

Long Term Trends in Landownership, 1500-1914: Berkshire and Oxfordshire

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SUMMARY

The history of landownership in England has been extensively studied, but as Sir John Habakkuk has noted, the complexity of the lives and interests of major landowners has produced a lack of certainty about the rate and direction of change, both nationally and between regions.¹ Habakkuk's early research was mainly on Northamptonshire, where the structure of landownership in the 18th century was particularly stable, and this led him initially to underestimate the extent of changes in ownership more generally. His later work is much more broad-based, and further emphasised the need for more research, especially local case studies. His own work, he believed, would make it easier to test hypotheses in a more systematic fashion.

The subject is far too vast for us to be able to undertake a national study. Rather, we have followed Habakkuk's lead – a regional analysis, which we believe is the first to have taken so long a view, and to have attempted numerical consistency by examining the descent of every manor in Berkshire and 89 percent of the manors in Oxfordshire. This enables us to present an almost comprehensive analysis of change spanning the early modern and modern periods.

The principal hypothesis about the general course of change in landownership in the early modern period is that mobility was greatest in the 16th and early 17th centuries, reflecting the huge transfer of ownership arising from the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the decline of the feudal aristocracy, the alienation of Crown lands and the disruptions of the Civil War and Restoration. Lawrence Stone in his study of the crisis of the aristocracy in the earlier period based on a national sample drawn from the Feet of Fines and the Close Rolls for 1560 to 1700, showed the number of transactions in the period 1560 to 1620 double that in the early 16th century, but that by 1700 they had returned to their pre-1560 level.² R. H. Tawney found that one third of the manors which he examined in seven counties were sold between 1560 and 1640, whereas Habakkuk found less volatility after 1700.³ These are hypotheses which we can test for Berkshire and Oxfordshire.

There is general agreement as to the heightened stability of the land market after 1700, notably during the early and mid-19th century. However, there is as yet no consensus as to the origins of the new owners. Habakkuk was uncertain whether the buyers of manors were drawn mainly from those with new wealth, such as lawyers, merchants, court officials etc, or whether they came from within the ranks of the older families, seeking to enlarge their estates or settle younger sons on the land. C. G. Durston's work on the Berkshire county gentry in the later Tudor and early Stuart periods shows many new entrants as resident in London, and a significant proportion of these, younger sons or minor offshoots of landed families. It is unclear how far this pattern extended to other regions, although Oxfordshire

¹ H. J. Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt, and the Estates System: English Landownership 1650–1950* (Oxford, 1994), pp. ix–x.

² L. Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558–1641* (Oxford, 1965), 36–38.

³ R. H. Tawney, 'The Rise of the Gentry', in E. M. Carus-Wilson (ed.), *Essays in Economic History*, i, (1954), 173, 214 (reprint of original article, in *Econ. H. R.* xi, (1941), i; 'Postscript', *Econ. H. R.* 2nd ser. vii, (1954)).

and Berkshire shared a number of characteristics with Essex and Hertfordshire and perhaps the Home Counties generally. L. and J. Stone, in their study of the ownership of country houses (as against estates) in three counties, conclude that there was no great exodus of wealthy businessmen into the countryside between the late 17th and late 19th centuries, while W. D. Rubinstein claims to have detected in the 19th century a markedly diminishing interest on the part of the very rich in social advancement through landownership on a large scale.⁴ Conversely, F. M. L. Thompson, found that 90 per cent of millionaires dying before 1880 bought land, and that of those 80 per cent founded landed families in the first or succeeding generations.⁵

There is a measure of agreement as to trends in the turnover of estates in the later period. The land market appears to have been more stable after 1750, and particularly in the second and third quarters of the 19th century, than in the highly fluid 16th and early-17th centuries. In the view of J. V. Beckett, 1750–1880 was a critical period for estate consolidation, achieved at the expense mainly of smaller landowners.⁶ The impact of the Great Agricultural Depression (1873–97), while more severe than in the earlier part of the century, was less catastrophic than previously supposed, with a surprising degree of continuity among established families, though with important differences between regions and classes of landowner.⁷

MANORIAL OWNERSHIP IN BERKSHIRE AND OXFORDSHIRE

These are issues on which this paper can hopefully shed some light. It is obviously not possible for us to cover adequately the whole complex history of landownership in Berkshire and Oxfordshire. Instead, we shall try to outline broad trends and concentrate on a few key aspects. One of the main objectives is to quantify changes in ownership, by distinguishing between those estates which remained in one family, and those estates which passed by purchase to new owners. In the case of the latter, we shall examine some examples to assess the origins of the new owners, and where possible, the sources of their wealth.

The study is based on the ownership of 477 manors in Berkshire and Oxfordshire, as recorded in the Victoria County Histories of the two counties, with additional information drawn from The Dictionary of National Biography (old and new series), and other sources listed below.⁸

The 165 Berkshire manors cover the whole county at its pre-1974 boundaries, e.g. they include the Vale of the White Horse which was transferred from Berkshire to Oxfordshire in 1974. The 312 manors in Oxfordshire cover the whole pre-1974 county except for 30

⁴ L. and J. C. F. Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540–1880*, (Oxford, 1984), 28–29; W. D. Rubinstein, *Men of Property*, (1981), *passim*.

⁵ F. M. L. Thompson, 'Business and Landed Elites in the Nineteenth Century', in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *Landowners, Capitalists and Entrepreneurs* (Oxford, 1986), 185.

⁶ J. V. Beckett, *The Aristocracy in England 1660–1914* (Oxford, 1986), chapter 2.

⁷ J. V. Beckett, 'Agricultural Landownership and Estate Management', in E. J. T. Collins (ed.) *Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vii, 1850–1914 (Cambridge, 2000), i, 718–28.

⁸ *V.C.H. Berks.* iii, iv; *V.C.H. Oxon.* xi, xii, xiii; G. J. Durston, *Berkshire and its County Gentry 1625–45* (University of Reading, unpublished PhD thesis, 1977), 2 vols; Id., 'London and the Provinces: the Association between the Capital and the Berkshire County Gentry of the Early Seventeenth Century', *Southern History*, iii (1981); Jill Franklin, *The Gentleman's Country House and its Place 1835–1924* (1981), 255–69.

parishes in Chadlington Hundred in the north-west of the county, which have not yet been fully investigated by or published in the Oxfordshire V.C.H.⁹

We proceed on the assumption that the ownership of manorial rights and of their subject lands were in most cases coincident.¹⁰ Some historians have been unhappy with this method, as there are some cases where the landowner sold off some, or even all, of his land, but not the manor; though our study shows that this occurred mainly from the late 19th century. It has also been pointed out that manors vary in size and that the ownership of a number of manors may not necessarily imply ownership of a large acreage, and that some parishes had as many as three or four sub-manors. This can, however, be roughly tested for particular periods between 1500 and 1914. For instance the Duke of Marlborough owned 19 manors in Oxfordshire in 1850, and 21,944 acres in 1874 (there were virtually no changes between these dates), giving an average size per manor of 1,155 acres – clearly his manors were of a significant size. The Earl of Abingdon's 12 manors in Oxfordshire were somewhat smaller, averaging 681 acres; but Edward Harcourt's five manors averaged 1,504 acres each. The V.C.H. describes both single manors and sub-manors, and distinguishes between manors and smaller freehold estates. It is clear that in many cases the manor subsumed virtually the whole parish. Thus, there is a strong tendency for the ownership of the lordship and the land to coincide, and for the sale of the manor to signify the transfer of the land itself, and vice versa.¹¹

Inheritance through the male line in accord with the principles of primogeniture was the usual path of descent. In the absence of sons, estates might pass to the husbands of owners' daughters, or nephews, cousins, or adopted heirs. In many cases, the descent was tortuous, shuttling backwards and forwards, within and between the different family branches, and at times extremely contrived.

In order to simplify the mass of data in the V.C.H., we have identified the ownership of the manors at six dates in time: 1500, 1600, 1700, 1800, 1850 and 1914, and analysed the interim changes – and continuities – across them. Although the choice of benchmarks is pragmatic (rather than historiographical), the resultant analysis is sufficiently objective for present purposes. The results are presented in Table 1 for Berkshire, in Table 2 for Oxfordshire, and in Table 3 for the two counties combined. The picture for the two counties is broadly similar, but with ownership in Oxfordshire being somewhat more stable in the 16th century and rather less so thereafter.

The analysis of these results forms the core of the next section; but there is one other important source which we have used to shift the focus from manors to landowners, namely the Return of the Owners of Land of 1872-3, sometimes called the 'New Domesday'.¹² This identifies by name, size of holdings, and rental value the landowners in each county, and thus complements the statistical analysis by its more personalised approach. Collected between 1872 and 1875, the data were corrected in 1876 by John Bateman. We have used a combination of original (1873) entries and Bateman's revised figures as reported in the 1883 edition of his *Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland*.

⁹ Through the kindness of Simon Townley, the editor of the Oxfordshire V.C.H., it was possible to see the typescripts of 8 parishes in Bampton Hundred (Pt 2) which had not been published at the date of writing, and of Minster Lovell, a detached part of Chadlington Hundred. The authors had access also to the files of original notes for the parishes in the Chiltern Hundreds of Ewelme, Langtree and Binfield, whose histories have yet to be written.

¹⁰ See J. P. Cooper, 'The Counting of Manors', *Econ. H. R.*, 2nd ser., viii (1965), 77-85; R. Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeomen* (Oxford, 1991), 90-104.

¹¹ *V.C.H. Oxon.* v and xii, *passim*.

¹² *Return of the Owners of Land* (1873). These listings are updated and corrected in J. Bateman, *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland* (4th edn., 1883).

TABLE 1: CHANGES IN OWNERSHIP OF 165 BERKSHIRE MANORS 1500-1914 SHOWING NUMBERS OF MANORS IN OWNERSHIP OF THE SAME FAMILIES IN YEAR 1 AND YEAR 2.

YEAR 1	1500	%	1600	%	1700	%	1800	%	1850	%
YEAR 2										
1600	40	24								
1700	17	10	78	47						
1800	9	6	37	22	85	52				
1850	3	2	24	15	59	36	123	75		
1914	3	2	18	11	50	30	82	50	103	63

TABLE 2: CHANGES IN OWNERSHIP OF 312 OXFORDSHIRE MANORS 1500-1914, SHOWING NUMBERS OF MANORS IN OWNERSHIP OF THE SAME FAMILIES IN YEAR 1 AND YEAR 2.

YEAR 1	1500	%	1600	%	1700	%	1800	%	1850	%
YEAR 2										
1600	75	24								
1700	41	13	132	42						
1800	31	10	90	29	143	46				
1850	30	10	77	25	111	36	212	68		
1914	21	7	48	15	72	23	125	40	160	51

TABLE 3: BERKSHIRE AND OXFORDSHIRE COMBINED (477 MANORS) 1500-1914 SHOWING NUMBERS OF MANORS IN OWNERSHIP OF SAME FAMILIES IN YEAR 1 AND YEAR 2.

YEAR 1	1500	%	1600	%	1700	%	1800	%	1850	%
YEAR 2										
1600	115	24								
1700	58	12	210	44						
1800	40	8	127	27	228	48				
1850	33	7	101	21	170	36	335	70		
1914	24	5	66	14	122	26	207	43	263	55

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY, 1500–1914

It is clear that the greatest turnover occurred in the 16th century. In Berkshire, only 40 per cent of the manors were still in the ownership of the same family or institution in 1600 as they had been in 1500 – and by 1700 this had fallen to 17 per cent. C. G. Durston's study of the Berkshire gentry in the early 17th century confirms this trend, in so far as of the 38 elite families existing in 1640, just over half had been in occupation in 1600, but only four in 1500, almost all the medieval owners having declined or disappeared in the meanwhile.¹³

'The lands of Berkshire', wrote Fuller in the 17th century, 'are very skittish, and apt to cast their owners.'¹⁴ Our analysis appears to confirm this statement for the early part of the period. The 18th and 19th centuries were by contrast more stable, though not entirely so, for over half of all the Berkshire manors changed hands in the 18th century, and half again between 1800 and 1914. This underlines Habakkuk's point that the degree of continuity in Northamptonshire was unusual. Table 4 shows the survival rates of the ownership of the manors in 1914.

TABLE 4: DURATION OF OWNERSHIP IN 1914 (PERCENTAGE OF FAMILIES SURVIVING)

Manors	165 Berkshire Manors %	312 Oxon Manors %	477 Manors: Combined Oxon and Berks %
Owned since 1500	2	7	5
Owned since 1600	11	15	14
Owned since 1700	30	23	26
Owned since 1800	50	40	43
Owned since 1850	63	51	55

Thus, even after 1700, though considerably more stable than in the 16th century, the continuity of ownership was less than might have been expected. By 1914, only 43 per cent of owners had held their lands since 1800, and barely half (55 per cent) had owned them since 1850. The overwhelming majority of the largest and most wealthy, however, pre-dated the Industrial Revolution.

By the later 18th century most though not quite all of the later medieval and Tudor landowning families had disappeared. The heavy turnover of manors and lands in the 16th and 17th centuries was due in large part to the redistribution of church lands following the dissolution of the monasteries; of Crown lands e.g. Royal Forests, including large areas of Windsor Forest in east and central Berkshire, owing to the need to refill the coffers of spendthrift impoverished monarchs; and of forfeited lands, such as those of the Englefield family in Berkshire, which reverted to the Crown and were sold on.

In 1500 just over one third of all manors in both counties were owned by ecclesiastical foundations, such as Abingdon, Reading and Osney Abbeys and other houses which were all dissolved in the 1530s. The great inflation of the mid- and later 16th century also took a

¹³ Durston (1981), *op. cit.* note 8.

¹⁴ D. and S. Lysons, *Magna Britannica*, i, *Berkshire* (1806), 179.

heavy toll of the old established families, as many of them did not, or could not, raise their rental incomes in line with their rising expenses. The agricultural depression of the 1720s and 1730s hastened the downfall of impoverished owners.

The relative stability of landownership between 1750 and 1870 can be attributed in part to the Agricultural Revolution, enclosure, and the alimentary demands of the now rapidly expanding urban and industrial populations, which together made for a steady rise in rent and property values. This greater financial security and prospect of steadily rising incomes in line with inflation, had the effect of reducing the numbers of large and medium sized estates coming up for sale. On the downlands of Berkshire and the Oxfordshire Cotswolds especially, income rose with the increase in the area under cultivation due to enclosure and reclamation, and adoption of improved farming systems based on sheep, corn and turnips. On the other hand, the stability is surprising given the highly disruptive nature of the Industrial Revolution, the resultant changes in regional and occupational distributions of wealth, and the counter attractions of other more liquid and accessible forms of investments and havens for large capital sums. Another factor, still the subject of debate as to its effects, was the Settlement, a device for holding estates together and preventing incumbents and their heirs from disposing of family lands. 'Entailment' became more rigorously applied from the late 17th century, especially by families wanting to perpetuate their social position as leading landowners. Both counties, especially Berkshire, benefited from their closeness to London, which made a country estate attractive to wealthy businessmen and citizens, and ensured a steady flow of replacements to fill the gaps as they appeared.

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL BENEFITS OF LANDOWNERSHIP

A remarkable feature of the period after 1700 was the high level of demand for agricultural land by all classes. For the very wealthy the possession of a large agricultural estate conferred upon its owner many more advantages than the purely economic. Land was a 'positional good' as well as a productive resource. In fact agricultural land was a fairly poorly paying investment, yielding in the 19th century at most little more than 3 per cent in rents, compared with 4 to 5 per cent offered by government stock, 4 to 6 per cent by urban housing and 8 to 10 per cent in tenant farming. But it was a comparatively safe investment, and as such, very attractive in the 16th and 17th centuries when alternative investments were far fewer, and much riskier.

In addition, as is well known, ownership of broad acres was a huge source of social prestige and could provide a route into the ranks of county society, a very exclusive club, that comprised in 1895, according to Walford, just 187 families in Berkshire and 128 in Oxfordshire.¹⁵ The possessor of a large estate wielded enormous power – direct and indirect, in the rural community and beyond – in the church, the army and local and national politics. As late as the 1890s, with agriculture's contribution to national income now having fallen to under 10 per cent, the majority of M.Ps possessed landed estates, and over three-quarters of Conservative cabinets consisted of titled aristocrats. In 1910, nearly one-half of all Liberal members even were landed, while the shire counties, such as Berkshire and Oxfordshire, were still the almost exclusive domain of the landed classes, with very few members of either House dependant on industry or trade for their livelihood.¹⁶

¹⁵ Walford, *County Families of the United Kingdom* (1895).

¹⁶ Beckett, *op. cit.* note 6, 128ff.

In Oxfordshire the ownership of land was a doorway into national politics. For instance in the 18th century, the county of Oxfordshire had about 4,000 electors (the 40 shilling freeholders), but between 1740 and 1790 all the M.P.s were large landowners, frequently the sons of peers, like George Lee, Viscount Quarrendon, heir to the Earl of Lichfield, and owner of an extensive estate in North Oxfordshire based at Ditchley in Spelsbury; or Norris Bertie, the great nephew of the Earl of Abingdon, whose extensive estate in both counties was centred on his seat at Wytham, just to the west of Oxford. The Duke of Marlborough's influence was also considerable. His second son, Lord Charles Spencer, was M.P. for the county from 1761 to 1801.¹⁷

Other prominent Oxfordshire landowners who entered Parliament were Sir James Dashwood of Kirtlington, north of Oxford, whose lands were said to stretch northwards almost to Banbury; Thomas, Viscount Parker, of Shirburn Castle in south Oxfordshire; Sir Edward Turner, Bart, of Ambrosden in northeast Oxfordshire; and Henry Perrot of North Leigh, who sat from 1721 to 1740, and whose father was so wealthy he was known as 'Golden Perrot'.¹⁸

Nor was the landowners' influence limited to the county seats. They also dominated the boroughs. Woodstock, with a small electorate, was the Duke of Marlborough's pocket Borough. His heir, the Marquess of Blandford, was elected in 1727, his grandson, John Spencer, a son of the third Duke sat from 1768 to 1781 and from 1818 to 1820, alternated between the Woodstock and Oxford City seats between 1771 and 1790. Banbury, which had only 18 electors, was influenced by the neighbouring landowning families of the Copes of Hanwell and the Norths of Wroxton.¹⁹

Oxford City, with about 1,200 electors was nominally less dominated by the landed interest, but throughout the 18th century its M.P.s were nominees of neighbouring landowners such as the Earl of Abingdon, the Duke of Marlborough, and the Harcourt family of Nuneham Courtenay and Stanton Harcourt. William Harcourt, a son of the second Viscount Harcourt, was elected for Oxford in 1768.²⁰

Landowners were also the controlling force in local government in the counties, monopolising the offices of Lord Lieutenant, High Sheriff, Justices of the Peace and Chairman of the Boards of Poor Law Guardians. For those who aspired to a true county position, it was usually necessary, not just to possess a landed estate, but to have done so for some time (at least more than one generation), and to possess the education and character befitting a gentleman. A landed estate also provided the opportunity to pursue county sports. Hunting and shooting had become an obsession with many landowners by the mid-19th century. The hunting field could provide the chance for the old and new landed gentry to mingle, and for the new ones to become assimilated into the county elite.

The period from about 1750 to about 1800 witnessed the progressive enlargement of the big estates at the expense of the smaller ones, and the extinction of a number of the very old-established families, such as the Englefields in Berkshire and the Fettiplaces in both counties. The estate system reached its apogee in Berkshire and Oxfordshire, as in the kingdom generally, in the third quarter of the 19th century – the so-called 'golden age' of English agriculture.

¹⁷ J. Black, *Historical Atlas of Great Britain. The End of the Middle Ages to the Georgian Era* (2000), 139–44. See also Thompson, *op. cit.* note 5 chapter 3.

¹⁸ Thompson, *ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.* For an account of politics in a rural market town, 1830–50, see B. Trinder, *Victorian Banbury* (Chichester, 1982), chapter 5.

THE LANDOWNING ELITE c.1880

As previously mentioned, we have for near the end of the period a major source of information about British landownership in the form of an official survey, the Return of Owners of Land, 1872-3, which was based on the county rate-books. Table 5 below analyses the corrected acreage figures as reported in 1883 by John Bateman, by size of estates and category of owner as defined by F. M. L. Thompson. It shows that 54 per cent of Berkshire was then occupied by estates of over 1,000 acres in aggregate, more or less exactly the national average.

TABLE 5: SIZE DISTRIBUTION OF LANDED ESTATES c.1880.

Source: F. M. L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (1963), pp. 32,114,115.

	Berkshire (%)	Oxfordshire (%)	England Average (%)
Great Estates (10,000+ acres)	17	15	24
Greater Gentry (3,000-10,000 acres)	22	25	17
Squirearchy Estates (1000-3000 acres)	15	15	12
* Smaller Landowners (300-1000 acres)	18	14	14

Table 6 lists Berkshire estates of in excess of 10,000 acres, 3,000-10,000 acres, and 2,000-3,000 acres, with their estimated annual value derived from Bateman's revised list of 1883. Owners who lived outside the county are in brackets. Estates outside Berkshire are not included in the total acreage and value, and estates in the hands of corporate bodies are excluded. Estates of between 1,000 and 2,000 acres, while they would normally be included in the squire class, are too numerous to be listed here.

Although the 34 landowners listed in Table 6 owned a considerable proportion of Berkshire, it is noticeable that there were only four 'great' estates of over 10,000 acres, occupying only 17 per cent of the land area - well below the national average of 24 per cent. Of particular note is the relatively large acreage owned by institutions, altogether nearly 34,000 acres. In 1872-3, over 10,000 acres, mostly in the east of the county, was owned by the Crown, and nearly 12,000 acres by 15 Oxford colleges, four of which possessed in excess of 1,000 acres, and one, St John's, over 3,660 acres producing £5362 per annum.

The most prominent group of Berkshire landowners were the greater gentry, with estates ranging from 3,000 to 10,000 acres, followed by the squirearchy, owning 1,000 to 3,000 acres.

But while Berkshire did not have so many great or aristocratic estates, it was the seat of a rather greater number of very large landowners of more than 10,000 acres who, in addition to their land in Berkshire, also had land elsewhere, including very large acreages, much of it in the form of moorland shooting estates, in Scotland and Ireland. Examples are the Marquis of Downshire who had 5,287 acres in Berkshire and 114,000 acres in Ireland; Charles Morrison of Basildon with 6,988 acres in Berkshire and over 75,000 acres in Scotland, and the Earl of Craven with 19,226 acres in Berkshire and some 31,000 acres elsewhere.

Berkshire boasted relatively few noble landowners. Only 7 peers were listed in 1873-83: the Marquis of Downshire, the Earl of Craven, the Earl of Abingdon (who also owned 8,173 acres, in Oxfordshire), the Earl of Radnor, Lord Braybrooke, whose principal seat was at Audley End near Saffron Walden in Essex, and Viscount Barrington.

TABLE 6: ESTATES OF OVER 2000 ACRES c.1880.

Source: J. Bateman, *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland* (4th edition, 1883).**A: OVER 10,000 ACRES**

Owner	Residence	Acreage	Annual Value(£)
Lt-Col Loyd-Lindsay	Lockinge House	20,528	26,492
Lord Craven	Ashdown Park	19,225	21,767
The Crown	Windsor Castle	10,203	22,434
Richard Benyon	Englefield House	10,129	13,303

B: 3,000 – 10,000 ACRES

Philip Wroughton	Woolley Park	8,692	9,357
Earl of Abingdon	Wytham Abbey	7,738	10,261
Charles Morrison	Basildon Park	6,987	12,206
(Sir R Burdett	Ramsbury Manor, Wilts)	6,541	6,243
Charles Eyre	Welford Park	5,737	7,121
John Walter	Bearwood	5,678	9,178
Lord Downshire	Easthampstead Park	5,287	4,853
E B Pusey	Pusey House	5,022	7,082
W H H Hartley	Bucklebury	4,952	5,325
Sir George Bowyer	Radley Park	4,451	9,412
Lord Radnor	Coleshill House	4,394	7,114
William Mount	Wasing Place	4,191	5,153
Robert Campbell	Buscot Park	4,183	8,398
Revd Richard Palmer	Holme Park	3,818	6,159
(Lord Braybrooke	Audley End, Essex)	3,590	4,955
(St John's College	Oxford)	3,668	5,362
Lord Barrington	Beckett Park	3,477	7,193
Sir G A East	Hall Place, Burchetts Gn	3,172	5,969
Sir Wm Throckmorton	Buckland House		4,539

C: 2,000 – 3,000 ACRES

C J Eyston	East Hendred	2,857	3,488
D H Burr	Aldermaston Court	2,778	3,054
E M Atkins	Kingston Lisle	2,625	3,177
Thomas Garth	Haines Hill	2,581	4,082
Charles Duffield	Marcham Park	2,521	3,037
(Grenfell family	Taplow Court, Bucks)	2,505	4,775
Sir Charles Russell	Swallowfield Park	2,381	3,220
Revd Thomas Stevens	Bradfield Rectory	2,263	2,879
James Blyth	Woolhampton House	2,195	4,413
John Blagrove	Calcot Park	2,041	4,385
Thomas Goodlake	Faringdon	2,041	3,479
John Leveson-Gower	Bill Hill, Hurst	2,038	2,807
Trustees	St Mary's Home, Wantage	2,018	2,871

Little changed in later years. Kelly's Directory for Berkshire 1915 listed 185 principal seats. Again only 7 were occupied by peers, and 25 more were held by baronets or knights.

To sum up, in the early 1870s, over half of the land in Berkshire was controlled by about 60 families, thirty four of whom owned in excess of 2,000 acres. Of these, three, Overstone, Craven and Benyon, had over 10,000 acres; eighteen between 3,000 and 10,000 acres, while seventeen more held between 2,000 and 3,000 acres. Of the 27 with the largest estates, 21 (and possibly as many as 23) had been resident since the 18th century; and ten since the 17th century or earlier. Seventeen were still resident (although many with reduced acreages) in 1939.

The situation in Oxfordshire in 1873 was broadly similar to that in Berkshire, except that there was only one estate of more than 10,000 acres – the Blenheim estate of the Duke of Marlborough, comprising 21,944 acres in the county out of a total of 23,511 acres in England owned by the Duke. As in Berkshire, over half the land was occupied by estates of over 1,000 acres in aggregate (59 per cent of the county was held by 97 such owners, including Colleges, the Crown and the Church). According to Bateman, 9 peers held 82,503 acres (18.2 per cent of the county), 17 great landowners held another 84,057 acres (18.7 per cent of the county) and 40 squires held 68,000 acres (15.1 per cent of the county). Thus, these 66 large landowners held 52 percent of the county between them; leaving 26.7 per cent in the hands of the smaller kinds of country gentlemen, larger freeholders and yeomen, each with a few hundred acres, and another 10.3 per cent in the hands of public bodies, like the Oxford Colleges, the Crown and the Church. This left a mere 10.1 per cent of the county in the hands of 9,326 small proprietors, of whom 6,833 were cottagers together occupying a mere 0.2 per cent of the county.

As in Berkshire, resident peers were few in number – only 9 – and apart from the Duke of Marlborough, none of them possessing estates exceeding 10,000 acres in Oxfordshire. The Earl of Ducie at Sarsden, in the northwest of the county, came second after the Duke of Marlborough, with 8,798 acres, and the Earl of Abingdon close behind him, although his seat, at Wytham Abbey, just outside Oxford, was then in Berkshire. However, if we add together his 7,739 acres in Berkshire and 8,798 acres in Oxfordshire, he emerges with 16,537 acres which puts him not too far behind the Duke of Marlborough in Oxfordshire, and Col. Loyd-Lindsay and the Earl of Craven in Berkshire (see Table 6). The Earl of Abingdon owned 21,276 acres in Britain all told.

Several Oxfordshire peers held estates of only moderate size in the county, but these were only a part of much larger holdings elsewhere. For instance, Viscount Dillon held 5,444 acres around Ditchley in mid-Oxfordshire, but his whole estate amounted to 94,764 acres, mostly in Ireland. The Earl of Jersey held 5,735 acres at Middleton Stoney, which was part of the 19,389 acres which he owned in all; and the Earl of Macclesfield's 5,518 acres in Oxfordshire were only part of the 14,553 acres he owned in Britain.

Four more peers held estates of a more moderate size (for peers). These were Baron Churchill of Cornbury Park, a relation of the Duke of Marlborough, with 5,352 acres in Oxfordshire; Baron Camoys at Stonor in the Chilterns with 4,500 acres (an estate which his family have held continuously since circa 1210 and where his descendants still reside); the Earl of Effingham with 3,376 acres around Tusmore on the northeast boundary of Oxfordshire; and Viscount Valentia with 3,207 acres around his seat at Bletchingdon, a few miles north of Oxford. As his title shows, he also held Irish land.

The greater gentry were much more numerous than the peers, as in Berkshire, and in some cases were probably as influential in the county. Those with between 7,000 and 8,000 acres in Oxfordshire included Edward Harcourt at Nuneham Courtenay, Matthew Boulton, a descendant of the famous industrialist at Tew Park and Haseley Court, and Sir Henry Dashwood, Bt., at Kirtlington. Others with somewhat smaller estates included another inheritor of industrial wealth, Albert Brassey of railway fame, at Heythrop House in north Oxfordshire and Colonel and Baroness North, of the political family at Wroxton near Banbury.

TABLE 7: ESTATES OF OVER 2,000 ACRES IN OXFORDSHIRE c.1880 (INCLUDING CROWN, CHURCH AND COLLEGE LAND).

Note: this table refers to the whole of pre-1974 Oxfordshire. Source: John Bateman, *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland* (1883 edn.).

Owner	Residence	Acreage	Annual value (£)
A: OVER 10,000 ACRES			
The Duke of Marlborough	Blenheim	21,944	34,341
B: 3,000 – 10,000 ACRES			
The Earl of Ducie	Sarsden	8,798	13,430
(The Earl of Abingdon	Wytham (Berks))	8,173	12,944
Matthew Boulton	Great Haseley and Tew	7,945	13,101
Edward Harcourt	Nuneham Courtney	7,520	10,000
Sir Henry Dashwood	Kirtlington	7,515	12,081
Thomas Taylor	Aston Rowant	7,185	10,257
The Earl of Jersey	Middleton Stoney	5,735	7,000
The Earl of Macclesfield	Shirburn	5,518	8,801
Viscount Dillon	Ditchley	5,444	6,989
Wykeham- Musgrave	Kingsey (now Bucks) & Thame Park	5,386	8,170
Baron Churchill	Cornbury Park	5,352	6,289
Christ Church	Oxford	4,837	10,637
New College	Oxford	4,744	8,099
Edward Slater-Harrison	Shellswell Park	4,716	5,000
William Fox	Burford	4,554	5,645
Baron Camoys	Stonor	4,500	5,000
Albert Brassey	Heythrop	4,275	5,100
The Crown	Various	3,676	4,966
Col and Baroness North	Wroxton	3,620	6,940
The Earl of Effingham	Tusmore	3,376	3,856
Magdalen College	Oxford	3,267	4,879
Viscount Valentia	Bletchington	3,207	5,238
C: 2,000 – 3,000 ACRES			
(Earl Delaware	Withyham, Sussex)	2,941	4,325
St John's College	Oxford	2,909	23,100
Keith MacKenzie	Gillotts, West Henley	2,870	3,800
Edmund Ruck-Keene	Swyncombe	2,819	2,111
George Morrell	Headington, Oxford	2,795	9,370
Cpt Lowndes-Stone-Norton	Brightwell Baldwin	2,761	4,329
John Blount	Mapledurham	2,680	4,167
(Major-General Sawyer	Maidenhead, Berks)	2,515	3,794
Lieut Colonel Dawkins	Over Norton	2,512	4,010
Alex Hall	Middle Barton	2,470	4,228
J Baskerville	Rotherfield Peppard	2,392	2,926
Charles Cotterell-Dormer	Rousham	2,341	2,547
Eccles. Commissioners	Various	2,263	4,183
Lady Georgiana Bertie	Weston-on the Green	2,198	2,355
(The Earl of Redesdale	Batsford Park, Glos)	2,132	2,667
(Henry Hippisley	Lambourn, Berks)	2,065	3,405
Joseph Reade	Shipton-u- Wychwood	2,018	2,826
H Gaskell	Kidlington	2,008	2,715

Another influential group of landowners in Oxfordshire were the Oxford Colleges, of whom 11 owned estates of over 1,000 acres in all, in the county, in 1873; of Christ Church (4,837 acres), New College (4,744 acres), Magdalen College (3,267 acres) and St John's College (2,909 acres) being the largest. The St John's College estate was exceptional though, because it owned the land in north Oxford onto which the city was expanding. Thus the St John's estate had an annual value of £23,100, whereas New College's larger (but more rural) estate brought in £8,099 a year. Thus each acre of the St John's estate returned an average yearly income of just under £8 compared with New College's £1.70, and £1.46 from its own mainly agricultural estates in Berkshire. Even that was greater than a purely rural estate such as Baron Churchill's at Cornbury, whose 5,352 acres averaged slightly under £1.20. The relatively high proportions of land in the two counties owned by 'public bodies' – 10.4 per cent in Oxfordshire and 7.8 per cent in Berkshire, compared with just 2.7 per cent in England and Wales overall – may have made for greater stability than in under-represented counties.

SOURCES OF WEALTH OF NEW LANDOWNERS

As we have seen there had been an active land market in both counties with a regular turnover of large estates, especially before about 1750. Many of these were purchased by newly rich, mainly London families, a number from landed backgrounds, who had made money in trade, manufacturing, the professions, or in the service of the Crown or the East India Company.²¹ Indeed, no fewer than 21 of Durston's 37 elite Berkshire families in possession in 1640 had lived previously in the capital.²² Many would have bought land to provide an income for widows and dependants, which partly explains the often fragmented nature and wide dispersal of many of the first generation estates assembled in the early period. Some, however, or more often their descendants, had loftier ambitions and wanted to create an hereditary estate and become full-time landowners. They either bought a large estate ready-made, or built one up around a country house, a park, and several farms. Others again were birds of passage, buying a place in the country and staying perhaps for a few years, or at most a couple of generations. Whatever the reason for settlement, both counties were a happy hunting ground for the newly rich, if only because of their proximity to London, the centre of commerce, government and the Court. For Berkshire, in the 19th century, closeness to Windsor may also have been an additional inducement.

Indeed, already by the Middle Ages, there could be found between Oxford and Maidenhead, numerous properties owned by persons described in manorial deeds as such and such 'of London'. For present purposes the important distinctions are between the different scales of investment varying between a modest summer retreat and a large residential estate, and between those who came in and quickly moved on, and those who withdrew more or less from trade, or previous occupation, and sank a large part of their fortune in landed estate, with view to becoming full-blown country gentlemen and landed magnates.

²¹ On the new rich of London see: W. Rogers, 'Money, Land and Lineage: the Big Bourgeoisie of Hanoverian London', *Social History*, 4 (1979); R. G. Lang, 'Social Origins and Social Aspirations of Jacobean London merchants', *Econ. H. R.* 2nd ser. v (1974); R. Grassby, 'The Personal Wealth of the Business Community in Seventeenth Century England', *Econ. H. R.* 2nd ser. xxiii (1970); G. E. Mingay, *The Gentry* (1976), *passim*. A significant proportion of the London business and professional men had landed connections; many were the younger sons of minor land owners.

²² Durston (1981) *op. cit.* note 8.

It was rather easier to do this before the later 18th century than subsequently because of the fewer estates coming onto the market, and the greater difficulty and higher cost of assembling a large estate piecemeal. By the 1820s it was generally recognised that only the very rich could afford a really large estate, even assuming they could find one. Moreover, by the 1850s wealthy businessmen were discovering that they could enjoy all the amenities of country life – cultured living, and especially country sports – without having to become great landowners, by travelling down to the country by train at weekends. By the 1880s with the onset of agricultural depression, and in the arable counties the collapse in farm rents, financially at any rate the possession of broad acres had become something of a liability. Few of the established families went so far as to sell up entirely. Many though, were obliged to retrench, to dispose of outlying portions of their estates, to economise on staff and entertainment, and give up or trade down their London house. Fewer outsiders were now prepared to sink such large sums into depreciating assets with high fixed overheads. Moreover, the social and especially the political value of land was also declining. Death duties, the prospect (albeit distant) of land nationalisation, and growing criticism of landowners as a parasitic class serving no useful purpose, not only deterred newcomers, but also led long established owners to consider their position, and as far as they could, transfer resources out of land into more profitable avenues.

Such was the importance of non-agricultural wealth in the history of landownership, that there were very few estates in either county, existing in 1914, which had not at some time or other passed through the hands of 'rich strangers'. A close search of the archives will usually reveal some long forgotten connection with trade or public office as the source of the family's territorial and social position.

Generally speaking, compared with trade or public office, manufacturing industry generated few truly great fortunes prior to the Industrial Revolution. But in an earlier period the woollen industry made the region more industrial. Indeed both counties produced some of the very first industrial fortunes in the 15th and 16th centuries, in the clothing trade.

One of the most famous, of course, was John Winchcombe, alias 'Jack of Newbury', reputedly the richest clothier in all England. He invested in landed property in and around Newbury and Thatcham in the late 15th century, and founded an estate, which through the direct line of descent, is still owned by the family, now the Hartley Russells. It appears that by the 1550s the Winchcombes had more or less withdrawn from business, and had built a fine mansion at Bucklebury, and become country squires.²³ Another family of early prominence in the woollen trade were the Stonors of Stonor Park at Pyrton near Henley. They traded in wool on a large scale before moving on to the law in the early 14th century, when Sir John Stonor (d. 1354) became the Chief Justice. He greatly increased the family's fortunes and its land holdings in Oxfordshire and elsewhere.²⁴

Another prominent wool-textile family were the Dolmans of Newbury. In 1553, the son of William Dolman, a business associate of Jack of Newbury, purchased Shaw Manor, just north of Newbury, and a few years later, his son, Thomas Dolman, decided to retire from trade, and like the Winchcombes became a country landowner. He built Shaw House, a magnificent Tudor mansion, still standing. Folklore has it that his workmen, thrown out of

²³ *V.C.H. Berks.* iii, 291–4; iv, 138; D.N.B. (new).

²⁴ *V.C.H. Oxon.* viii, 154–5.

work, attacked the house, declaring: 'Lord have mercy on us, miserable sinners, Thomas Dolman has built a new house and has turned away his spinners.' Dolman replied, ingeniously in Greek and Latin above the door of his new home: 'Let no envious man enter. The toothless man craves the teeth of those who eat, the mole despises the eye of the rose.'²⁵

The Dolmans remained there until 1727, when the estate and manors were sold to the Duke of Chandos, a descendant of another parvenu family, the Brydges. In the same category of local clothiers made good, can be put the Kendrick family, cloth makers of Reading in the 16th and 17th centuries, who purchased the manor of Whiteley Park to the south of the town, retired from business, became county squires, and by the 18th century, owned extensive properties in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Wiltshire, as well as Prospect Park at Calcot in Tilehurst Parish.²⁶ A similar family in Oxfordshire were the Wenmans of Witney, who made a fortune in the woollen trade, first as merchants of the Calais staple and later as clothiers. By 1600 Sir Richard Wenman was an M.P., and he inherited Thame Park by marrying the daughter of Sir John Williams (d. 1559) a courtier, who had acquired Thame Abbey at the Dissolution in 1539. By 1700 another Richard Wenman was a Viscount and by 1800 William Wykeham of Swalcliffe in north Oxfordshire had inherited Thame Park by marrying the heiress Sophia Wenman. A friend of King William IV she became a Baroness in 1834. She died in 1870, and by 1914 her descendant Wenman Aubrey Wykeham-Musgrave held Thame Park. It comprised 3,300 acres when sold in 1917.²⁷

With the decline of the cloth trade, Berkshire and Oxfordshire ceased to be counties of any industrial importance until the 19th century, when the rise of biscuit making (Huntley and Palmer), brewing and banking (Symonds), and commercial seed production (Sutton), yielded a fresh crop of Berkshire industrialists with aspirations to become part-time country gentlemen; and of course it was not until the early twentieth century that Oxford became a centre of motor car production.

There were, however, other sources of wealth in the 17th and 18th centuries which created prosperous outsiders whose landed ambitions brought them to the region. An important group were the holders of government offices. In the 16th and early 17th centuries, under the Tudors and Stuarts, men of humble backgrounds used this pathway to rise through the profits of the growing number of new government positions, and by obtaining favour at Court. Among them was Daniel Blagrave, a son of a small landowner living at Southcote near Reading. Although a signatory of the death warrant of Charles I, during the Restoration he rose to become Treasurer of Berkshire, Exigencier in the Court of Common Pleas, and a Master in Chancery. From these offices he was able to purchase the King's Fee Farm Rent of the manor of Sonning. In 1655 his descendant built Calcot Park, and in 1873 the family owned over 2,000 acres of land in Berkshire, including valuable freehold property in Reading.²⁸

Another successful office holder was William Trumbull, who rose through the diplomatic service in James I's reign to become eventually Clerk of the Privy Council and Master General.²⁹ His son, also William Trumbull, was a successful lawyer and Privy Councillor,

²⁵ *V.C.H. Berks.* iv, 12-13; Lysons, *op. cit.* note 14, i, 344-5.

²⁶ D. Phillips, *The Story of Reading* (1980), 47; H. M. Appleby, *The Kendrick Book* (1948); *V.C.H. Berks.* iii, 355-6; D.N.B. (new).

²⁷ *V.C.H. Oxon.* vii, 174-7.

²⁸ Phillips, *op. cit.* note 26, 47-8; D.N.B. (new).

²⁹ *V.C.H. Berks.* iii, 77-9; D.N.B. (new).

Secretary of State, and Governor of the Hudson's Bay and Turkey Companies. In 1628 the first William Trumbull purchased the Fee Farm of Easthampstead Park in Berkshire. One of his descendants married into the Hill family, Marquesses of Downshire, who inherited Easthampstead and added it to their immense estates in Northern Ireland.

Another famous office holder was James Brydges, already referred to, the son of an impoverished Herefordshire gentleman, who worked his way up in government service. In the words of one historian he rose 'by persistent soliciting and nauseating ingratiation' until in 1705 he was appointed Paymaster to the Queen's Forces Abroad, which proved so lucrative that by 1720 he was said to have about a quarter of a million pounds invested in stocks and £80,000 in mortgages, and to have drawn £10,000 a year from landed property. His personal fortune is said to have exceeded one million pounds. He bought the Shaw estate in 1727 from the Dolmans, and he also entered the Peerage, being created Earl of Carnarvon in 1714, and Duke of Chandos in 1719. However, his line died out when his last descendant, Lady Anne Eliza Brydges, married the second Marquess of Buckingham (of Stowe, Bucks), in 1796, who later added the name of Brydges to his already long surname, and became Duke of Chandos and Buckingham in 1822.³⁰

Among the many shadowy figures were birds of passage such as Brigadier General Waring, who had a distinguished army career under William III and the Duke of Marlborough. Rewarded for his services from the public purse he purchased the manor of Thatcham in 1727, where he built himself Dunston House. He assembled an estate of about 4,000 acres, but this was sold by his heirs in 1798, mostly to other newly rich men.³¹

The mention of the Duke of Marlborough brings us to the most famous, and arguably the most successful man to acquire an immense landed estate through service to the Crown, both as a distinguished general and astute politician. John Churchill's rise to fame is probably too well known to be worth repeating here; except perhaps to note that this handsome Devon gentleman of modest means, also owed a lot to his fortunate marriage to Sarah Jennings, a lady of the bedchamber and confidential friend of Queen Anne. By her restless ambition and tireless petitioning she finally alienated the Queen (c. 1710), but by then the Marlboroughs had already acquired (in 1705) their immense estate by royal grant of the manor of Woodstock and its associated park. They added many other Oxfordshire properties later by purchase, to build up and consolidate their estates.³²

THE MERCHANTS

Another group of purchasers were those who had made money as merchants. Whether, as is widely believed, large numbers of successful merchants in the 16th–18th centuries were themselves scions of minor landed families, is an interesting question, still to be answered fully. In 1775 *The Spectator* declared:

It is the happiness of a trading nation like ours that the youngest sons ... may by an honest industry, rise to greater estates than their elder brothers.

However that may be, a number of successful merchants settled in the two counties, particularly Berkshire. Probably the most famous was Sir William Craven, who had accumulated at least £125,000 in personal estate, when he wrote his will in 1616. He bought no land himself and it was his widow and two sons who created the vast Craven estates in

³⁰ *VC.H. Berks.* iv, 90; D.N.B. (old and new); Rubinstein, *Men of Property*, op cit., 84.

³¹ *VC.H. Berks.* iii, 313.

³² *VC.H., Oxon.* xii, 433–89; D.N.B. (old and new).

Berkshire and other counties, after his death in 1618. When Lady Craven died in 1624 she had acquired at least 20,000 acres. Her eldest son was created Baron Craven in 1629 and Earl of Craven in 1663. The family was seated at Ashdown Park, near Shrivenham, but also owned at the time, Benham Park, just outside Newbury. In 1873 the Berkshire estates exceeded 19,000 acres, and the total holdings were over 30,000 acres. The by now severely reduced estate was recently broken up after a tragic death.³³

The Stevens family of Bradfield were another Berkshire family who owed their money to trade, and also to the law. Originally small landowners near Henley-on-Thames, the family at first fell on hard times, when Henry Stevens became Wagon Master General in the royal army in the Civil war, and suffered with the royalist defeat. He was forced to sell his lands. However his son Richard Stevens became a successful lawyer and retrieved the situation, one of his sons becoming a member of, and his son in turn a captain, in the East India Company with large investments in cargoes to places such as Calcutta, Sumatra, Canton and elsewhere in the Far East. Thus the family prospered and by the mid 18th century owned considerable lands around Henley. In 1751 Henry Stevens, another lawyer with property in London, purchased the manor of Bradfield and assembled an estate of about 2,500 acres. A descendant later founded Bradfield School.³⁴

The Mount family of Wasing near Aldermaston, still surviving, entered landed society in 1760, when Thomas Mount, a stationer in the city of London, purchased the Wasing estate of about 1,000 acres, which through purchases at Oare, near Hermitage, and at Thatcham from the heirs of Colonel Waring, was eventually built up to about 4,000 acres. By about 1810 the family had severed its connection with trade and become full time squires.³⁵ The list of landowners whose wealth originated in commerce can easily be extended. It includes Matthew Wymondsold, a successful speculator in South Sea Company stock, who purchased East Lockinge near Wantage in 1718; Robert Vernon, who had made a large fortune supplying horses to the British army in the Napoleonic Wars, who bought Ardington, next door to East Lockinge in 1833;³⁶ Thomas Brightwell, a citizen and bowyer of London, who bought the Padworth estate, near Aldermaston, in 1655;³⁷ James Morrison, of crepe drapery fame, merchant and politician, who in 1838 purchased Basildon Park, overlooking the Thames, between Pangbourne and Streatley.³⁸ One of the richest men in Britain, Morrison died in 1857 worth an estimated £4-6 million. By the early 1880s he owned over 75,000 acres in all, over 7,000 acres in Berkshire, plus about 67,000 acres of mainly sporting estate in Argyllshire. Another wealthy merchant family were the Houblons of Welford, northwest of Newbury. Descended from Huguenot cloth merchants, who in the early 18th century bought estates in Essex and Hertfordshire, they afterwards married into the Archer family of Welford, itself descended from a former Lord Mayor of London. Later generations assumed the surname of Eyre. The family is still in possession.³⁹

Perhaps the most lofty and together with James Morrison probably the wealthiest of the commercial magnates to become a landowner in Berkshire was Samuel Loyd, Baron Overstone (1796-1883), who made a fortune in banking in the early 19th century, and

³³ *V.C.H. Berks.* iii, iv, *passim* (esp. Hampstead Marshall); D.N.B. (new).

³⁴ *V.C.H. Berks.* iii, 397; Berks Records Office (hereafter BRO) Class D/ESV(B), Stevens family.

³⁵ *V.C.H. Berks.* iv, 114-15; BRO Class D/EMT, Mount family.

³⁶ *V.C.H. Berks.* iv, 267-8, 307-11; W. H. Hallam, *History of the Parish of East Lockinge, Berks* (Wantage, 1900).

³⁷ *V.C.H. Berks.* iii, 414.

³⁸ *V.C.H. Berks.* iii, 450-60; R. Gatty, *Portrait of a Merchant Prince: James Morrison, 1789-1857* (privately published, 1976); D.N.B. (new).

³⁹ *V.C.H. Berks.* iv, 116-19.

originally bought land at Overstone in Northamptonshire (where he owned 15,045 acres in 1873) and another 15,804 acres in ten other counties – of which only 284 were in Berkshire. This however distorts his real position, for with the marriage of his only daughter, and heiress, Harriet in 1858 to Major (later Colonel) Robert Lindsay (who assumed the name Loyd-Lindsay),⁴⁰ Overstone began buying land in East Lockinge in Berkshire as a seat for his daughter and son-in-law. Later he purchased West Lockinge, Ardington and Betterton, and many other adjacent manors. By 1873, the Lockinge estate, although still not complete, comprised well over 20,000 acres in Berkshire (see Table 6). The creation by piecemeal assembly of such a large estate was quite difficult in the 19th century, and only a man of Overstone's exceptional wealth was able to do so. Although now much smaller in size the estate is still substantial, and Overstone's descendants still own it and reside there. Deserving of mention also are the estate-building activities of another national figure, John Walter, founder and proprietor of *The Times*, who assembled some 5,000 acres on the poor forest soils of east Berkshire, around Bearwood.⁴¹

There are many similar examples from Oxfordshire of estates owing their origin to commercial or legal wealth. The huge Dashwood estate based on Kirtlington owed its origins to the wealth acquired by a 17th-century Chief Justice of Chester, Sir Thomas Chamberlayne, who bought Kirtlington in 1610 for £3,000. His great-grand daughter, Penelope, married Robert Dashwood on whom a baronetcy was bestowed in 1684. The Dashwoods remained at Kirtlington until 1909, when they sold the estate to the Earl of Leven and Melville.⁴²

Landowners who made their money in industry were slightly more unusual. We have already referred to Matthew Boulton at Great Tew and Albert Brassey at Heythrop. Another example is provided by Thomas Taylor who had assembled an estate of 7,185 acres around Aston Rowant in South Oxfordshire by 1873. A successful cotton spinner from Wigan in Lancashire who bought the large manor of Aston Rowant in 1858, he got into difficulties, and in 1889 his creditors sold Aston Rowant to Sir William Plowden, late of the Bengal Civil Service.⁴³ Another landowner with industrial wealth was William Fox, an umbrella maker from Yorkshire who owned the Bradwell Grove estate in Broadwell, a few miles south of Burford, which he bought in 1871. In 1873 it comprised 4,554 acres, and by his death in 1921 had been extended to 5,114 acres, when it was sold.⁴⁴

More conventional landowners were the Villiers family, Earls of Jersey, who held 5,753 acres around Middleton Stoney, north of Oxford, in 1873, which was part of a much larger estate of 19,389 acres in other parts of Britain. They were related to the Dukes of Buckingham, the favourites of the Stuart Kings, but owed their wealth to the marriage, at Gretna Green, of the 5th Earl in 1804 to Lady Sarah Fane, the sole heir of the wealthy London banker, Robert Child. They thus combined commercial wealth with titles acquired in royal service in the 17th century – a fairly conventional route to a large estate. They bought Middleton Stoney in 1737 for £20,000.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ M. A. Havinden, *Estate Villages Revisited* (Reading, 1999) for a history of the Lockinge Estate and the Overstone-Loyd families.

⁴¹ BRO, Class D/EWL, Walter family.

⁴² *VC.H. Oxon.* vi, 221–4.

⁴³ *Ibid.* viii, 16, 22.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Bampton Hundred, pt. II, unpublished manuscript.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* ix, 45–6; vi, 244–6.

THE NABOBS

Berkshire and Oxfordshire were not of course unique in their seeming capacity to absorb the newly rich, but along with Surrey, Kent, Essex and Hertfordshire, they were among the more fashionable venues. Perhaps their greatest distinction, succeeding almost to the point of notoriety, was their popularity in the 18th century among the 'nabobs', a derogatory term applied to servants of the East India Company, many of whom returned home with considerable fortunes by the standards of the day, a large part of which they sunk into landed estate. The nabobs were also famous for extravagant living and involvement in politics. So many of them settled in Berkshire that the county became known as the 'English Hindostan'.

Founded in the year 1600 the East India Company had become the most important mercantile corporation in England by the early 18th century. It effectively monopolised Anglo-Indian trade, the conduct of which demanded competent executives both at the company's headquarters in London, and in India at the operational end. While stockholders in the company often made substantial profits, it was in the sub-continent itself that the greatest opportunities for self-enrichment obtained, and on a hitherto unprecedented scale. It has even been claimed that the wealth transferred (or sequestered) out of India in the second half of the 18th century, helped launch the Industrial Revolution in Britain.⁴⁶

However, not all Company men serving in India made fortunes. Many indeed died in the attempt, mostly from disease. Salaries were modest, and even though servants were keen to supplement them by developing other sources of income, usually by trading on their own account, but sometimes by plunder or extortion, it was generally reckoned that after ten years in India most were happy to return home with £10,000, a substantial fortune nevertheless. East India Company sea captains could make money from private cargoes, mainly silks and porcelain. By a combination of skill, opportunism, ruthlessness and skulduggery, some exceptional personal fortunes were made by senior company servants, from diamonds, lending money to Indians at usurious rates of interest, tax-farming, or by gifts and disbursements from grateful native potentates in return for protection or special favours. It is on record that when in 1757 the Nawab of Bengal was overthrown, his successor rewarded the company servants who had helped him to the tune of £650,000. Robert Clive, the commander of one of the Company's armies, is said to have received £211,000 for his share, and to have returned home with £600,000. Perhaps between 15 and 20 company employees came back with in excess of £50,000. To put this in its context, an acre of good agricultural land then cost about £8 and an average large mansion could be built and furnished for £20,000, while a farm worker earned £15 a year. Clive's fortune amounted to at least £100 million in today's money. Much of this was expended on landed estate, often in great style and with an extravagance and brashness that set tongues wagging from Windsor to Wallingford. His descendants became Earls of Powis.⁴⁷

The list of nabobs settling in the region is a long one. It includes Colonel Marsack, reputedly a natural son of George III, who bought Caversham Park, then in Oxfordshire, now in Reading, in 1784 from Lord Cadogan. It was said of the servants in the mansion that 'the homely rustic and blushing maids were supplanted by Old French women, Swiss valets

⁴⁶ On the East India Company and nabobs as a class, see: H. Dodwell, *The Nabobs of Madras* (1926); P. J. Marshall, *East India Fortunes* (Oxford, 1976); P. Spear, *The Nabobs* (Oxford, 1963). For this study, J. M. Holzman, *The Nabobs of England: a Study of Returned Anglo-Indians* (New York, 1926), is the key work of reference.

⁴⁷ Holzman, op. cit. note 46, *passim*; D.N.B. (new).

de chambers, black boys, gentry coachmen, mulatto footmen and negro butlers'.⁴⁸ Other notables included General Sir Richard Smith, the 'Nabob of Nabobs' of Chilton Lodge, Hungerford, who was reputed to have lost £180,000 in a single gambling debt;⁴⁹ William Martin who bought Whiteknights Park outside Reading (now the site of the University) from the last surviving Englefield;⁵⁰ Hugh Watts who acquired Lovells Hall, Windsor, and his brother William Watts who settled at South Hill Park, Ascot. Stanlake Batson acquired Winkfield Place near Windsor, and Edmund Golding settled at Maiden Erleigh near Reading.⁵¹

Despite their numbers, many of the nabobs stayed for only a few years, or a single generation. A very few founded long-term landed families, one or two of whom still survive. One of the most notorious of the stayers was Sir Francis Sykes, a close associate of Robert Clive and Warren Hastings, who was known widely as 'Squire Matoot' after a tax which he had administered in India, to his enormous advantage.⁵² He bought Basildon Park (now owned by the National Trust) in 1770 from Lord Fane and employed Carr of York to build him a fine Palladian mansion. Sykes died in 1804, and in 1838 his heirs sold the Basildon estate to Charles Morrison, the draper. Another prominent stayer was George Vansittart, a former Governor of Bengal. With the £150,000 he is said to have come back with, he acquired Bisham Abbey near Marlow, which his family retained until the 1950s. His brother Henry Vansittart, another nabob, established himself at Foxbury Park nearby. Long-seated also were the Russell family of Swallowfield Park, about 5 miles from Reading. Henry Russell had followed his father into the Indian service, and became Resident of Hyderabad with a reputed salary of £20,000 a year, very large by contemporary standards. He purchased Swallowfield Park in 1810, which the family held until the 1990s.⁵³

Among the returning nabobs was Thomas Pitt, ancestor of two Prime Ministers, though he was only resident in Berkshire briefly. One of the first of the Anglo Indians, he went out in the 1670s as a free trading merchant and made so much money that the East India Company had finally to admit him, and appoint him Governor of Madras. He specialised in diamond dealing, and was known as 'Diamond Pitt'. In 1701 he acquired the famous Pitt diamond of 400 carats for £24,000, which he is said to have sold sixteen years later for £125,000, on the strength of which he bought Swallowfield Park. However he disposed of it soon afterwards, and the family later moved to nearby Stratfield Saye, in turn the home of The Duke of Wellington, in north Hampshire.⁵⁴

A nabob family who stayed much longer in Berkshire were the Benyons of Englefield, now among the very largest landowners in the county.⁵⁵ Little is known about the early life of the first Richard Benyon, who was a shadowy figure up to the 1740s, when he returned to England, after a spell as Governor of Fort St George at Madras, and as such the effective ruler of the whole of southern India. He was probably related to David Benyon, an associate of 'Diamond' Pitt, who had been closely involved in the negotiations leading to the sale of the Pitt diamond. Richard Benyon had returned home a very rich man and had purchased land in southeast Essex, east of Romford, and this estate, the North Ockenden estate, of

⁴⁸ Ibid. 25, 153.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 162-3.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 153.

⁵¹ Ibid. 167.

⁵² Ibid. 164-5; D.N.B. (new); G. Jackson-Stops, *Basildon Park* (National Trust, 1986).

⁵³ Lady Russell, *Swallowfield and its Owners* (1901); D.N.B. (old and new).

⁵⁴ P. D. Brown, *William Pitt, Earl of Chatham* (1976), 13-33; Lysons, *op. cit.* note 14, i, 437

⁵⁵ *V.C.H. Berks.* iii, *passim*, (esp. Englefield); BRO, Class D/BY, Benyon family.

more than 4,200 acres in 1880, remained in Benyon hands until after the Second World War. His connection with Berkshire began around 1750 when he married Mary Wright of Englefield, widow of the Reverend Wright, owner of the Englefield estate of some 1,500 acres.

Richard Benyon II, their son, inherited the Englefield and North Ockenden estates, and through two sets of relatives on his mother's side, substantial freehold London properties; in Hackney, Islington and the Haymarket. The Berkshire estates were steadily expanded by purchases, and by 1800 extended to a little over 10,000 acres in a more or less solid block stretching from Englefield and Bradfield south eastwards through Grazeley to Mortimer. The priceless asset, however, were the London properties, and these were to prove the sheet anchor of the family's fortunes. In the 1870s they were producing about £12,000 a year, and by 1939, many times that, while agricultural rents per acre stood still or declined. These non-agricultural sources of income allowed the family to survive the agricultural depressions of the 1890s, and the inter-war years, and to continue to expand the Berkshire estate, while most other landowners were re-trenching. The London income provided the capital for ambitious programmes of estate investments, both in Berkshire and Essex, where new ranges of farm buildings were built. The Benyons were thus generous landlords who took the lead in west Berkshire's agricultural affairs.

Oxfordshire too had a number of nabob landowners, though fewer than Berkshire. The most prominent were the Page-Turners of Ambrosden and other parishes northeast of Oxford. By 1873 they owned nearly 2,000 acres around Ambrosden, and a little over 5,000 acres in all in Britain. The family's rise in Oxfordshire began in 1729 when the baronet Sir Edward Turner purchased the manor of Ambrosden. In 1718 he had married Mary Page, the daughter of Sir Gregory Page, a director of the East India Company and 'an immensely wealthy and ostentatious merchant prince'. In 1775 Sir Edward Turner's son, Sir Gregory Turner, took the name of Page-Turner under the will of his great-uncle Sir Gregory Page, whose estates he had inherited. The family held Ambrosden until 1930, when the manor was sold.⁵⁶ Another prominent nabob family who settled in Oxfordshire were the Westerns. Maximilian Western, a son of a director of the East India Company bought the Cokethorpe estate in Ducklington, near Witney, from Earl Harcourt in 1766. The estate also included Ducklington manor. Maximilian Western lived at Cokethorpe House until his death in 1801, when it passed to his daughter Frances and her husband Walter Strickland. It remained in their family until 1908.⁵⁷ Prior to the purchase of the manor of Great Tew, comprising over 2,000 acres, by Matthew R Boulton, the son of the famous Birmingham industrialist in 1816, it was owned by the nabob, George Stratton. Stratton bought Great Tew in parts between 1780 and 1793; but his son, G F Stratton, an improving landlord, got into financial difficulties conducting expensive agricultural experiments, and was obliged to sell to Boulton in 1816.⁵⁸ Stratton had been persuaded by J. C. Loudon, the well-known landscape improver, to undertake an expensive Scottish system of alternate husbandry on land that had been permanent pasture. New Scottish tenant farmers offered to pay overly high rents, hoping to sub-let later on. By 1813 the scheme had collapsed spectacularly and all the farms were vacant, soon to be taken up again by their original tenants. Loudon later admitted that his scheme was remembered in the county as 'a ruinous project of wild adventurers'.

⁵⁶ *V.C.H. Oxon.* v, 18.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* xiii, 123-4.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* xi, 231; Holzman, *op. cit.*, 163.

However, he reckoned that Stratton retrieved 'a handsome fortune' after he sold the estate for twice what it had been worth in 1807.⁵⁹

A variant on the Indian nabobs were those who had made fortunes from slave trading or slave-worked sugar plantations in the West Indies, such as Charles Oldfield, a Jamaica merchant, who bought the manor of North Aston near Banbury in 1733; and Abel Ross Dotton, an MP from Southampton whose family came from Barbados and whose ancestor purchased the manor of English, in the Chilterns in the eastern end of Newnham Murren, over the Thames from Wallingford, in 1743.⁶⁰

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to measure the changes in the ownership of 477 manors in Berkshire and Oxfordshire between six different dates – 1500, 1600, 1700, 1800, 1850 and 1914. As expected, and confirming the findings of Stone, Durston and other scholars, volatility was greatest between 1500 and 1600. Turnover slowed from the mid-17th century, though not perhaps by so much as Habakkuk had originally thought. We have also attempted to identify types of new buyers by category and to distinguish between them and older landed families.

Comparing 1500 and 1600, only 114 of the 477 manors (24 per cent) remained in the ownership of the same family, and had it not been for college-owned manors, the proportion would have been even smaller. In the 17th century the land market steadied; in 1700 some 210 of the manors (44 per cent) were held by the same families as in 1600. Even so, more than half the manors had changed hands. The 18th century saw a further deceleration, albeit slight, with 228 manors (48 per cent) in the same ownership as a century earlier, a turnover of just over one half. It is important to bear in mind is that in the earlier period especially, many manors changed hands several times in the course of a century, some as many as five or six. The time spans used in this analysis very much understate the true rate of turnover.

The first half of the 19th century saw much greater stability and a tight land market. In 1850, 335 manors (70 per cent) were in the same family ownership as in 1800. This was the high point of dominance of the landed interest, creating at the time an illusion of permanence, which the Great Depression and the rash of land sales in 1912 and 1918–21 were to shatter. In 1914 only 263 of the manors (55 per cent) were still in the same ownerships as in 1850. Heather Clemenson's study of a sample of English estates of over 10,000 acres in 1880, shows that in 1980 only one quarter of these were still in that class, while 30 per cent were no longer in existence, and the remainder all much reduced in size. Habakkuk calls this the greatest change since 1066.⁶¹

The question of the origins of the wealth of new owners is much more difficult to answer with certitude. We have shown that the greater majority by far were founded on wealth derived from trade, manufacturing, the law, public office and service overseas. The wealthiest tended to settle in Berkshire, perhaps because of its accessibility to London, overland and via the Thames, and in the 19th century especially, proximity to Windsor and the Court and fashionable venues such as Ascot and Henley. Relatively few estates we believe were significantly enlarged from agricultural profits alone; injections of fresh capital through

⁵⁹ *V.C.H. Oxon.* xi, 238–9.

⁶⁰ *V.C.H. Oxon.* xi, 10; *V. C. H. Oxon.* unpublished note in file on Newnham Murren.

⁶¹ H. A. Clemenson, *English Country Houses and Landed Estates*, 1982, 155–6; Habakkuk, *op. cit.*, 623, *passim*.

inheritance or marriage, urban revenues, or a successful commercial undertaking, played much the more important role in funding territorial growth. Possibly the Dukes of Marlborough in Oxfordshire were exceptions to the rule, although their origins were in Crown service.

What emerges is that very few of the families in occupation in the late 19th century were truly ancient. In Berkshire, a handful or so of Durston's 45 elite families in possession in 1640 had survived. The Stonors, Hartley Russells, Dormers, Eystons, Wroughtons, Nevills, Eyres, Blounts, Earls of Abingdon, and the Lords Saye and Sele, all established from before the mid-16th century, were rare birds indeed. Most of the incomers were rather birds of passage, remaining no longer than one or two generations, perhaps only a few years. The long-stayers may not be significant statistically, but they show that a well-entrenched family could survive many vicissitudes, and could take advantages to consolidate its estate as they arose.

In contrast to the north and midlands, where from the later 18th century numerous industrialists acquired estates, the Industrial Revolution had seemingly little direct impact on the landowning structure of Berkshire and Oxfordshire. A feature of the Victorian age was its remarkable stability, with few major intrusions by industrialists from the north and midlands. By the 1870s, or before, most London businessmen, and the occasional migrants from the industrial regions, were willing to settle for a country house and park, with sporting amenities, close to a railway station. Few now wanted to found a landed family in the accepted tradition; most could be classed as part-time country gentlemen, shuttling between home and work in the City. Between 1860 and the Great War, some 15–20 new country houses of architectural note were built to meet the needs of the modern type of client.⁶²

The counties appear to have escaped the attentions of the late Victorian and Edwardian plutocrats, the pace-setters in country house life, with little to compare, for example, with the Rothschilds at Waddesdon, the Astors at Clivedon, or Sir Julius Wernher at Luton Hoo. Apart from the turn of the 19th century when, for a brief while, the nabobs took centre-stage, Berkshire and Oxfordshire seem by contrast, very stolid, provincial even.

The paradox is that they should have experienced their greatest influx of new rich-businessmen, and transformation of their landowning structures, in the pre-industrial 16th and 17th centuries, when huge areas of land were redistributed, and large profits could be made from timely acquisition and disposal. No doubt, land continued to excite the imagination of the business and professional classes, but in these two counties the barriers to entry in the 19th century were more difficult to scale than perhaps at any time since the Norman Conquest. This raises the question as to where in England the land-seeking new rich of the Industrial Revolution were accommodated.

We suggest that the chief determining factors in the development of the regional land market, and the successive stages through which it may have passed, were as follows. First, the state of communications and journey times to and from London. Here, a major discontinuity was the railway which opened up the distant hinterlands, as to a smaller extent had the turnpike roads in the previous century. Second, was the kind of estate required, whether a permanent home within daily reach of the city, a summer or weekend retreat, or

⁶² Franklin, *op. cit.* note 8, 255–69, *passim*.

⁶³ Durston (1977), *op. cit.* note 8; *Id.*, (1981), *loc. cit.* note 8; Professor Richard Hoyle, University of Reading, Private communication. Professor Hoyle presented a paper to the Economic History Conference at the University of Reading in April 2006 on trends in 16th- to 18th-century landownership, based on a year on year analysis of the Feet of Fines.

a large residential estate. Third, the primary purpose: short- or long-term residential, entrée to upper class society or, especially before the mid-18th century, as a source of income, for retirement or to support widows and dependants. Often, the decision to create a large estate, befitting a landed family, was a second stage in the migratory process. From the early 18th century, land was increasingly bought for position and social advantage. The growth from the 1770s of fox-hunting, and from the 1840s of organised shooting using the newly invented breach-loading gun, enhanced the attraction of country estates, and induced sporting owners to spend more time there in the autumn and winter months.

Much more research is needed to flesh out and refine, or to refute the afore-mentioned hypotheses and generalizations. The manorial statistics need to be further broken down and correlated by location, size of estate, and type of owner. East, west and central Berkshire, and Chiltern and Cotswold Oxfordshire, for instance, are likely to have differed, perhaps markedly, in their pattern of development. Another question is in which ways did the Berkshire and Oxfordshire experiences differ from those of other parts of England, or elsewhere in the London region? C. G. Durston saw early 17th-century Berkshire as conforming in part to a broader 'Home Counties pattern' of landownership. Both he and Richard Hoyle suggest that other regions too experienced a large turnover of land. This might imply that a national market may have existed in the late 15th and 16th centuries, at any rate for large properties.

While the landowning classes are no longer a dominant force in local and national affairs, in Berkshire and Oxfordshire they and the landed estates still play an important role in rural affairs. Wealthy buyers, enriched by the same square mile of the City of London as produced the great commercial fortunes of the 17th and 18th centuries, compete strongly for country properties in the both counties. Meanwhile, surprisingly large numbers of 19th-century landowning families, together with a sprinkling of truly ancient ones, survive into the 21st century.

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