *the* house. I myself have felt this allure of ancestral belonging since discovering that, coincidentally, my great-great-great-great grandfather Thomas Wright was a stonemason who worked on the 6th Duke’s North Wing in the 1820s, and his son is buried in the churchyard at Edensor. The country house continues, then, to enthrall people on a deeply personal, as well as cultural and intellectual level. Despite the arguably working-class status of individuals such as Thomas Wright, country house visiting and related family history research ironically remain largely

⁷⁹⁶ L. Smith, ‘Deference and Humility: The Social Values of the Country House’, in L. Gibson and J. Pendlebury (eds.), *Valuing Historic Environments* (Farnham, 2009), p.33.

⁷⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

middle-class past-times that are devoted to uncovering a presumed bygone era of aristocratic affluence, on the one hand, and the servants ‘downstairs’, on the other.

Laurajane Smith argues that even by highlighting the lives of the servants, and opening up the kitchens and service spaces, country houses continue to conform to an Authorised Heritage Discourse that ‘informs middle class membership, identity and social value’, by focusing on deference and humility, and the good old days when people ‘knew their place’ either in the upstairs or downstairs world.⁷⁹⁸ The fight to dispel the image of the country house as a comfortable middle-class retreat has been spearheaded by heritage programmes such as the National Trust’s Challenging Histories programme, and by university projects such as the University of Leicester’s ‘Colonial Countryside’ and UCL’s ‘The East India Company at Home’, which have sought to bring the uncomfortable to the fore.⁷⁹⁹ The last few years have seen ground broken on exhibition themes such as slavery, sexuality and popular protest, as country houses take inspiration from, and work with, the socially-engaged museum sector.

As the National Trust gears up for its future national theme ‘Class and Social Mobility’, and as many other organisations work to fulfil the public appetite for social history, there is a general acceptance in the industry that its future commercial success depends on democratisation, and that this is dependent in part on the successful interpretation of social history. Lucy Delap argues that domestic service is an ‘intimate site of memory’, through which the British public have made sense of historical disparities in class and wealth. This narrative of social disparity is particularly prominent in country houses, where the boundary between ‘upstairs’ and ‘downstairs’ is clearly demarcated in the visitor experience by an invitation to get ‘hands on’ in the kitchens, often with actors portraying real or generic historical staff

⁷⁹⁸ Smith, ‘Deference and Humility’, p.48.

⁷⁹⁹ See: R. Sandell, R. Lennon and M. Smith (eds.), *Prejudice and Pride: LGBTQ Heritage and its Contemporary Implications* (Leicester, 2018); M. Finn and K. Smith (eds.), *The East India Company at Home* (London, 2018).

members. Cross-cutting relationships such as those between servants and children, Delap argues, are downplayed both for practical purposes and because they complicate the narrative of the upstairs/downstairs divide. From my own interactions with family history researchers and the visiting public, however, it seems clear that these nuanced narratives are in demand. Visitors' desires for a personal connection to the country house extend beyond the 'downstairs', to the whole house and estate.

In June 2018, my colleagues and I delivered a free pop-up exhibition and storytelling event in the stables at Chatsworth. The event was intentionally not advertised in advance in order to ensure, to the greatest possible extent, an audience of 'typical' visitors. The 71 feedback forms collected at this event suggested that the delivery of social history research through storytelling performances had the effect of changing how people looked at the whole house, not only the parts typically associated with servants. One audience member wrote, 'These stories should be part of everyday Chatsworth and its story- Everyones story, Everyones house [sic]'.⁸⁰⁰ Another wrote that the 'most memorable or thought-provoking moment' of the day was the sense of 'community spirit' conveyed by the stories, and another was interested in how interpretation could '[build] a picture of the ecosystems that built up around these institutions'.⁸⁰¹ One feedback form stated that this research could 'be used to bring the house to life (it isn't just a grand building - it is about people & the wider community)', drawing a direct connection between the elite building and the wider community that is usually presented as separate from it.⁸⁰²

This thesis recognises the social structures of the country house not as the substance of social relations and non-élite experience, but part of their sociocultural context. As such it has

⁸⁰⁰ Anonymous feedback form written at Chatsworth, 13 June 2018

⁸⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰² *Ibid.*

powerful implications for the future of heritage interpretation and the field of country house studies. This research has shown how the country house community in the nineteenth century did not only exist ‘to underpin middle-class deference, social position and place, and, by inference, the social and political position of the elites’.⁸⁰³ Instead, non-elite individuals also exercised their agency in their own interests both in resistance to and compliance with institutional structures, and were able to accrue their own social, cultural and economic capital through association with the elite house. In this way, the upper-class realm of the elite household was shaped by the increasingly influential middle classes, not just the other way around. Chatsworth was not, as John Burnett has described the country house, ‘independent from the rest of society’.⁸⁰⁴ It was shaped by the same fears, ambitions and influences which governed life in other nineteenth-century communities. Finally, this research has revealed that the public’s appetite for a social history that transcends the spatial boundaries of the servants’ wing can be satisfied, in part, with archival research. Servants were not only found in the servants’ wing, gardeners were not confined to the flower beds, and tenants did not shut themselves up in their cottages. Power in the sense of transformative capacity was accessible to all individuals, and they exercised this agency in surprising and unpredictable ways which reveal more about their own ambitions than those of the landowning family.

⁸⁰³ Smith, *Ibid.*, p.45.

⁸⁰⁴ J. Burnett (ed.), *Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working People from the 1820s to the 1920s* (London, 1974), p. 145.

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